

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SMALL GROUP SESSION
"On Dabbling, Dithering, and Dilettantism"
First Universalist Church UU, Auburn, Maine, Rev. Glenn H. Turner

OPENING WORDS & CHALICE LIGHTING

...from "The Once and Future King" by T. H. White, this admonition from the wizard Merlin, to the young Arthur -

"The best thing for being sad," replied Merlin, beginning to puff and blow, "is to learn something. That's the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honour trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it then — to learn. Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting. Learning is the only thing for you. Look what a lot of things there are to learn."

SILENT REFLECTION

CHECK-IN: (40-50 minutes)

FOCUS: "On Dabbling, Dithering, and Dilettantism"

Dabbling, dithering, and dilettantism, different strokes for different folks. Some see those terms in a positive light; others react to them negatively. Here are some various takes on these terms:

Dabbling

"I think that we all at some point are in search of something - a higher power, whatever you want to call it, the meaning of life. I know I was, especially at even my son's age in my 20s, and dabbling in Eastern philosophies and yoga and Buddhism and Christianity and Islam. I kind of touched them all, you know, just trying to figure out the meaning of life or if nothing else, figure myself out."

Denzel Washington

"If you want your life to have impact, focus it! Stop dabbling. Stop trying to do it all. Do less. Prune away even good activities and do only that which matters most. Never confuse activity with productivity. You can be busy without a purpose, but what's the point?"

Rick Warren

Dithering

"Wavering, dithering, or passive hysterical fear will only intensify or prolong pursuit."

Camille Paglia

"The minimum I need is six months to allow for dithering, procrastination and the research. The research times varies from book to book; some are faster because they're based off resources I have at my disposal."

Lauren Willig

"Life must be something more than dilettante speculation."

Anna Julia Cooper

"He (the "specialist") is one who, out of all that has to be known in order to be a man of judgment, is only acquainted with one science, and even of that one only knows the small corner in which he is an active investigator. He even proclaims it as a virtue that he takes no cognizance of what lies outside the narrow territory specially cultivated by himself, and gives the name of "dilettantism" to any curiosity for the general scheme of knowledge."

Jose Ortega Y Gasset

"I'm a dilettante. My governing word is 'curiosity.'"

Author: Ian Hacking

DISCUSSION:

1. Do you dabble? In what way do you dabble? Or, do you try to maintain a linear focus. Do you enjoy dabbling or does it lead you astray?
2. Do you dither? What do you dither about? Are you down on yourself when you dither? Or, does something creative come out of it?
3. Are you a dilettante? Is being called one an accusation? In what way are you a dilettante? What are the different pies you like to stick your fingers into?

LIKES AND WISHES

CLOSING WORDS:

"... what you learn today, for no reason at all, will help you discover all the wonderful secrets of tomorrow."

— Norton Juster, *The Phantom Tollbooth*