

SMALL GROUP SESSION

**“FINDING SOMETHING TO GIVE US THE IMPRESSION WE EXIST”**

First Universalist Church UU, Auburn, ME, Rev. Glenn Turner, Nov. 2016

OPENING WORDS & CHALICE LIGHTING

Experience is “a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness.”

...”We must become someone upon whom nothing is lost.”

Henry James’s *The Art of Fiction*

SILENT REFLECTION

CHECK-IN: (40-50 minutes)

FOCUS: “FINDING SOMETHING TO GIVE US THE IMPRESSION WE EXIST”

A friend sent me an article by Bailey Trela on a talk by Harvard president emeritus Neil Rudenstine about what courses in the humanities open us to. Trela wrote: "Experience and humanistic study jointly force us to reflect on certain fundamental questions: “What kind of creatures are we? What do we know, and how do we know it? What values should we live by, and what constitutes a good life? What is a just society, and what does it imply for the people who compose it?” Only this sort of deep and sustained thought, (Rudenstine) believed, allows us to 'transcend ourselves, as well as our assumptions—to realize that they’re only part of a much larger constellation of potentialities that to some extent are open to us if we choose to follow them.”

Trela went on: "The simplest case for the humanities, Rudenstine suggested, might be their ability to satisfy the human need to justify ourselves. He adapted from Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot the brief exchange in which Estragon turns to his companion Vladimir and says, 'We always do find something, don’t we, to give us the impression that we exist?’

'There will be many things in your lives that will give you the impression that you exist,' Rudenstine continued. 'But I would urge you to consider one with special intensity: do whatever in life makes you feel creative. Few things revivify the spirit so much as the feeling that one’s creative powers are being used to the fullest—few things are more important, and few things are more effective, than giving yourself the impression that you exist.’

## DISCUSSION:

I was struck by the phrasing about what gives us the impression that we exist. Beyond getting up in the morning, dressing, putting breakfast together, and the automatic dailyness of life, what are the “AHA” moments that give us the impression that we exist?

When did they begin?

How have they changed over time?

Have they faded, dulled, become more intermittent, intensified?

What’s the relationship between the good life and the impression that we exist?

What’s the relationship between building a just society and the impression that we exist?

## LIKES AND WISHES

## CLOSING WORDS:

- Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.

—Maya Angelou