

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Food

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY, December 2013

Rev. Margie Allen and Rev. Dr. Linda Anderson

[Note: Elements of this session are derived from “Food for the Journey.”], a small group ministry session from Countryside Church Unitarian Universalist, (Palatine, IL).]

Prior to meeting: *Facilitators: Please ask participants to bring a favorite recipe to share with the group. Each person to bring enough copies for the whole group, if possible. Optional: participants could also bring a table grace that is special to them.*

Opening Words: Three Short Poems

(Basho, tr. Robert Hass)

Coolness of the melons
flecked with mud
in the morning dew.

(Ron Padgett)

Oh God! It's great!
to have someone fix you
chocolate milk
and to appreciate their doing it!

This Is Just To Say (William Carlos Williams)

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

Chalice Lighting and Silence

Covenant

Check-In: General personal sharing or optional topic: What were your fall holiday experiences? What are you looking forward to in the winter holidays?

Topic Introduction

The human relationship with food, on one hand, is elemental: we need food to live. At the same time our relationship with food is quite complex. Food has physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. We celebrate with food and we mourn with it. We court each other with it and we can damage one another with it. With food we carry on the traditions handed down by previous generations. We even have a national holiday dedicated to it -- Thanksgiving.

There is no mystery why Jesus chose a meal to reveal his death to those he loved, why he chose a meal to commemorate his truth. It is when we gather for a meal that we are, in some ways, most in touch with our human-beingness. We must end lives in order to sustain our own. At table, life and death, joy and sadness, celebration and mourning can be so strangely intertwined. It is natural to want to hallow so elemental an event.

The Dakota Sioux would often take the choicest piece of meat and cast it into the fire before beginning to eat. The Tibetans place the first food of a meal outside the door as an offering to the hungry spirits. Today, for many of us, food comes easily. We care less about sustenance, more about choice. We judge the meal, we do not honor it. Often, the one who prepares the meal may be the only one who senses even dimly the sacred dimensions of the act.

There are many socio-economic, ethical, and justice issues associated with food: in its production, in its distribution, in the access to it, in the messages we receive about it, from advertising and from fashion and from the medical profession. Our relationships with food are formed, not only by our personal experiences but also by our cultural, ethnic, and religious contexts. In this session we will explore the many facets of food.

Quotations

Activity: Recipe Sharing

Facilitators: Clear a space on a table for as many piles of recipes as you have group members. Ask participants to put the copies of their recipes on the table. Then have each person pick up a copy of each recipe so that together you have created packets of recipes for every member in the group. Explain that in the discussion there will be time to share about the recipes. You might also ask participants to send the recipes electronically to the whole group.

Questions for Sharing and Reflection

1. Share the story of the recipe you brought in. What does it mean to you? When do you make it? To whom in your life is it connected?
2. What are some of the messages you received about food in your childhood and from your family? Do those messages still operate in your life? Why or why not?

3. How would you describe your relationship with food as an adult? What are some of the reasons that you eat? Are certain foods tied to certain reasons for eating?
4. What are some of the most memorable experiences that you have had with food—happy and/or sad? What made them happy or sad?
5. What, if anything, would you like to change about your relationship with food?
6. How do you feel about cooking? How did you learn to cook? What role does cooking play in your life?
7. Are you now, or have you been in the past, influenced by taboos or rituals connected with food? Do social justice principles guide you in your choices as you purchase, grow or prepare food? Tell us about how factors such as these affect your food life.

Likes and Wishes: At what point in this session did the group seem particularly engaged. Where in the session did the group’s energy or focus dip? What insight came out of this session for you?

Closing Words and Chalice Extinguishing

Da Capo (Jane Hirshfield)

Take the used-up heart like a pebble
and throw it far out.

Soon there is nothing left.
Soon the last ripple exhausts itself
in the weeds.

Returning home, slice carrots, onions, celery.
Glaze them in oil before adding
the lentils, water, and herbs.

Then the roasted chestnuts, a little pepper, the salt.
Finish with goat cheese and parsley. Eat.

You may do this, I tell you, it is permitted.
Begin again the story of your life.

Quotations: Blessings

UU Tradition: A Unitarian Blessing (Rudy Nemser, adapted)

The bread we share this day is sacred.

The wine we share this day is sacred.

The friendship we share this day is sacred.

The laughter we share this day is sacred.

The stillness we share this day is sacred.

For bread, for friends, for joy and sorrow, for the comfort of quietness:

Let us ever be grateful and caring.

Christian Tradition

For what we are about to receive, May the Lord make us truly thankful. Amen.

From a Native American Tradition: Preparing to Eat

Now that I am about to eat, O Great Spirit, give my thanks to the beasts and birds whom You have provided for my hunger; and pray deliver my sorrow that living things must make a sacrifice for my comfort and well-being.

Let the feather of corn spring up in its time and let it not wither but make full grains for the fires of our cooking pots, now that I am about to eat.

Hindu Tradition : A Hindu Meal Blessing

This ritual is One.

The food is One.

We who offer the food are One.

The fire of hunger is also One.

All action is One

We who understand this are One.

Islamic Tradition

As we sit at table and rejoice in the mercy and goodness of the one God, may the bonds of friendship be strengthened, may our fellowship be a light in the darkness, and—most importantly—may we remember that in opening ourselves to each other we open ourselves to Allah.

Pagan Blessing (Source unknown)

From forest and stream, from mountain and fields, from the fertile Earth's nourishing yields, I now partake of the Divine Energy; may it lend me health, strength, and love

Jewish Tradition (from *A Haggadah of Liberation*, adapted)

We dedicate this meal to our hopes and dreams for the future.

We dream of a world not threatened by destruction.

We dream of a world in which all people are free to be themselves.

We dream of a world at peace.

Bread (Hamotzi)

*Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam
hamotzi lehem min ha'aretz.*

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the
universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן־הָאָרֶץ.

Wine & Grape Juice (Kiddush)

*Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam
borei p'ri hagafen.*

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the
universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Prayer of the New Year Festival, the Gad (Native Peoples of Ghana)

Hail, Hail, Hail.

May happiness come.

May meat come.

May corn come.

Just as the farmers work

And look forward to the reaping,

So may we sit again as we are sitting now.

Buddhist Tradition (Thich Nhat Hanh)

All living things are struggling for life.

May they all have enough food today.

Humanist (Source unknown)

Today may we appreciate this food and remember those who are hungry.

May we appreciate our family and friends and remember those who are alone.

May we appreciate our health and remember those who are sick.

May we appreciate the freedoms we have

and remember those who suffer injustice and tyranny.

Peace on earth. Amen.