

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Session Plan
Silence

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Raleigh, NC, Chris Abbate, January 26, 2015

Chalice Lighting & Opening Thought:

Within each of us there is a silence
--a silence as vast as the universe.
We are afraid of it. . . we long for it.
When we experience that silence, we remember
who we are; creatures of the stars, created
from the birth of galaxies, created
from the cooling of this planet, created
from dust and gas, created
from the elements, created
from time and space . . . created
from silence.
Silence is our deepest nature,
our home, our common ground, our peace.
Silence reveals. Silence heals.

“Sharing Silence”, G. Norris

Check In: Talk about one thing you have learned or a significant feeling or thought you have had since our last meeting.

Topic: Silence

Our society is, by all accounts, a noisy place: Internet, TV, radio, cell phones, car horns, airplanes, news feeds, etc.

- Do you feel that our society suffers from a lack of silence?
- What is lost when there is a “silence deficit”?
- Are we avoiding something by avoiding silence?
- Reflect upon the role that silence plays in your life, what it signifies for you.

Sitting in silence:

- How does it feel to sit in silence? Does it make you uncomfortable? Do you long for it? Do you make room in your life for silence?

A voice asked, "Who are you?"
"I am Els," the woman answered.
"I didn't ask your name, I'm asking, 'Who are you?'"
"I am the mayor's wife," she replied.
"I didn't ask whose wife you are, but who you are."
"I am the mother of four children."
"I didn't ask whose mother you are, but who you are."
"I am a teacher."
"I didn't ask for your profession, but I asked who you are."
"I am a Christian."
"I didn't ask what religion you adhere to; I asked who you are."
"I am the one who went to church almost every day and always helped the poor and less fortunate."
"I didn't ask what you did, I asked, 'Who are you?'"
Then the woman had run out of answers; she couldn't come up with anything else.
Her mind was empty. There was only silence.
And all of a sudden, in this silence, she knew from the depth of her heart: I am!
Then the voice whispered, "Yes, that is what you are!"

- Do you think silence can help us understand who we truly are? Can we better experience our essence through silence?

If sound arises in silence, where do the things arise that cause sound? Also in silence? Sound comes and goes in waves. What remains is the silence. Do the things that make noise also arise in silence and disappear into silence again? Modern day physics teaches us that things are a mix of energy vibrations, waves. Waves appear from silence and disappear into silence, like water waves emerge from the sea and disappear into the sea again. If noise doesn't arise until you are there, do things that cause noise also not arise until you are there? Or are you also a "thing" arising from silence? Or are you essentially silence itself?

Closing Thought:

"Would you teach me silence?" I asked.
"Ah!" the master said. He seemed to be pleased. "Is it the great Silence you want?"
"Yes, the great Silence."
"Well, where do you think it can be found?" he asked.
"Deep within me, I suppose. If I could but go deep inside, I'm sure in the end I will be able to escape the noise. But it is hard. Would you help me?"
I knew he would help. I could feel his attention and his mind was so still.
"Well, I have been there indeed," he answered, "for years I was even in it. I sensed the silence within. But one day I heard a voice saying, 'Come, follow me.' I left it and never returned."
I was stunned. "But the Silence ..."
"I found the great Silence and discovered that the noise was within."