

**Personal Power: Claiming Power When We Feel Powerless**

Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA, Lynn Hanson, Ministerial Intern, January 2006

**Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:** *Naomi Shihab Nye's poem "Making a Fist" from Words Under the Words:*

For the first time, on the road north of Tampico,  
I felt the life sliding out of me,  
A drum in the desert, harder and harder to hear.  
I was seven, I lay in the car  
Watching palm trees swirl a sickening pattern past the glass.  
My stomach was a melon split wide inside my skin.

"How do you know if you are going to die?"  
I begged my mother.  
We had been traveling for days.  
With strange confidence she answered,  
"When you can no longer make a fist."

Years later I smile to think of that journey,  
The borders we must cross separately,  
Stamped with our unanswerable woes.  
I who did not die, who am still living,  
Still lying in the backseat behind all my questions,  
Clenching and opening one small hand.

**Reflection/Personal Sharing/Prayer (approximately 30 minutes):**

(The facilitator should briefly remind the group of confidentiality/anonymity, that this is not the time for cross conversation, etc.)

**Focus Readings and Quotes:**

*From Mark Belletini:*

Forget not your power in the days of your powerlessness.

*From Martin Luther King, Jr.:*

"Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle. And so we must straighten our backs and work for our freedom. A man [or some other perceived oppressive force] can't ride you unless your back is bent."

"Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase."

"... progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal ... requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."

"Everything that is done in the world is done by hope."

**Focus Questions:**

What does powerlessness mean to you? How do you experience it?

What does power mean to you? How do you experience it?

Have you ever felt really powerless? When, why, what happened?

Are there times when you felt powerful? Why and how?

How do you find the strength to ask for what you need or to do what you believe in, if it means taking risks? What gives you spiritual strength to carry on, even in adversity?

Who do you think of that overcame great obstacles? What did they do and how were they able to do it?

At what point does claiming one's power become an abuse of power?

**Checkout/Likes and Wishes:**

(This is the time for facilitators to ask participants what they liked about this meeting and what they might wish for future meetings. This is also the time for any discussion of logistics.)

**Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:** *Nancy Wood, Singing the Living Tradition #688*

Hold on to what is good  
Even if it is  
A handful of earth.  
Hold on to what you believe  
Even if it is  
A tree which stands by itself.  
Hold on to what you must do  
Even if it is  
A long way from here.  
Hold on to my hand even when  
I have gone away from you.

**Personal Power: Power and You**

Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA, November 2007

**Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:**

Gloria Steinem: Power can be taken, but not given. The process of the taking is empowerment in itself.

**Check-in:** *What is most on your mind today? Share one high and one low from your life right now.*

**Focus Readings:**

Frances Moore Lappe' in Getting a Grip:Clarity, Creativity, and Courage in a World Gone Mad (Small planet Media):

Power can manipulate, coerce, and destroy. And as long as we are convinced we have none, power will always look negative. In fact, power means simply our capacity to act. From this lens, we each have power – and often, much more power than we think. If we accept ecology's insights that we exist in densely woven networks, then we must also accept that every choice we make sends out ripples, even if we're not consciously choosing. So the choice we have is not whether, but only how, we can change the world.

Marianne Williamson:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our Light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be?

Your playing small doesn't serve the world.

There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

**Focus Questions:**

Tell about a time when you felt empowered.

Tell about a time when you felt powerless.

Have you ever chosen not to claim some power being offered?

If you could choose a super power or to be a superhero (Superman, Wonder Woman, Underdog, etc.) which would it be and why?

**Check-out/Likes & Wishes:** *Did this session meet your needs for connection and spiritual growth? Was our covenant honored?*

**Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:**

Audre Lorde: When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.