

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SPIRITUAL SHARING CIRCLES April 2009

“Where Do We Go From Here?” By the Rev. Lucy M. Ijams

Welcome and Lighting of Chalice

Opening Words

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar;
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy! ~William Wordsworth “Ode: Intimations of Immortality . . .”

Check-In 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, and, if time remaining, general response and conversation is welcome. Confidentiality.

Transition to Focus (e.g. silence, ringing bell, stand up/sit down)

Focus (may be read silently, or take turns reading a sentence around the circle.)

“To view death as an abrupt, dumb stop is unfair to the beauty, struggle and growth of a life. It seems unlikely that life would choose us so carefully, bring us through so much and then simply offload the whole harvest of journey over a cliff.

Caught between the shadowing and brightening of our days, we can have no clear view, yet our glimpses of the eternal world suggest that it is not a matter of infinite quantity so much as pure refinement of presence. And maybe this is the unseen gift that death will bring, namely, a refinement that transfigures us in order that we may dwell completely in eternal presence.”

~John O'Donohue, from *Beauty: the Invisible Embrace*, pp.204-205; 211

In general, there are four views of what happens to us after we die: Reincarnation of the soul as many times as is necessary until it is so spiritually advanced, it becomes free of rebirth; or, some part of us persists in an invisible world where contact with the visible world is sometimes possible; or, there is nothing—we may have left behind a material legacy or the memory of us, but at death we enter into nothingness; or, our souls are resurrected to a heavenly realm, dwelling with God and everyone we loved who died before us.

Questions for Reflection and Sharing: (in silence, each person consider the questions. When you feel ready to listen, raise your hand. When all hands have been raised, begin sharing.)

What do you believe about what happens after death? Does your belief affect the way you live?
Have you experienced the presence of someone who has died? Have you had a near-death experience?

Likes and Wishes How did this session go for you? Is there anything you'd like to call particular attention to? Our next meeting will be:

Closing Words

Did someone say that there would be an end,
An end, Oh, an end, to love and mourning?
What has once been so interwoven cannot be raveled, nor the gift ungiven.
Now the dead move through all of us still glowing.
Mother and child, lover and lover mated,
are wound and bound together and enflowing.
What has been plaited cannot be unplaited—
Only the strands grow richer with each loss
And memory makes kinds and queens of us.
Dark into light, light into darkness, spin.
When all the birds have flown to some real haven,
We who find shelter in the warmth within,
Listen, and feel new-cherished, new-forgiven,
As the lost human voices speak through us
And blend our complex love,
Our mourning without end.

~May Sarton, excerpts from "All Souls" from *Selected Poems of May Sarton*, 1978