

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Session Plan

Impermanence

Sanctuary Boston, MA, October 13, 2015

Gathering, Welcoming (2 minutes)

Chalice lighting & Opening words (1 minute)

No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man.

—*Heraclitus*

Covenant (1 minute)

- confidentiality
- respect our time together, beginning and ending on time
- keep discussion focused on topic
- invitation but not expectation to share
- speak from your own experience
- assume good intentions
- commitment to 5 weeks
- address conflict directly and in the group
- refrain from talking at people

Check-in (2–3 minutes each @ 20 minutes)

Reading (2 minutes)

Nothing remains the same for two consecutive moments. Heraclitus said we can never bathe twice in the same river. Confucius, while looking at a stream, said, "It is always flowing, day and night." The Buddha implored us not just to talk about impermanence, but to use it as an instrument to help us penetrate deeply into reality and obtain liberating insight. We may be tempted to say that because things are impermanent, there is suffering. But the Buddha encouraged us to look again. Without impermanence, life is not possible. How can we transform our suffering if things are not impermanent? How can our daughter grow up into a beautiful young lady? How can the situation in the world improve? We need impermanence for social justice and for hope.

If you suffer, it is not because things are impermanent. It is because you believe things are permanent. When a flower dies, you don't suffer much, because you understand that flowers are impermanent. But you cannot accept the impermanence of your beloved one, and you suffer deeply when she passes away.

If you look deeply into impermanence, you will do your best to make her happy right now. Aware of impermanence, you become positive, loving and wise. Impermanence is good news. Without impermanence, nothing would be possible. With impermanence, every door is open for change. Impermanence is an instrument for our liberation.

—*Thich Nhat Hahn*

First response (20 minutes)

Take a moment of silence and consider these questions.

How has impermanence woven into your perspectives upon life, upon love, upon relationships, upon time itself?

How has impermanence been a hindrance to you, how has it been a help?

Even if permanence is not possible, and all life is change, what about the prospects for all of life being in relationship and continuity?

Please respond to whichever question or questions you feel moved to answer. It is not necessary to respond to all of the questions. You may also respond to any of the readings that you find to be particularly meaningful.

Snack break (5 minutes)

Cross-conversation (30 minutes)

This time is for you to respond to what other shared previously.

Business / Feedback (5 minutes)

Closing (1 minute)

Impermanence is what makes transformation possible. Thanks to impermanence, we can change suffering into joy.

—Thich Nhat Hanh

Adapted from: Covenant Group Curriculum, River of Grass Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Davie, FL