

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

“Leaving”

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Opening Words: The Journey (Mary Oliver)

One day you finally knew
 what you had to do, and began,
 though the voices around you
 kept shouting
 their bad advice--
 though the whole house
 began to tremble
 and you felt the old tug
 at your ankles.
 "Mend my life!"
 each voice cried.
 But you didn't stop.
 You knew what you had to do,
 though the wind pried
 with its stiff fingers
 at the very foundations,
 though their melancholy
 was terrible.
 It was already late

enough, and a wild night,
 and the road full of fallen
 branches and stones.
 But little by little,
 as you left their voices behind,
 the stars began to burn
 through the sheets of clouds,
 and there was a new voice
 which you slowly
 recognized as your own,
 that kept you company
 as you strode deeper and deeper
 into the world,
 determined to do
 the only thing you could do--
 determined to save
 the only life you could save.

Chalice Lighting and Silence**[Covenant Review]**

Check-in: Open check-in or optional topic: What is your favorite season of the year and why?

Topic Introduction

Experiences of leave-taking permeate our lives. Some departures we initiate, some are initiated by others. Leaving someone, something, somewhere entails endings, disorientation, disconnections and separations as well as new beginnings, new opportunities, new sources of energy and excitement. Often leaving involves some big decisions, painful weighing of pros and cons. In some cases a departure evolves over time in a way that eases the pain or makes it much worse. In other situations, leaving is a “no-brainer,” a sudden and painless shift in the scenery and possibilities. In every case, though, we have the opportunity to look back and to look forward as we make the transition between here and there, before and after.

Leave-taking, whether forced upon us or carefully planned, can flood us with a mix of feelings. Happiness, sadness or the fear of sadness, frustration, resentment, anger,

excitement, relief or confusion are some of the possible reactions. Sometimes physical or mental illness accompanies the process of leaving or being left. Every leave-taking represents a kind of death and rebirth. Negotiating this radical process takes its toll, but often brings unimagined rewards.

Quotations

Meditation

Consider the following list of kinds of leaving. As you read over the list see if it brings to mind one or two leave-takings that were significant for you, perhaps one where you did the initiating and one where another did it for or to you.

- leaving home
- leaving for vacation destinations and making the transition back again.
- leave a job, a school, familiar work, beloved colleagues.
- routine and frequent departures (planes, trains, cars, term limits, ends of days and visits)
- reassignment, relocation, moving
- retiring: leaving a long-term daily pattern, sense of purpose, and professional identity
- leaving an abusive or stagnant relationship.
- being left behind by a loved one—abandonment, estrangement, divorce, bereavement
- leaving the country of your birth to seek freedom, safety, prosperity.
- empty nest
- walking out
- escaping, running away
- rejecting a way of life (living “off the grid,” for instance)

Questions for Group Reflection

1. Can you remember a time during your childhood when some kind of leave-taking disturbed your universe? How did you understand the circumstances that necessitated the leave-taking? What did you learn from the adults around you about “leaving well?” Tell us a story about how you said good-bye to what you left behind.
2. Consider sharing a leave-taking experience that you initiated with either a good or bad outcome. How did you feel and how did you handle those feelings? What were the consequences? Did it affect your spiritual life or lead you to new questions or observations about yourself?
3. Was there a leave-taking that, for whatever reason, you did not process (recognize, think about, celebrate or grieve) at the time it occurred? What was the dynamic that kept the experience subconscious? How did you address it in the long run?
4. Share a leave-taking that was forced on you by someone else. What happened? How did you feel and what did you do with those feelings? Did this experience contribute to your growth, spiritual or otherwise?
5. In your adulthood, how do you characteristically tend to say good-bye?

6. What feelings did the Opening Words bring up for you? Could you identify with the situation of the speaker in the poem?
7. Have you been thinking of leaving? Are you about to be left? How might your Unitarian Universalist community/faith/identity help you negotiate the transitions involved?

Likes and Wishes (Likes: celebrations, gratitudes, appreciations for needs met; and Wishes: mournings, requests, acknowledgements of needs not met)

Closing Words and Chalice Extinguishing (Alla Renne Bozarth)

The small plot of ground
on which you were born
cannot be expected

To stay forever
the same.
Earth changes,
And home becomes different
places....

Quotations

Good-night, Good-night! Parting is such sweet sorrow
That I shall say good-night till it be morrow.
~William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

All changes are more or less tinged with melancholy, for what we leave behind is part of ourselves. ~Amelia Barr

Leaving home in a sense involves a kind of second birth in which we give birth to ourselves.
~Robert Bellah

When I remember my family, I always remember their backs. They were always indignantly leaving places. ~John Cheever

The fatal metaphor of progress, which means leaving things behind us, has utterly obscured the real idea of growth, which means leaving things inside us. ~Gilbert K. Chesterton

Leaving America is like losing twenty pounds and finding a new girlfriend. ~Phil Ochs

Leaving the old, both worlds at once they view,/ That stand upon the threshold of the new.
~Edmund Waller

There's a trick to the Graceful Exit. It begins with the vision to recognize when a job, a life stage, a relationship is over – and to let go. It means leaving what's over without denying its value. ~Ellen Goodman

Of all horrid things, leave-taking is the worst. ~Jane Austen, *Emma*

Be brave enough to live creatively. The creative is the place where no one else has ever been. You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition. You cannot get there by bus, only by hard work, risking and by not quite knowing what you are doing. What you will discover will be wonderful: yourself. ~Alan Alda

Today the world changes so quickly that in growing up we take leave not just of youth but of the world we were young in. ~Peter B. Medawar

There are far better things ahead than any we leave behind. ~C. A. Lewis

Every leaf speaks bliss to me, fluttering from the autumn tree. ~Emily Bronte

And Pooh gave Christopher Robin the biggest Pooh hug he could because he knew that goodbyes were not Far Away. ~A.A. Milne