

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Small Group Ministry

Peak Experiences

First Parish Church of Stow and Acton, MA, March 2019

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting

"Don't just learn, experience.

Don't just read, absorb.

Don't just change, transform.

Don't just relate, advocate.

Don't just promise, prove.

Don't just criticize, encourage.

Don't just think, ponder.

Don't just take, give.

Don't just see, feel.

Don't just dream, do.

Don't just hear, listen.

Don't just talk, act.

Don't just tell, show.

Don't just exist, live." - **Roy T. Bennett**

Check-in/Sharing: This is the time to mention briefly any major issues or events on your mind that you would like to share. Agree to the Covenant and read the poem "Deep Listening" aloud.

Topic: Peak Experiences

Peak experiences are times in our lives that define us. They might be times of joy, sadness, contemplation, defiance, exultation or triumph. They might be times we achieved a goal, realized a truth, or made a decision that our lives must change in some crucial way. They might last moments or years.

As the name indicates, peak experiences are the times that our lives reached some pinnacle, some point better, higher, stronger than the normal experiences of life. We have all had them, together with valleys and many moments when our lives were ordinary.

What were some peak experiences of your life? What do they mean to you? Let us share them and discuss their import.

"The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience." — *Eleanor Roosevelt*

"Blessed is the fire that burns deep in the soul. It is the flame of the human spirit touched into being by the mystery of life. It is the fire of reason; the fire of compassion; the fire of community; the fire of justice; the fire of faith. It is the fire of love burning deep in the human heart; the divine glow in every life." — *Eric A. Heller-Wagner*

"Be brave. Take risks. Nothing can substitute [for] experience." — *Paulo Coelho*

"Nothing ever becomes real 'til it is experienced." — *John Keats*

“Experience is not what happens to a [person]; it is what a [person] does with what happens to [them].” – *Aldous Huxley*

“Everyone has a purpose in life and a unique talent to give to others. And when we blend this unique talent with service to others, we experience the ecstasy and exultation of [our] own spirit, which is the ultimate goal of all goals.” – *Kallam Anji Reddy*

“He was mastered by the sheer surging of life, the tidal wave of being, the perfect joy of each separate muscle, joint, and sinew in that it was everything that was not death, that it was aglow and rampant, expressing itself in movement, flying exultantly under the stars.” – *Jack London, The Call of the Wild*

“Laughter is wine for the soul - laughter soft, or loud and deep, tinged through with seriousness - the hilarious declaration made by [humans] that life is worth living.” – *Sean O’Casey*

“My mind rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram, or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation.” – *Sherlock Holmes*

“Contrary to what we usually believe, moments like these, the best moments in our lives, are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times—although such experiences can also be enjoyable, if we have worked hard to attain them. The best moments usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile.” – *Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi*

“Close your eyes and turn your face into the wind. Feel it sweep along your skin in an invisible ocean of exultation. Suddenly, you *know* you are *alive*.” – *Vera Nazarian*

“Life can be short, but it’s also long enough for us to make great things happen.” – *Jeffrey Moore*

Possible Questions for Discussion:

- What peak experiences could I share? What made them stand out as peaks in my life?
- Are there any valleys or low moments that I would like to share?
- Are there smaller experiences that have special memories for me?
- To what extent did I make peak experiences happen, as opposed to them happening to me?
- Did any of these experiences happen despite, or because of, problems or difficulties in my life at the time?
- Are there any peak experiences I would like to have in my future?

(Group will take a few minutes to consider topic and questions and then share.)

Wrapping Up: How did you like this topic and session?

Closing Words

“If I had my life to live over, I would start barefoot earlier in the spring and stay that way later in the fall. I would go to more dances. I would ride more merry-go-rounds. I would pick more daisies.” – *Nadine Stairs*