



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Network Website

**Wednesday Small Group
Thanks & Gratitude
Hayward, CA, Kathryn LaMar, November 2021**

CHALICE LIGHTING

0.5 min

I am grateful for what I am and have. My thanksgiving is perpetual. It is surprising how contented one can be with nothing definite - only a sense of existence. Well, anything for variety. I am ready to try this for the next ten thousand years, and exhaust it. How sweet to think of! my extremities well charred, and my intellectual part too, so that there is no danger of worm or rot for a long while. My breath is sweet to me. O how I laugh when I think of my vague indefinite riches. No run on my bank can drain it, for my wealth is not possession but enjoyment.

Henry David Thoreau

OPENING WORDS

0.5 min

READING IN THE ROUND: Who can make an accounting of gratitude? / For the universe we give thanks, an expanse of life to stretch us with wonder / For the earth we give thanks, fragment of the stars that is our home / For life we give thanks, the burning of stars ordered and tempered here allowing us life and breath / For growth we give thanks, for the heritage of the spirit, for all the forces past our knowing, power past our control / For the ages which follow us, for the eternity of days, in which life is ever renewed and fulfilled, we give thanks.

Kenneth Patton

CHECK-IN (2 ROUNDS)

40 min

Please share some thing(s) about your life since last we met.

COMMUNITY SINGING: HEAP HIGH THE FARMER'S WINTRY HOARD, GREY HYMNAL, NO. 70

INTRODUCTION

White View of Original US Colonial Thanksgiving (From Britannica Website)

Plymouth's Thanksgiving began with a few colonists going out "fowling," possibly for turkeys but more probably for the easier prey of geese and ducks, since they "in one day killed as much as ... served the company almost a week." Next, 90 or so Wampanoag made a surprise appearance at the settlement's gate, doubtlessly unnerving the 50 or so colonists. Nevertheless, over the next few days the two groups socialized without incident. The Wampanoag contributed venison to the feast, which included the fowl and probably fish, eels, shellfish. Stews, vegetables, and beer. Since Plymouth had few buildings and manufactured goods, most people ate outside while sitting on the ground or on barrels with plates on their laps. The men fired guns, ran races, and drank liquor, struggling to speak in broken English and Wampanoag. This was a rather disorderly affair, but it sealed a treaty between the two groups that lasted until King Philip's War (1675-76), in which hundreds of colonists and thousands of Native Americans lost their lives.

An Indigenous View of Early Thanksgivings (From *This Land is Ours*, by Susan Bates)

The story began in 1614 when a band of English explorers sailed home to England with a ship full of Patuxet Indians bound for slavery. They left behind smallpox which virtually wiped out those who had escaped. By the time the Pilgrims arrived in Massachusetts Bay they found only one living Patuxet Indian, a man named Squanto who had survived slavery in England and knew their language. He taught them to grow corn and to fish, and negotiated a peace treaty between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag Nation. At the end of their first year, the Pilgrims held a great feast honoring Squanto and the Wampanoags.

But as word spread in England about the paradise to be found in the new world, religious zealots called Puritans began arriving by the boat load. Finding no fences around the land, they considered it to be in the public domain. Joined by other British settlers, they seized land, capturing strong young Natives for slaves and killing the rest. But the Pequot Nation had not agreed to the peace treaty Squanto had negotiated and they fought back. The Pequot War was one of the bloodiest Indian wars ever fought.

In 1637 near present day Groton, Connecticut, over 700 men, women and children of the Pequot Tribe had gathered for their annual Green Corn Festival which is our Thanksgiving celebration. In the predawn hours the sleeping Indians were surrounded by English and Dutch mercenaries who ordered them to come outside. Those who came out were shot or clubbed to death while the terrified women and children who huddled inside the longhouse were burned alive. The next day the governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony declared “A Day Of Thanksgiving” because 700 unarmed men, women and children had been murdered.

Cheered by their “victory”, the brave colonists and their Indian allies attacked village after village. Women and children over 14 were sold into slavery while the rest were murdered. Boats loaded with a many as 500 slaves regularly left the ports of New England. Bounties were paid for Indian scalps to encourage as many deaths as possible.

Following an especially successful raid against the Pequot in what is now Stamford, Connecticut, the churches announced a second day of “thanksgiving” to celebrate victory over the heathen savages. During the feasting, the hacked off heads of Natives were kicked through the streets like soccer balls. Even the friendly Wampanoag did not escape the madness. Their chief was beheaded, and his head impaled on a pole in Plymouth, Massachusetts — where it remained on display for 24 years.

The killings became more and more frenzied, with days of thanksgiving feasts being held after each successful massacre. George Washington finally suggested that only one day of Thanksgiving per year be set aside instead of celebrating each and every massacre. Later Abraham Lincoln decreed Thanksgiving Day to be a legal national holiday during the Civil War — on the same day he ordered troops to march against the starving Sioux in Minnesota.

FIVE-MINUTE GUIDED MEDITATION ON GRATITUDE, BY ELAINE SMOOKLER

5 min

This meditation can be found at the end of this document.

QUOTES ABOUT THANKS AND GRATITUDE

10 min

I celebrated Thanksgiving in an old-fashioned way. I invited everyone in my neighborhood to my house, we had

an enormous feast, and then I killed them and took their land.

Jon Stewart

Thanksgiving dinners take eighteen hours to prepare. They are consumed in twelve minutes. Half-times take twelve minutes. This is not coincidence.

Erma Bombeck

The ultimate feast! Turkey, dressing, pies, memories./ Laughter carries over squabbles and fleeting tears. / Game time, go! / Heightened adrenaline; increased appetites. / Oh, the parade! Marching bands, floats and giant balloons. / Stuff the turkey, stuff your tummies! Eat up, eat more! / Thanksgiving joys shared with beloved family and friends.

Richelle E. Goodrich

If the only prayer you say in your whole life was “Thank You,” that would suffice.

Meister Eckhart

It is heaven itself to take what is given, to see what is plain, what the sun lights up willingly. We offer gratitude and reverence to the things that sustain us ... the earth, our community, the mysteries of the Universe, our good fortune in the miracle of life.

Mary Oliver (Daisies)

Give thanks for unknown blessings already on their way.

Native American Prayer

The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate.

Oprah Winfrey

Everything has its wonders, even darkness and silence, and I learn, whatever state I may be in, therein to be content.

Helen Keller

Gratitude is heaven itself.

William Blake

Thankfulness is a lethal weapon of unimaginable power. And because it is, it allows us to rise far above all of the dark and maniacal forces that assail us. And in refusing to lower ourselves to the squalid terrain from which these forces have launched their sordid attacks they are doomed to surrender, not because we outwitted them in battle, but because we stole the battle.

Craig D. Lounsbrough

This is the key to life: To expect everything to be given to you from above, yet to be genuinely surprised and forever grateful, when they are. Expecting all good things to be yours, while not knowing how to take anything for granted.

C. JoyBell C.

I didn't expect to recover from my second operation but since I did, I consider that I'm living on borrowed time. Every day that dawns is a gift to me and I take it in that way. I accept it gratefully without looking beyond it. I completely forget my physical suffering and all the unpleasantness of my present condition and I think only of the joy of seeing the sun rise once more and of being able to work a little bit, even under difficult conditions.

Henri Matisse

If there is no element of asceticism in our lives, if we give free rein to the desires of the flesh (taking care of course to keep within the limits of what seems permissible to the world), we shall find it hard to train for the service of Christ. When the flesh is satisfied it is hard to pray with cheerfulness or to devote oneself to a life of service which calls for much self-renunciation.

Dietrich Bonhoeffe

There are things in life that just sort of hang there: like free-floating guilt and angst. But, what about a sense of gratitude? Doesn't that well up at times and demand expression? A blessing, a song of praise, a shout, a loud HURRAH! I'm talking about a sense of gratitude that goes beyond just what another person does for you. I'm

talking about the fiery sunset, the smell of the rose, the very existence of the artichoke and the giraffe. It should take our breath away. And our breath, oxygen - yes, thank you!

*Gratitude SGM Session Of Mainline
Unitarian Church, October 2003*

PREPARATION FOR GROUP REFLECTION

1 min

Read the questions for reflection, one by one

BREAK

10 min

GROUP REFLECTION

50 min

- ◆ Do you remember to be grateful for big things but forget the small ones
- ◆ How do you express your thankfulness regularly?
- ◆ What steps do you take to avoid being superficial when thanking someone.
- ◆ How do you cultivate a thankful heart?
- ◆ How do we stay aware of that in life which is sheer blessing?
- ◆ Gratitude is about keeping an open mind. It is about not having your mind so set on an apple, that you can't be grateful when given a luscious pear. How have you found ways to be grateful for the ways that life turned out, rather than the ways you expected it to be? Have you found ways to be grateful for difficult people or circumstances?
- ◆ What spoke to you (or didn't speak to you) from the readings?
- ◆ Do you have a spiritual practice related to gratitude? Describe it for us.

SESSION FEEDBACK

5 min

How did this session go for you? What could have gone better for you? Are there any changes to the group format you can think of that would help us fulfill our mission, charter, or camaraderie better?

FUTURE PLANS

5 min

Now meeting once a month, unless other group members volunteer to plan/lead a session.

Okay to invite other congregants/friends to attend meetings?

COMMUNITY SINGING: WOYAYA, TEAL HYMNAL, NO. 1020.

EXTINGUISH CHALICE / CLOSING WORDS

0.5 min

READING IN THE ROUND: To all those who care, / You can't forever. / Time steals the years, / And your reflection in the mirror. / But I can still see the story in your eyes, / And your timeless passion that's never died. / While your skin became tired, / Your heart became strong, / The present became the past, / And your memories like a song. / And though the moment at hand is all that we have, / You've taught me to live it like it is our last. / Since two words don't say 'thank you' the way they are meant to, / I'll try all my life to be something like you.

Crystal Woods

Five-Minute Gratitude Meditation, by Elaine Smookler

Savor the good. On days when gratitude feels difficult to find, tune into your senses. This meditation invites you to cultivate thankfulness by slowing down and noticing what you can see, hear, touch, smell, and taste. There doesn't have to be anything special going on in order to practice gratitude—maybe it's as simple as feeling grateful for your morning coffee, or for a good book. Explore this practice to appreciate the little things.

1. **Use the breath to anchor yourself in the present moment.** Our minds are always so easily pulled to busyness. Bring particular attention to feeling the breath, or something in the body, as you bring your shoulders down and orient your attention toward gratitude.
2. **Next, bring to mind a sight you are grateful for.** Move through your senses, and find one thing to start with that you appreciate that comes to you from the world of sight, if you have this available. It could be a color...a shadow...a shape...a movement. Remember, it will never be like this again. What do you see right now, and can you feel grateful that you get to see this, whatever it is?
3. **Now, shift to a scent you appreciate.** As you continue to work with your senses, now take time to tune in with appreciation to an aroma. What do you notice? What about that glorious or interesting or subtle smell is making you smile? It could be gratitude for something familiar: a scent that brings comfort, upliftment; or maybe it's something you've never smelled before, and it just piques your curiosity, ignites you, enlivens you.
4. **Moving on, tune into any sounds around you.** Allowing the world of smell to gently recede into the background, on an in-breath, shift your attention to your ears and the world of sound. Maybe notice what it feels like to really listen. How many sounds can you notice, and can you feel grateful that you're able to experience sound, if you are? What can you notice about these sounds—far away? close? Perhaps you could play a piece of music that brings you joy, and have gratitude that it's so available? Or maybe it's the sound of children laughing, the sound of loved ones breathing, the sound of the beating of your own heart.
5. **The world of touch and texture beckons us next.** We find so much to be grateful for in touch! If there's someone near who you can hug or who can hug you, notice how this makes you feel filled with gratitude for the joy of human contact. Or perhaps you have a beautiful pet that you can stroke and cuddle, or some lovely material with a texture that feels warm to the touch, soft, evocative. Let your senses ignite your gratitude! There's so much to be appreciative of.
6. **Shift to noticing and appreciating objects around you.** Now take a moment to look around: Look down, look up, and from side to side. Appreciate how much effort must have gone into anything at all you own or use. Someone conceived of the need and many people worked on the details of the design. Much care even went into the packaging to deliver your item to you safely. What do you feel when you let yourself be grateful that all that talent went into making your life a little easier?
7. **As you end this practice, carry this attitude of gratitude with you.** One last little grateful tip: Why not offer your thanks to each person who does anything at all for you today? Even if it is their job to help you? When you're grateful, when you let your heart open up and be filled with appreciation, notice how being grateful makes you feel.
8. **Close with gratitude.** I'm so grateful that you tuned in to this gratitude practice, and I appreciate your time, your effort, and your energy to be present, awake, and alive to your precious life. Have a beautiful day.