

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website



**Wednesday Evening Small Group (via ZOOM!)  
Spiritual Practice of Gratitude  
18 November 2020, 3:00 PM**

**CHALICE LIGHTING****0.5 min**

If we never experience the chill of a dark winter, it is very unlikely that we will ever cherish the warmth of a bright summer's day. Nothing stimulates our appetite for the simple joys of life more than the starvation caused by sadness or desperation. In order to complete our amazing life journey successfully, it is vital that we turn each and every dark tear into a pearl of wisdom, and find the blessing in every curse. *Anthon St. Maarten*

**OPENING WORDS****1 min**

I have been finding treasures in places I did not want to search. I have been hearing wisdom from tongues I did not want to listen. I have been finding beauty where I did not want to look. And I have learned so much from journeys I did not want to take. Forgive me, O Gracious One; for I have been closing my ears and eyes for too long. I have learned that miracles are only called miracles because they are often witnessed by only those who can see through all of life's illusions. I am ready to see what really exists on other side, what exists behind the blinds, and taste all the ugly fruit instead of all that looks right, plump and ripe.

*Suzy Kassem*

**SONG: THANKSGIVING EVE (by Bob Franke, cover by Garnet Rogers)**

**<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efdDMlCe-A>>**

**MEDITATION / CENTERING****2 min**

And when you crush an apple with your teeth, say to it in your heart: "Your seeds shall live in my body, And the buds of your tomorrow shall blossom in my heart, And your fragrance shall be my breath, And together we shall rejoice through all the seasons."

*Khalil Gibran*

The first sound of the gong brings us to silence. Please take time to center yourself, and temporarily push aside whatever might be preventing you from participating fully in tonight's session. The second sound of the gong returns us to each other's presence.

**CHECK-IN (2 ROUNDS)****40 min**

Please share some thing(s) about your life since last we met. How are you managing in the face of COVIF-19 PLUS the heat and the fires? Has anything occurred that has caused you to pause and take stock of where you are in relation to where you planned to be?

**INTRODUCTORY CONSIDERATIONS****5 min**

Dana Horton wrote in a column entitled *What Makes a Spiritual Practice Spiritual* that “... spiritual practices keep us buoyed up while tending to the unrelenting demands of life.” Among the spiritual practices listed were meditation, prayer, tithing, chanting, ceremonies, rituals, gratitude, and call-and-response recitations. These practices are designed to make you a stronger person, not to make your life easier. Some, like meditation, help us focus our mental energy, and others synchronize the body with nature. They do not have to be associated with religion.

In 2018, Mitch Horowitz described in a *Medium* article titled “Why the Best Spiritual Practice is One You Invent Yourself” his personal experience with rituals as follows:

Something swelled up within me at that moment: I felt in sync physically, intellectually, and emotionally and at one with my surroundings; my wish felt clear, strong, and assured, as though lifted by some unseen current. It was a totalizer experience, which went beyond the ordinary.

Today, we are considering how the practice of gratitude meets these criteria for a spiritual practice

**QUOTES ABOUT GRATITUDE**

True happiness is to enjoy the present, without anxious dependence upon the future, not to amuse ourselves with either hopes or fears but to rest satisfied with what we have, which is sufficient, for he that is so wants nothing. The greatest blessings of mankind are within us and within our reach. A wise man is content with his lot, whatever it may be, without wishing for what he has not.

*Seneca*

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend.

*Melody Beattie*

At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.

*Albert Schweitzer*

Gratitude is one of the strongest and most transformative states of being. It shifts your perspective from lack to abundance and allows you to focus on the good in your life, which in turn pulls more goodness into your reality.

*Jen Sincero*

Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.

*Marcus Tullius Cicero*

I am happy because I'm grateful. I choose to be grateful. That gratitude allows me to be happy.

*Will Arnett*

The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy.

*Henri Nouwen*

Gratitude can transform common days into thanksgivings, turn routine jobs into joy, and change ordinary opportunities into blessings.

*William Arthur Ward*

Reflective of the deep sense of gratitude and respect Mongolians reserved for wolves, there was a belief that only through wolves could the spirit of a deceased human be set free to go to Heaven.

*Tim Cope*

In the weeks after 9/11, out of the pain and the fear there arose also grace and gratitude, eruptions of intense kindness that occurred everywhere, a sharp resolve to just be better, bigger, to shed the nonsense, rise to the occasion.

*Nancy Gibbs*

Ascetics and fakirs come to mitigate human suffering; to heal us and lead us on the path. They put up with criticism; they go through many worldly trials. Some of them have even become martyrs for our sake. But they have done all this with a smile and with gratitude to God. Hence sacrifice is a great virtue.

*Sadhu Vaswani*

There is nothing remotely dignified about sorting through rotting trash to find something to feed your child, or asking someone for money because you have none (anyone who has contrived to give people money before they had to ask will never forget the look of gratitude in their eyes).

*Abhijit Banerjee*

Having the brain tumor, coming out of surgery and going through all of that, you're like, I am never going to feel the same and I have this new perspective on life. So much gratitude, life just feels like this enormous treasure. Then that kind of just falls away and you're back being grumpy about having an early morning meeting.

*Simone Giertz*

Hilary Putnam died of cancer at the age of 89. Those of us who had the good fortune to know Putnam as mentees, colleagues, and friends remember his life with profound gratitude and love, since Hilary was not only a great philosopher, but also a human being of extraordinary generosity, who really wanted people to be themselves, not his acolytes.

*Martha Nussbaum*

If you want to become physically stronger, you'll need healthy habits--like going to the gym. You'll also have to give up unhealthy habits--like eating junk food. Building mental strength requires healthy habits--like practicing gratitude--while also giving up unhealthy behavior, like giving up after the first failure.

*Amy Morin*

I must recall with gratitude those 178 Jewish women and men who participated in the Estonian War of Independence. Both of our nations know what it means to keep your identity and freedom even under the pressure of foreign powers, and we can be proud of their achievements.

*Kersti Kaljulaid*

I'm happy to say that at 62, I think I've reached that point where stuff doesn't bother me as much, and my gratitude level has gone way up, especially having gone through the loss that I've had, and losing so many of the great artists that I was close to. They taught me how to see it with a grain of salt and a lot of humor and perspective.

*Bonnie Raitt*

One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.

*Carl Jung*

If having a soul means being able to feel love and loyalty and gratitude, then animals are better off than a lot of humans.

*James Herriot*

The greatest wisdom is in simplicity. Love, respect, tolerance, sharing, gratitude, forgiveness. It's not complex or elaborate. The real knowledge is free. It's encoded in your DNA. All you need is within you. Great teachers have said that from the beginning. Find your heart, and you will find your way.

*Carlos Barrios*

I have learned that in every circumstance that comes my way, I can choose to respond in one of two ways: I can whine or I can worship! And I can't worship without giving thanks. It just isn't possible. When we choose the pathway of worship and giving thanks, especially in the midst of difficult circumstances, there is a fragrance, a radiance, that issues forth out of our lives to bless the Lord and others.

*Nancy Leigh DeMoss*

I have learned over a period of time to be almost unconsciously grateful--as a child is--for a sunny day, blue water, flowers in a vase, a tree turning red. I have learned to be glad at dawn and when the sky is dark. Only children and a few spiritually evolved people are born to feel gratitude as naturally as they breathe, without even thinking. Most of us come to it step by painful step, to discover that gratitude is a form of acceptance.

*Faith Baldwin*

Because gratitude is the key to happiness, anything that undermines gratitude must undermine happiness. And nothing undermines gratitude as much as expectations. There is an inverse relationship between expectations and gratitude: The more expectations you have, the less gratitude you will have.

*Dennis Prager*

What can we make of the inexpressible joy of children? It is a kind of gratitude, I think—the gratitude of the ten-year-old who wakes to her own energy and the brisk challenge of the world. You thought you knew the place and all its routines, but you see you hadn't known. Whole stacks at the library held books devoted to things you knew nothing about. The boundary of knowledge receded, as you poked about in books, like Lake Erie's rim as you climbed its cliffs. And each area of knowledge disclosed another, and another. Knowledge wasn't a body, or a tree, but instead air, or space, or being—whatever pervaded, whatever never ended and fitted into the smallest cracks and the widest space between stars.

*Annie Dillard*

**SONG: GIVE THANKS AND PRAISE (written and recorded by Bob Marley)**

**<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TK34aQwC7Q>>**

**PREPARATION FOR GROUP REFLECTION      1 min**

Read the questions for reflection, one by one.

**BREAK      10 min**

**GROUP REFLECTION      35 min**

Two rounds. Or, we can respectfully discuss the issues as they come up, with each participant having their "first round" say, followed by discussion of what was said, then proceeding to the next participant. Take a moment of silence and consider your ideas about gratitude.

- Do you have a daily or other regular practice involving gratitude? What is it? How do you keep it fresh?
- Is there a difference between feeling thankful and feeling gratitude? What is it?
- Which of the quotes particularly resonated with you, positively or negatively, and why?

**SESSION FEEDBACK AND FUTURE PLANS      5 min**

- How did the session go for you?
- Do we need to make any format changes to make it more useful to you?

- Any interest in designing or helping with session plans?
- Discuss response from afternoon SGM group.
- Should we revisit / modify our covenant?

**EXTINGUISH CHALICE / CLOSING WORDS** **1 min**

I cannot pretend I am without fear. But my predominant feeling is one of gratitude. I have loved and been loved; I have been given much and I have given something in return; I have read and traveled and thought and written. I have had an intercourse with the world, the special intercourse of writers and readers. Above all, I have been a sentient being, a thinking animal, on this beautiful planet, and that in itself has been an enormous privilege and adventure. Oliver Sacks

**CLOSING SONG: THANKSGIVING DAY (written and recorded by Ray Davies)**

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yD2PXEue-Jw>>