

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
**“Living Simply”**  
Covenant Group Curriculum, River of Grass Unitarian Universalist  
Congregation, Davie, FL

**Opening Meditation/Music/Silence/Chalice Lighting** (whichever one(s) you choose to do)

**Opening Words:**

“Today’s “simplicity movement” resonates with every sector of American society – from evangelical Christians to left-leaning environmentalists – and every age group from schoolchildren to Baby Boomers to senior citizens nostalgic for a slower-paced life.

Indeed, a poll commissioned by the Merck Family Fund in the mid-1990s found that 82 percent of survey participants agreed with the statement: "Most of us buy and consume far more than we need." The report stated that our priorities are "out of whack" and that "materialism, greed, and selfishness increasingly dominate American life, crowding out a more meaningful set of values."

- *simplelivingtv.net*

**Check-in/Sharing**

**Topic/Reading:**

Schools, churches, and the media are all beginning to sound the same message: that it is our duty to live lightly on the land, to refashion our lives in at least modest ways to make amends for the environmental woes we are causing. It can be quite depressing. We begin to think of our own species as uniquely malign. Only through self-abnegation and saintly acts can we halt the destruction. The best we can hope for is to do less harm. And we do less harm by way of duty.

Duty is that which we do because we should---not because we would. In contrast, an action that is as natural as drawing breath is not a duty. In Immanuel Kant's terminology, a difficult-appearing act undertaken without any thought of duty, perhaps even joyfully, is a beautiful act. A beautiful act, unlike a dutiful one, arises from our deepest inclinations. We simply could not do otherwise.

Arne Naess, the Norwegian philosopher who gave the "deep ecology" worldview its earliest expression, believes Kant's distinction is crucial for the earth's well-being. "When people feel they unselfishly give up or sacrifice their self-interests to show love for nature," warns Naess, "this is a treacherous basis for conservation." Doing right by the earth should, rather, feel as natural as doing right by our families, our very selves. According to Naess, the way to nurture this mind-set is to expand our notion of self to include Self--the greater self of the planet, with all its creatures and landscapes.

The ecological crises thus demand a deep solution. The will to change must come from within. Only a shift in values can work a lasting shift in laws and institutions and, most important,

everyday practices. And those values must emerge from a shift in worldview that is in a fundamental sense religious.

- *Connie Barlow*

### **Questions for consideration:**

How could you live more simply? Is this an issue for you? Does “simple living” conjure thoughts of self-denial or more harmonious living? Or both? What’s one thing that you could do to foster a more simplified existence for yourself at this very moment? What’s stopping you from doing it?

### **Likes and Wishes/Feedback**

### **Closing Words:**

'Tis a gift to be simple,  
'tis the gift to be free.  
'Tis the gift to come down  
where we ought to be.  
And when we find ourselves  
in the place just right,  
Twill be in the valley  
of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gained,  
To bow and to bend  
we shall not be ashamed.  
To turn, turn  
will be our delight,  
'Till by turning, turning  
we come round right.

- *Hymn lyrics*

Amen. May you go in peace. May you live in blessing.