

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
“Is should ever a good word?”
Covenant Group Process, Rev. Maj-Britt Johnson, Community Church of Chapel Hill
Unitarian universalist (NC), January 2011

Chalice Lighting

Mindful of truth ever exceeding our knowledge, and community ever exceeding our practice, reverently we covenant together, beginning with ourselves as we are, to share the strength of integrity and the heritage of the spirit in the unending quest for wisdom and love.

Check in:

For the one hour drop-in 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.

Meditation: About two minutes of shared silence.

Topic: “Is should ever a good word?”

The words “should” and “shouldn’t” have become dirty words in our culture, and for understandable reasons. They are usually found in sentences like these: “I really should go to the gym.” or, “I should call my mother more often”.

The word *should* in these cases often carries a sense of guilt or obligation that is externally defined. In other words, I should go to the gym because everyone says I’ll live longer that way. And I know it’s true. But when people talk about **not** “should-ing” all over themselves they often mean they want to find their own motivation from within. We’re tired of the weight of so many shoulds in our lives.

So, in liberal religious community, and in covenant groups in particular, we listen for the voice of our own conscience, or for some of us the voice of an “inner wisdom” or an “inner teacher”. We try to chart our own path. But, of course, that doesn’t mean we have no sense of shared morality, ethics, or conscience.

Questions: (listen for the one that wants to claim you)

Does your conscience or inner wisdom ever hand you a “should” that you really know you ought to listen to? What happens when you don’t pay attention?

Which of the “shoulds” from your childhood have shaped you in a positive way? Which are you passing on to your children? Which “shoulds” do you really want your community to live out?

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, not only not interrupting but also refraining from trying to fix, save, advise or set

someone else straight, directly or indirectly. It is wise to speak in the first person, “I think, I feel...”

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’s inner wisdom to emerge. Comfort and care can be offered after the group session. Practice silence after a person has spoken, to honor their “inner teacher.”

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)...

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

Closing words

Prayer for Conscience -by Jane Ellen Mauldin

Shake me awake
when I cover my ears,
when I deny your call,
and try to justify my actions with
greed called practicality,
hunger called need,
desire called just desserts.

Flood my hearing with
the music of love
that pounds through my veins.

May my craving cease
and my sensitivity heighten
that each moment each day
my ears and heart are open
to you.