

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Session Plan

Spirituality

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Raleigh, NC, Chris Abbate, August 25, 2014

Chalice Lighting & Opening Thought

When I heard the learn'd astronomer;

When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me;

When I was shown the charts and the diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them;

When I, sitting, heard the astronomer, where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,

How soon, unaccountable, I became tired and sick;

Till rising and gliding out, I wander'd off by myself,

In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time

Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

~ Walt Whitman

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

Topic: Spirituality

Spiritual can refer to a state solitary or communal. It can refer to an inward quality or a quality of connection. It can refer to both. Usually it indicates a quality of experience beyond the materialistic, time-bound habits that detract us from what our Buddhist friends call simply “mindfulness.”

Meditation is regarded by many as a spiritual practice. It is not the only form. Connecting with our larger world through a desire for the common good is yet another way in which we, as individuals and in community, realize “spiritual practice.”

The prophet Micah, writing in the latter part of the 8th century BCE, proclaimed that what is good is “to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” There are many ways to interpret God. There are many ways to “be good.” Justice, mercy, and humility help; but there are multiple paths to mindfulness and countless means of transcending the narrow confines of ourselves that also permit us “to find ourselves.” Spiritual practice does carry an understanding that the spiritual life—however we define it—takes practice. What form that practice assumes is a matter of choice driven by conscience and caring community.

In the words of the late novelist and Unitarian Universalist, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.: “The primary benefit of practicing any art, whether well or badly, is that it enables one’s soul to grow.”

Questions

Each of us holds our own understanding of “spiritual,” “spiritual life,” and “spiritual practice.” What do any of these words mean to you, and how have their meaning changed for you over time?

What do you regard as your “spiritual practice” and how does it grow your soul? How does it connect you with your larger world?

What does it mean to become more spiritual? How do you nurture spirituality?

What is the difference between religion and spirituality? Where do they intersect? Where do they diverge?

Closing Thought

Mature spirituality is not based on seeking perfection, on achieving some imaginary sense of purity. It is based simply on the capacity to let go and to love, to open the heart to all that is.The heart can turn the suffering and imperfections we encounter into the path of compassion. In this practice, the divine can shine through even in acts of ignorance and fear, inviting us to wonder at the mystery of all that is. In this there is no judgment and no blame, for we seek not to perfect the world but to perfect our love for what is on this earth. Thomas Merton saw it this way.

Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths where neither sin nor desire can reach, the person that each one is in God’s eyes. If only they could see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way there would be no reason for war, for hatred, for cruelty . . . I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other.

- *A Path With Heart: A Guide Through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life*, Jack Kornfield