

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
SMALL GROUP SESSION  
**PUNISHMENT**  
Glenn Turner, First Unitarian Universalist Church, Auburn, ME

**OPENING WORDS & CHALICE LIGHTING:**

“Oh, if everyone thought as I do, behaved as I do, wouldn’t that be a paradise? On second thought, how have I thought, how have I behaved? If everyone was forgiven, as I have been forgiven, for my dark thoughts and misbehaviors, wouldn’t that be a paradise? And what of my thoughts and actions which have not been caught out, and which I try to hide even from myself? What would a paradise look like that would save me from myself? What frowns, or prisons, or patient understanding? We don’t like to call ourselves “sinners,” but there’s dust on all our halos. Welcome to this fellowship of forgiving friends. How far can we extend it? GHT

**CHECK IN: (40 - 50 minutes)**

What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health, cares or concerns for loved ones, issues you are facing.

Each person in the group speaks uninterrupted, if time remaining, general response and conversation is welcome. Confidentiality.

**FOCUS: “Punishment”**

“Men simply copied the realities of their hearts when they built prisons.” Richard Wright

“In a civilized society, all crimes are likely to be sins, but most sins are not and ought not to be treat as crime.” Geoffrey Fisher

“As one reads history...one is absolutely sickened , not by the crimes that the wicked have committed, but by the punishments that the good have inflicted; and a community is infinitely more brutalized by the habitual employment of punishment than it is by the occasional occurrence of crime.” Oscar Wilde

**Discussion:**

Recent statistics indicate that 1 in 100 people in American are imprisoned.

And among black males over 20, it is 1 in 15. “Lock them up and throw away the key” is a frequent reaction to “so-called” criminals. What is there in us, in you and me, that makes us so susceptible to simply locking people up for misbehavior, or crimes, and forgetting about them? Knowing ourselves, why aren’t we more compassionate? How do we deal with friends or members of our family when they “go wrong”?

**LIKES AND WISHES**

How did this session go for you? Is there anything you’d like to call particular attention to?

**CLOSING WORDS:**

If one by one we counted people out  
For the least sin, it wouldn't take us long  
To get so we had no one left to live with.  
For to be social is to be forgiving.

Robert Frost