

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Guidelines for Covenant Groups March 2011, Community Church of Chapel Hill UU, NC
Having a Spiritual Practice
Assembled by Rev. Maj-Britt Johnson

Chalice Lighting - #482 in the gray hymnal

If it is language that makes us human, one half of language is to listen. Silence can exist without speech, but speech cannot live without silence. Listen to the speech of others. Listen even more to their silence. To pray is to listen to the revelations of nature, to the meaning of events. To listen to music is to listen also to silence, and to find the stillness deepened and enriched.

Meditation: Enter into a couple of minutes of silence. (chimes or simply the sentence “take a few more breaths in and out” can bring everyone back)

Check in:

For the one hour drop-in family groups: A brief check in such as “how is it with your spirit today?”

For the two hour covenant groups: What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health, cares or concerns for loved ones, issues you are facing. Each person in the group speaks uninterrupted for approximately ____ minutes.

Reading on the topic:

“Most of us spend no time on spiritual maintenance at all. This doesn’t mean that we don’t have a spiritual life. Grace does happen. The spirit will break in to our obsessed, anxious lives on occasion, whether we do anything about it or not. But we can derive immeasurable benefit from spending just a little bit of time each day *nurturing* our spiritual life. The benefits are feeling more calm, a feeling of being more available to oneself and to other people, of being more loving, of being in touch with a joy that does not depend on whether our outward circumstances are happy or not. It means getting in touch more often with the deep currents and purposes of our lives.

Below, you will find a schedule for spiritual maintenance* It’s like the schedule you have in the owner’s manual for your automobile. How often do you change the oil? How often do you get a tune up? How often do you check your tires? I tried to make it simple. Realize that in keeping this schedule simple, I have idealized it to the point where it might not fit some of you, but at least it’s a starting point in reflecting how your lives might improve by paying attention to the spirit.

***A Spiritual Maintenance Schedule**

Once a day

Spend ten to thirty minutes in prayer and/or meditation

Once a week

take a day free of obligations or work to rest: reflect, enjoy loved ones, family and friends; enjoy good food, love-making reading, praying...whatever renews and fulfills you. “remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy”

At least monthly

Meet with a group that nurtures your spiritual development -- men’s or women’s group, meditation group, twelve-step group.

At least yearly

Take a three to ten day guided retreat away from home at a religious retreat center, yoga camp or a personal growth center.

For many, the first item on that schedule is the most important: Daily practice, just spending as few as ten minutes a day --ideally thirty--in prayer or meditation or silent reflection. I believe that no matter how busy you are, if you really want to, anyone can find fifteen minutes some time in the day for this purpose.”

(Rev. Arvid Straube in “Everyday Spiritual Practice: Simple Pathways for Enriching Your Life”, edited by Rev. Scott W. Alexander. This book collects UU perspectives on spiritual practice and is a good starting place for thinking about which spiritual practice might work in your life)

Questions: It’s not necessary to address them all! Start with the one that calls to you.

1. If you do not have a spiritual practice, do any of the benefits that Straube points out in the first paragraph appeal to you? How might you go about making time for a practice? What are the obstacles in your life to having a spiritual practice?
2. Do you believe there is “a joy that does not depend on whether our outward circumstances are happy or not?” Do you experience that? How?
3. *Does* grace happen to you?
4. Do you think your spirit deserves the same maintenance your car does? If not, why not?
5. Though Straube describes spiritual practice as that which an individual does to maintain his or her own spirit/soul, can spiritual practice be communal? And do you think a spiritual practice can lead to more engagement and care for others, and the world?
6. If you have a regular spiritual practice you might share something about it and how it affects your life, and/or the changes it has made in your life.

Guidelines for Sharing – (leader reads these guidelines, or has another person do it, then s/he can repeat the questions again)

We’ll each speak for roughly ____ minutes, with no cross talk or interruptions. Cross talk means advice giving, blaming, trying to fix another person. It is wise to speak in the first person, “I think, I feel...” to avoid cross talking.

When we are listening: Try to listen to each other as if you were listening to, or watching, your own thoughts. Let others’ words simply fall down into your heart. It is not necessary to give the

person reassurances that they are being heard, such as nodding or eye contact. By simply listening together we create a holding space for each speaker. Comfort and care can be offered after the group session.

When it is your turn to speak it is not necessary to respond to the persons who have gone before you, though you may find yourself building on what has been shared already. Find out what your own inner wisdom wants to say. Together we create a quilt of wisdom, the design is a surprise.

(Leader can re-read the questions here)

-Sharing around the circle

-After everyone has shared (some groups go around twice, or more)... do:

Likes and Wishes – What did you like about this session? What would you wish to be different if anything?

-Closing words

#700 in hymnal

For all who see God, may God go with you.

For al who embrace life, may life return your affection.

For all who seek a right path, may a way be found..

And the courage to take it, step by step.

-Robert Mabry Doss