

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website



Wednesday Evening Small Group, Hayward, CA
Ways to See Suffering,
26 February 2020, 7:15 PM

CHALICE LIGHTING

0.5 min

Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it. My optimism, then, does not rest on the absence of evil, but on a glad belief in the preponderance of good and a willing effort to always to cooperate with the good, that it may prevail.

Helen Keller

SILENT MEDITATION / CENTERING

2 min

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.

OPENING WORDS:

0.5 min

Darkness is not a force - it is merely the absence of light. Observe that when a light is brought to a dark place, the darkness disappears. Sadness is similar - when joy is brought to suffering, the sadness disappears.

Jonathan Lockwood Huie

CHECK-IN (2 ROUNDS)

36 min

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

INTRODUCTION:

5 min

The following descriptions of how five major human religions view suffering is from the article *Why Bad Things Happen* on the Belief Net website.

Buddhism: According to the first two Noble Truths of Buddhism, all of life is suffering and suffering is caused by attachments to worldly things. This attachment, which can take the form of greed, hatred, and ignorance in this and past lives, can, unless mitigated, return as more suffering (karma). Suffering is not necessarily punishment from a divine being, but rather something that must be transcended by not clinging to material objects or relationships.

Hinduism: Many Hindus view suffering as punishment for misdeeds committed in this or past lifetimes. Even a seemingly innocent person who has not eradicated bad karma from past lives through charitable deeds is susceptible to such payback. Individuals' suffering should be placed in the broader context of a cosmic cycle of birth, life, destruction and rebirth. Hindus believe victims will be reincarnated and may be happier in their next life.

Judaism: Some Jews believe that suffering is caused by a weakness in one's devotion to God. Generally, it is believed that God gave humans free will to feel pleasure and pain, and His purpose in allowing deep suffering of the innocent must be good even if mysterious. God suffers along with the sufferer. Many believe that God's sense of justice, and therefore the reasons for human suffering, are unknowable. To some Jews, knowing why God allows suffering is not as important as knowing that God will punish the perpetrators. All Jews place high importance on working to help those in need; the concept of *tikkun olam*, or repairing the world, will help allay undeserved suffering. Interestingly, suffering is the only issue listed in the Talmud that could lead a person to lose faith in God.

Christianity: The question of the unjustified suffering of the innocent is at the heart of Christianity, which holds that a sinless man (Jesus) suffered and died for the sins of humanity. Some Christians see suffering as God's punishment of sinful people or the world as a whole. Others see such suffering as a way a loving God tests the faith and fortitude of survivors. According to St. Paul, Christians should rejoice in suffering because it produces endurance, hope and character ([Romans 5:3-5](#)). Still other Christians see innocents' suffering as evidence of the inscrutable will of a God who "works in mysterious ways" toward an ultimate but unknowable good. Some Christians offer no explanation but, like Job, seek to trust in God. In the past, Roman Catholic Christians were taught that they should "offer up" pain, with the idea that through faith, suffering that seems meaningless can be redeemed and transformed.

Islam: The very word "Islam" means "submission." Many Muslims understand that to include suffering--enduring pain or loss--is a way of submitting to the will of Allah. Some suffering is Satan's doing or is the work of his cohorts in the spirit world (the "jinn") and is allowed by Allah as a test of humility and faith. Many Muslims believe that suffering and adversity strengthen one's faith, as pain often leads to repentance and prayer and good deeds.

QUOTES TO PONDER

10 min

To love is to suffer. To avoid suffering one must not love. But then one suffers from not loving. Therefore, to love is to suffer; not to love is to suffer; to suffer is to suffer. To be happy is to love. To be happy, then, is to suffer, but suffering makes one unhappy. Therefore, to be unhappy, one must love or love to suffer or suffer from too much happiness. I hope you're getting this down.

From the movie Love and Death

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

Helen Keller

Suffering by nature or chance never seems so painful as suffering inflicted on us by the arbitrary will of another.

Arthur Schopenhauer

If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death, human life cannot be complete.

Viktor E. Frankl

Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind.

Bertrand Russell

Rejoicing in our joy, not suffering over our suffering, makes someone a friend.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Suffering becomes beautiful when anyone bears great calamities with cheerfulness, not through insensibility but through greatness of mind.

Aristotle

What really raises one's indignation against suffering is not suffering intrinsically, but the senselessness of suffering.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Tell your heart that the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself. And no heart has ever suffered when it goes in search of its dream.

Paulo Coelho

Nature shows that with the growth of intelligence comes increased capacity for pain, and it is only with the highest degree of intelligence that suffering reaches its supreme point.

Arthur Schopenhauer

Dogmas are collective conceptual prisons. And the strange thing is that people love their prison cells because they give them a sense of security and a false sense of "I know." Nothing has inflicted more suffering on humanity than its dogmas.

Eckhart Tolle

Some people awaken spiritually without ever coming into contact with any meditation technique or any spiritual teaching. They may awaken simply because they can't stand the suffering anymore.

Eckhart Tolle

Thoughts are fine when you don't confuse them with who you are, and then thoughts are not a problem. Thinking is a wonderful tool to create things in this world. It only becomes problematic and a source of suffering when you confuse thinking with who you are.

Eckhart Tolle

"Fair" is not a useful concept. Life is not "fair." You can't make life "fair." You can get angry. You can complain about life not being "fair." You can attempt revenge - perhaps violently. You can inflict great suffering upon yourself in the name of life being "unfair." And Life is still not "fair."

Jonathan Lockwood Huie

If we could read the secret history of our enemies we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

We create our own unhappiness. The purpose of suffering is to help us understand we are the ones who cause it.

Willie Nelson

I may be too craving of that rich gift, the power of sharing other minds. I have drunk deeply, long, and oh! how blissfully at this fountain in a foreign clime. Hearts met hearts, minds joined with minds; and what were the secondary trials of pain to the enfeebled, suffering body when daily was administered the soul's medicine and food!

Dorothea Dix

A compassionate heart will lift you out of the pain and suffering of your own world because it knows that everyone is doing the best they can, given their state of consciousness and the histories they're dragging behind them.

Debbie Ford

There is no limit to suffering human beings have been willing to inflict on others, no matter how innocent, no matter how young, and no matter how old. This fact must lead all reasonable human beings, that is, all human beings who take evidence seriously, to draw only one possible conclusion: Human nature is not basically good.

Dennis Prager

The human murder by poverty in Latin America is secret. Every year, without making a sound, three Hiroshima bombs explode over communities that have become accustomed to suffering with clenched teeth.

Eduardo Galeano

The incorrect supposition that we live in a world of scarce resources has done more than preclude most individuals from achieving economic success. Over the centuries, this zero-sum-game view of the world has been responsible for wars, revolutions, political strategies, and human suffering of unfathomable proportions.

Paul Zane Pilzer

SONG IN CHINA OR A WOMAN'S HEART (KATE WOLF)

4.5 min

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14siRMH-9Uo>

PREPARATION FOR GROUP REFLECTION

1 min

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON SUFFERING

- ◆ Do you believe that human suffering has a purpose? If so, what is it.
- ◆ What did you learn about human suffering as a child?
How has your way of explaining human suffering to others changed over the years? Or have you avoided these discussions entirely? [If you have, why?]
- ◆ Was this change a result of an experience of your own, or did the change come from something you observed in others? Explain to us what these experiences were, and how they affected you.
Do or did your views about suffering come from any of the religions
- ◆ described above? Which ones? How do you relate differently to suffering now?
Is suffering an emotion? What other emotions do you associate with
- ◆ suffering? Can these be changed, or your ways of handling them be changed? How?
- ◆ In your view, do beings other than human suffer? If so, what changes are you willing to make to alleviate that suffering?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON SUFFERING

- ◆ Did any of the quotations in this session plan strike a chord with you? Explain.
- ◆ Talk about any other aspects of suffering you believe are relevant to how you live your life?

BREAK **10 min**

GROUP REFLECTION / FEEDBACK **36 min**

Two rounds. Take a moment of silence and consider your response to one or more of the questions above.

SONG: EVERYBODY HURTS (REM) **6 min**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5r0iW_xY-kc

ANNOUNCEMENTS, FUTURE SESSIONS, SERVICE PROJECT **5 min**

SESSION FEEDBACK **5 min**

EXTINGUISH CHALICE / CLOSING WORDS **1 min**

All men and women are born, live, suffer and die; what distinguishes us one from another is our dreams, whether they be dreams about worldly or unworldly things, and what we do to make them come about. We do not choose to be born. We do not choose our parents. We do not choose our historical epoch, the country of our birth, or the immediate circumstances of our upbringing. We do not, most of us, choose to die; nor do we choose the time and conditions of our death. But within this realm of choicelessness, we do choose how we live.

Joseph Epstein

**SONG LYRICS FOR SKUUC WEDNESDAY EVENING SGM SESSION ON SUFFERING
IN CHINA OR A WOMAN'S HEART (Kate Wolf)**

Just a little box all covered with blossoms white as snow
Chinese red and made of brass that he gave her long ago
Like the red dirt Oklahoma hills and the springtime flowering trees
That she kept with all the love they shared inside her memories

She got it from her captain when he sailed around the horn
Bringing gifts from China to their Oklahoma home
There were fancy silks and carved wood chests from the places he had gone
She kept them all until she died, but this was her favourite one

Just a little box all covered with blossoms white as snow
Chinese red and made of brass that he gave her long ago
Like the red dirt Oklahoma hills and the springtime flowering trees
That she kept with all the love they shared inside her memories

She kept it on her dresser filled with gold and silver rings
Necklaces of turquoise beads and other things
It filled her heart with the mystery and the magic of the day
When he gave it to her for her own, in his quiet loving way

Ten years they spent together, he'd come home and then he'd leave
One day while she waited, he disappeared at sea
No one knew how she called his name to the silent rocks and stones
Or how she'd sit and hold that little box, so she would not feel alone

Just a little box all covered with blossoms white as snow
Chinese red and made of brass that he gave her long ago
Like the red dirt Oklahoma hills and the springtime flowering trees
That she kept with all the love they shared inside her memories

No, she never was a dancer or wrote a fancy line
The treasures of her life, were the things she left behind
They buried her without them, where the prairie grasses grow
In China or a woman's heart, there are places no one knows

Just a little box all covered with blossoms white as snow
Chinese red and made of brass that he gave her long ago
Like the red dirt Oklahoma hills and the springtime flowering trees
That she kept with all the love they shared inside her memories

They buried her without them where the prairie grasses grow
In China or a woman's heart, there are places no one knows

EVERYBODY HURTS (R.EM—all members share song-writing credits--Bill Berry, Peter Buck, Mike Mills, and Michael Stipe)

When your day is long
And the night, the night is yours alone
When you're sure you've had enough
Of this life, well hang on

Don't let yourself go
'Cause everybody cries
And everybody hurts sometimes

Sometimes everything is wrong
Now it's time to sing along
When your day is night alone (hold on, hold on)
If you feel like letting go (hold on)
If you think you've had too much
Of this life, well hang on

Cause everybody hurts
Take comfort in your friends
Everybody hurts
Don't throw your hand, oh no

Don't throw your hand
If you feel like you're alone
No, no, no, you are not alone

If you're on your own in this life
The days and nights are long
When you think you've had too much of this life to hang on

Well, everybody hurts sometimes
Everybody cries
Everybody hurts sometimes
And everybody hurts sometimes
So hold on, hold on
Hold on, hold on, hold on, hold on, hold on, hold on
Everybody hurts