

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SMALL GROUP SESSION
WHAT AM I WILLING TO NOTICE IN MY WORLD?
By the Rev. Glenn H. Turner

OPENING WORDS & CHALICE LIGHTING:

How did I get so lucky to have my heart awakened to others and their suffering? -
Pema Chodron

CHECK IN: (40 - 50 minutes)

What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health, cares or concerns for loved ones, issues you are facing.

Each person in the group speaks uninterrupted, if time remaining, general response and conversation is welcome. Confidentiality.

FOCUS: What am I Willing to Notice?

What's happening to us as we continue to be bombarded by so much human suffering? What is our coping strategy, conscious or not? I sense that more of us are shutting down. We have no other way of dealing with the haunting faces and frightening images that so frequently appear in our papers and on TV. We turn away, and try to get on with our own lives. Or if the suffering is close to home, we get angry and want to strike out.

Many times I have fled from others' grief and pain. I've seen this behavior in many others. We don't know how to fix the situation or make the pain go away. There is nothing we can do to help, so we flee in the opposite direction, turn off the television, avert our eyes from the pictures, stop talking to our grieving friends. I don't see these actions helping anyone, even ourselves. It's impossible to shut out the world. We are more aware of what's going on than ever before, and there's no way to change that. As hard as we try to close people out, we never really lose awareness of their suffering. The world get in and gnaws at our insides.

The irony is that we want to help, but feel impotent, and so we withdraw the one thing that does help, our companionship. If you've experienced grief, you know how healing it is to just have friends sit with you, not saying a word, not expecting anything from you. You don't need them to do anything except be there, bearing witness to your loss and sorrow.

How we respond to so much suffering is our choice. We can feel hopeless and overwhelmed by this world; we can turn away and just live the best life we can. Or we can learn to bear witness.

When I bear witness, I turn toward another and am willing to let their experience enter my heart. I step into the picture by being willing to be open to their experience, to not turn away my gaze.

If the world were going along smoothly, if life were growing easier, it wouldn't matter so much which way we were turning. But most of us feel that the world is deteriorating, and we don't expect it to be improving any time soon. Because this is a difficult time for so many, we need a better way to be with hardships and devastation.

We can turn away, or we can turn toward. Those are the only two choices we have.
adapted from Margaret Wheatley

Discussion:

How have you felt about yourself, what you experienced or learned, when you faced the suffering of others?

Give examples from your life. What do you tend to avoid? What would strengthen you in turning toward rather than away from suffering?

LIKES AND WISHES

How did this session go for you? Is there anything you'd like to call particular attention to?

CLOSING WORDS: Again, these words of Pema Chodron -

“How did I get so lucky to have my heart awakened to others and their suffering?”