

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Regrets

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY, September 2014

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Opening Words:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference. (Robert Frost, *The Road Less Travelled*)

Chalice lighting and silence

Covenant

Check-in: (Optional focus: what is the most important thing that has happened in your life since you last saw one another?)

Topic Introduction

Regret is a feeling of disappointment, distress or sorrow over the wish that something we did or did not do, something we said or did not say in the past could have been different. The language of regret is "if only," woulda/coulda/shoulda, "I wish." It often comes with a kind of helplessness because we cannot change the past and do not know what to do with the dissatisfaction we feel about it in the present. If regret lingers without some sort of resolution it can turn into rumination and even stop us from moving forward with our lives. Those who study regret note that it occurs among virtually all ages and cultures and that it is a complex feat of

human cognition. "If you talk about the emotion of regret, you want to differentiate that from simpler emotions like pain and fear, which seem to be experienced pretty much the same way by animals. Regret is a very complicated emotion that involves all these things coming together -- it's raw feeling plus all of the complicated imaginings of future possibility," says Dr. Neal Roese, psychology professor at Northwestern University, Kellogg School of Management. In other words, regret involves many emotions, such as pain, fear, guilt, shame, remorse, desire, frustration, anger, wishful thinking - coming together in a realization that the future might have been different if we had made different choices in the past.



Quotations

Activity --

Facilitators give out paper and pens and ask everyone to sit quietly. On the paper ask participants to make two columns and label them "childhood/adolescence" and "adulthood." Under each column list any regrets they have from those times in their lives. During the discussion there will be opportunities to share what is on the lists.

Questions for group reflection

1. What did you learn about regret from your family? Did you grow up in a household where the adults had many regrets? Few regrets? How did they express them? How did this influence your relationship with regret?
2. Thinking back to your childhood and adolescence is there anything you regret? What is it? How might your life have been different if you had made a different choice?
3. Can you think of a time in your adulthood when you felt regret? For a choice you did or did not make, a word you did or did not speak, an action you did or did not take? Tell us the story.
4. What have you done with your regrets? How have you handled them? What has helped you to deal with them? Have you ever helped another person with his/her regrets? Give some examples.
5. How have your regrets made you better? How have they hindered you? Have they led you to make changes in your life? What?
6. There is a famous song performed by Edith Piaf, which is called *Non, Je Ne Pas Regrette Rien*, which means No, I regret nothing. What, if anything, appeals to you about having no regrets? Why do you think that is?
7. Sometimes we attach guilt (judgment about our behavior) or shame (judgment about our own worthiness) to the choices which led to our regrets. Can you think of a time you have done that? What did that feel like?
8. If you were told you had just one more month left to live, what do you imagine might be your greatest regret?

Likes and wishes

Closing words (*When I Am Among the Trees* by Mary Oliver) and Chalice extinguishing

When I am among the trees,

especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
 but walk slowly, and bow often.

Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine."

Quotations

He tried to name which of the deadly seven (sins) might apply, and when he failed he decided to append an eighth, regret. ~ Charles Frazier

Maybe all one can do is hope to end up with the right regrets. ~ Arthur Miller

Make the most of your regrets. . . To regret deeply is to live afresh. ~ Henry David Thoreau

I'd rather regret the things I've done than regret the things I haven't done. ~ Lucille Ball

My one regret in life is that I am not someone else. ~ Woody Allen

I often regret that I have spoken; never that I have been silent. ~ Publius Syrus

We don't have to be defined by the things we did or didn't do in our past. . . Get over it. ~ Pittacus Lore

My honest opinion and my friendly advice is this: do it or do not do it — you will regret both. ~ Soren Kierkegaard

And I want to tell you about everything but I can't because I couldn't stand for you to have that look on your face all the time. ~ Nina LaCour

The only victories which leave no regret are those which are gained over ignorance.
~ Napoleon

Never regret trusting someone. It proves you have a heart. ~ Jude Watson

Have you ever hoped for something? And held out for it against all the odds? Until everything you did was ridiculous? ~ Ali Shaw

My dad used to say that living with regrets was like driving a car that only moved in reverse. ~ Jodi Picoult

No trouble ever got fixed late at night. ~ Holly Black

Changing even the bad things that have gone before would fundamentally change who we are, and whether or not that would be a good thing, I believe, it is impossible to predict. ~ R. A. Salvatore