

## **Gestation, Labor & Birth**

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY, November 2014

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### **Opening words**

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving upon the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light;" and there was light. And God saw that the light was good . . . And God said, ". . . let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And God called the firmament Heaven. . . . And God said, "Let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth. . . . And God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation . . . Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth . . . Let the earth bring forth living creatures. . . ." God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. . . . (Gen 1:1-28)

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens . . . God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. . . . The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it. . . . Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." . . . So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. (Gen 2:4-22)

### **Chalice lighting and silence**

### **Covenant**

**Check-in** (optional focus: How are you feeling about the holidays soon to come?)

### **Topic Introduction**

The ancient human questions, "Where did we come from?" and "How did we get here?" are questions about birth. Throughout human history people have offered different answers to them. Science tells us about a Big Bang and evolution. Most, if not all religions have at least one birth story or understanding of how the world was created, and by whom. We heard the two stories about creation in the biblical book of Genesis as our opening words. (They are thought by scholars to have been written by two different writers at two different times because of the way God is called God in one and the Lord God in the other, and because of the differences in the creation of man and woman.)

It is an experiential part of life that, whatever we believe about our own beginnings, all human beings have the capacity to give birth -- in a metaphorical, if not a biological manner. Conception, gestation, labor and birth happen in any number of ways and through any number of individuals and groups. There is the birth of a person, an animal, a nation, a social movement, an idea, a relationship, a work of art, a disease and so forth. In the gestation, when something alive has been kindled, consciously or perhaps unconsciously or through a dream, it grows itself into being. Gestation is a time of preparation, formation, patient or impatient waiting, sometimes worrying, hoping, dreaming, dreading. The transition time of movement to independent life, the labor, in

most cases involves work and does not happen without sweat, effort, even pain. It takes place according to its own time schedule. Then there is the birth itself. Something awaited and prepared for, something worked hard for. Yet when it actually happens, birth often feels like a miracle. Like something brand new; like something that has arisen from nothing. And at the same time we know that sometimes the processes of gestation, labor and birth do not bring forth that which is alive. All that is conceived does not proceed to living birth.

In this session we will have an opportunity to reflect upon and share our own experiences with gestation, labor and birth.

## **Quotations**

### **Activity: Creating a poem as a group**

*(Facilitators -- Cut index cards in half and please give everyone two pieces and a pen for this activity.)*

Ask each person to write one word on each piece of index card and not to share them with anyone else. Then, one at a time, participants will put one of their words down on a table. After the first word is down, following participants may put their word before it, or after it, or between two words, or as the start of a new line. Remember -- you are creating a poem together. (There will be two go rounds as each person will have two cards.) As each person adds their word, they may rearrange what is already on the table. The game ends when the last word is down. Thus the group has created a poem together. Read it aloud.

*Please take a picture of it to share with Margie and Linda and the group members if they would like it.*

### **Questions for group reflection**

1. Thinking back on your life, can you recall an early experience you had of birth, gestation and/or labor? (Ex. birth of animals, a sibling, seeds being planted . . .) Share the circumstances and the story. What was that like for you? How did your experience influence you?
2. What was the experience like to give birth to a poem with your sharing circle group? How did the waiting feel as it emerged? How did the labor feel as different people rearranged it? Is it finished? Has it been born?
3. As an adult can you think of times when you have taken part in the process of birth? (Ex. in the birth of an idea, an invention, a recipe, a relationship, a work of art, a child, and more.) What was the beginning, the conception of it? How did you await and prepare for it? Did you work hard to give it life? What was the birthing like? Who else was a part of it? How did you, and do you, feel about the birthing process?
4. Who and/or what are you most proud of giving birth to? Why?
5. Have you ever conceived and/or gestated something that did not come to birth? What were the circumstances? What and who has helped you to cope with that?

6. Has it happened for you that, as one thing seemed to die or come to an end, something new was born? That the birth could not have come about without the death? Tell us the story.
7. Has anything you have ever gestated, awaited and prepared for, turned out differently from what you wanted/expected and disappointed you once it was born? How so?
8. Often we must let go of what we give birth to. What has it been like for you to let go of that to which you gave birth? (A child, a work of music, an idea, a business, etc.)

## **Likes and wishes**

### **Closing words and Chalice extinguishing**

“What we call the beginning is often the end  
And to make an end is to make a beginning.  
The end is where we start from. . . .  
We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.” (T.S. Eliot)

## Quotations

You're searching, Joe, for things that don't exist; I mean beginnings. Ends and beginnings — there are no such things. There are only middles. ~ Robert Frost

Nor do we keep the memory of our birth, though being born was important and fresh: . . . But of the profound jolt from not being to existing, . . . nothing, there is nothing left in your memory of the fierce sea that lifted like a wave and knocked down a dark apple from the tree. The only thing you remember is your life. ~ Pablo Neruda

There's a trick to the 'graceful exit.' . . . It involves a sense of future, a belief that every exit line is an entry, that we are moving up, rather than out. ~ Ellen Goodman

Michelangelo is said to have remarked that he released David from the marble block he found him in. "The painting has a life of its own. I try to let it through," said Jackson Pollock. ~ Julia Cameron

Nobody sees a flower -- really -- it is so small it takes time -- we haven't time -- and to see takes time, like having a friend takes time. ~ Georgia O'Keefe

Birth and death are present in every moment. ~ Thich Nhat Hanh

We are, ourselves, creations. And we, in turn, are meant to continue creativity by being creative ourselves. ~ Kent Matthias

He allowed himself to be swayed by his conviction that human beings are not born once and for all on the day their mothers give birth to them, but that life obliges them over and over again to give birth to themselves. ~ Gabriel Garcia Marquez

And she said gently-that they believe when a lot of things start going wrong all at once, it is to protect something big and lovely that is trying to get itself born-and that this something needs for you to be distracted so that it can be born as perfectly as possible. ~ Anne Lamott

Everything is gestation and then bringing forth. To let each impression and each germ of feeling come to completion wholly in itself, in the dark, in the inexpressible, the unconscious, beyond the reach of one's own intelligence, and await with deep humility and patience the birth-hour of a new clarity . . . ~ Rainer Maria Rilke

But maybe it's the laboring that gives you shape. Might the most fulfilling times be those spent solo at your tasks, literally immersed or not, when you are able to uncover the smallest surprises and unlikely details of some process or operation that in turn exposes your proclivities and prejudices both? ~ Chang-Rae Lee