

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY Plan for Facilitators
Soul

Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA, March 2004

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting: From “Revelation” by Robert Frost

“We make ourselves a place apart
Behind light words that tease and flout,
But, ho, the agitated heart
Till someone really finds us out.

‘Tis pity if the case require
Or (so we say) that in the end
We speak the literal to inspire
The understanding of a friend.

But so with all from babes at play
At hide and seek to God afar,
So all who hide too well away
Must speak and tell us where they are.”

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: From “A Sunset in My Soul” by A. Powell Davies

“At the end of the summer of 1936, I was crossing the Atlantic Ocean, westbound, on the Queen Mary. A westbound ship, as all ocean travelers know, sails into the sunset, and on this particular evening the sunset was unusually beautiful. I stopped to look at it. ‘Take this sunset,’ I said to myself. ‘There is no soul in it.’ It is just something that clouds do to a source of light. And what are clouds? They are nothing but moisture suspended in the earth’s atmosphere. And what is this sea that reflects the sunset? It is just a great waste of waters, bleak and desolate. Not one thing that composes this sunset is aware of the sunset. Not even the sun, for the sun is nothing but a ball of fire. And my eyes that see all this, what are they but water and dust, briefly blended for the short space of a human lifetime, so that this insignificant blob of protoplasm that I call myself may see something that isn’t altogether there?

But isn’t it altogether there, I immediately ask myself? If I am not seeing this sunset with my eyes alone, I am seeing it with a sense of wonder and a joy of beauty, and the solace of it is slowly pervading me, even while I stand and look. I am seeing it with what I can only call my soul. If I do not call it that, I cannot call it anything; yet there it is. I cannot define it—no, but this sunset as a thing of beauty is definitely real. Indeed, the sunset is not only in the sky; it is in my soul

Everything that comes to human beings, everything they do, has something of this in it, I remind myself. You can put a sunset into the language of physics, but when you have done it, you haven’t got a sunset, you haven’t even got a complete description of the thing you are experiencing. Not at all. In the same way, you can put a living creature on a dissecting table and separate him into all his component parts, but at the end of the

process you won't have a living being; you will only have a lot of dead parts. The life that gave them unity and meaning—it will be gone.”

From *The Care of the Soul* by Thomas Moore

“In the fifteenth century, Marsilio Ficino put it as simply as possible. The mind, he said, tends to go off on its own so that it seems to have no relevance to the physical world. At the same time, the materialistic life can be so absorbing that we get caught in it and forget about spirituality. What we need, he said, is soul, in the middle, holding together mind and body, ideas and life, spirituality and the world.”

“‘Soul’ is not a thing, but a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart, and personal substance. I do not use the word here as an object of religious belief or as something to do with immortality. When we say that someone or something has soul, we know what we mean, but it is difficult to specify exactly what that meaning is.”

Focus Questions:

What experiences (spiritual or otherwise defined) of wonder, awe, beauty beyond description have you had?

Have you felt a spirit or soul inside yourself or around you that caused you to wonder whether we are more than the sum of our parts?

Some people seem to have some strength or power, or spirit in them that we might call character, personality, or soul? Where do you think it comes from?

Do you agree with Davies that there is something beyond the state of the physical that is difficult to define—the soul—Is there a source for it? What happens to the soul when the physical being ceases to exist?

If not soul what words do you use to describe the mystery of life and death?

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: From “Poem” by Mary Oliver

“The spirit
likes to dress up like this:
ten fingers,
ten toes,

shoulders, and all the rest
at night
in the black branches,
in the morning

in the blue branches
of the world.

It could float, of course,
but would rather

plumb rough matter.

Airy and shapeless thing,
it needs
the metaphor of the body,

lime and appetite,
the oceanic fluids;
it needs the body's world,
instinct

and imagination
and the dark hug of time,
sweetness
and tangibility,

to be understood,
to be more than pure light
that burns
where no one is—

so it enters us—
in the morning
shines from brute comfort
like a stitch of lightening;

and at night
lights up the deep and wondrous
drownings of the body
like a star.”