

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Small Group Ministry

Guilt

First Parish Church of Stow and Acton, MA

April 2022

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting

We light our chalice, symbol of our faith,
For truth, sought through a questioning heart and an attentive mind;
And for love, pursued through obstacles inside and outside our own human
heart;
And for forgiveness, and all it entails—
The place where truth and love meet and merge. — *Vanessa Southern*

Check-in/Sharing: This is the time to mention any issues or events on your mind that you would like to share. Start brainstorming community service options.

Topic: Guilt

Feelings of guilt can arise from many things: a breach of a moral standard or of conduct; a failure of responsibility; or a self-violation of one's sense of right and wrong. It is a consequence of having a conscience and sense of responsibility. Guilt can be motivating or it can be demoralizing and self-undermining.

Healthy guilt may lead to taking responsibility, remorse, repentance and restitution. We may seek forgiveness through confession and recompense. A weak or absent conscience and sense of guilt is associated with Antisocial Personality Disorder (think sociopaths and psychopaths). Alternatively, guilt can be negative. It can result in feelings of self-loathing, shame and disappointment from having come up short of expectations.

We can feel guilt from having disappointed others such as a parent, our society or even our God. We may feel guilt from actions, inactions or even our thoughts. Let us share some stories about how guilt has affected us and those around us.

“In order to divest ourselves of guilt, we need to figure out who it is that is judging us.” — *Aurora Dawn*

“I've got a bad case of the 3:00 am guilts - you know, when you lie in bed awake and replay all those things you didn't do right? Because, as we all know, nothing solves insomnia like a nice warm glass of regret, depression and self-loathing.”

— *D.D. Barant*

“The problem with guilt is that it cements you to the past.” — *Kevin Leman*

“For a moment he felt good about this. A moment or two later he felt bad about feeling good about it. Then he felt good about feeling bad about feeling good about it and satisfied, drove on into the night.” — *Douglas Adams*

“He showed the words “chocolate cake” to a group of Americans and recorded their word associations. “Guilt” was the top response. If that strikes you as unexceptional, consider the response of French eaters to the same prompt: “celebration”.”

— *Michael Pollan*

“True guilt is guilt at the obligation one owes to oneself to be oneself. False guilt is guilt felt at not being what other people feel one ought to be or assume that one is.” — *R. D. Laing*

“Forgive me father, for I have sinned. (insert sin) O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins, because of Thy just punishments, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love.” — *Catholic Confession (one version)*

“With integrity, you have nothing to fear, since you have nothing to hide. With integrity, you will do the right thing, so you will have no guilt.” — *Zig Ziglar*

Possible Questions for Discussion:

- What role has guilt played in your decisions throughout your life?
- Can you identify the environment in which you first learned to experience guilt?
- What sorts of things do you tend to feel guilty about?
- Does having witnesses to your transgression affect your feeling of guilt; does believing that your thoughts could or could not be read by a god or others make a difference?
- Does guilt have a negative, positive or mixed role in your life?

- Do you ever use guilt to influence (or manipulate) others?
- Do you work hard to minimize the guilt you will feel from your actions?
- Could you share any ways in which you have been able to let go of guilt?

(Group will take a few minutes to consider topic and questions and then share).

Wrapping Up: How did you like this topic and session?

Closing Words

“Guilt: the gift that keeps on giving.” — *Erma Bombeck*