

Session 3: Bearing Witness

To the facilitator, remember on each chance to share, let each person share in a circle or to each speak from the silence. If the group speaks from the silence, keep track of who has spoken and do not let another speak until each have had a turn or chosen to pass. If you're on zoom, you can establish an order with the first sharing and put that order of names in the chat.

Opening Words

The greatest compliment that was ever paid me was when one asked me what I thought, and attended to my answer. ~ Henry David Thoreau

Sitting in Stillness

As a facilitator, at the first meeting, invite everyone to sit together in silence. In later meetings you may not need to make such an invitation, as people will know. This should be at least a minute, perhaps more. It gives each person a chance to really “arrive” in the space.

Reminder

Remember that we have lived through, are living through, a time unlike any in living memory. We are learning new ways to be in relationship and relearning or remembering how to be in community. We may feel awkward or unsure. As we go through today remember how you are doing in this moment in pandemic. Remember that we each respond to this time in our own unique ways. Allow and offer grace to yourself and to those in the circle as we share in this return to community.

Re-visit Covenant

You can invite one person to read your covenant or ask each person to read a line of it around the circle. If you have new people, which you are likely to, give them a chance to suggest edits or additions.

Check-in

Take this time to share how you are spiritually, psychologically, emotionally, and physically. As you are comfortable sharing, we want to know how you are in this moment.

Embodied Meditation

The facilitator may choose to do the meditation from the prior two sessions for a familiar ritual or choose from option 2 for something new.

Option 1: As I read this out loud, please remember this is just an invitation. If anything feels uncomfortable to you or your body doesn't want to, please don't. As you turn your attention to your body, let your attention soften to just notice what is. Beginning with the lowest part of your body, just notice what you are connected to. What parts of your body touch the ground, or chair, or your own other parts of your body? Notice the contact of your body with your chair. What places touch your chair and how do they feel? Notice,

don't change, your breathing. Notice if it's deep, or shallow, or any way you could describe the rhythm of air in and out of your body. And then turn your attention to the space around you -- what senses connect you to the world around you? Let your gaze or your ears or nose or touch softly take in the world. What are you drawn to? Notice the details of what you're sensing. And then slowly turn your attention to what else you're drawn to. And now, again, notice your breath. How is your breathing now? How is the same? How has it changed? When you're ready, turn your attention back to this group gathered together.

Option 2: Notice something around you- it could be a sound, smell, vibration, image, or sensation. Simply draw your attention to it- be present to it fully. Let your attention settle into this noticing. Do not try to change what you notice or do anything more than be fully attentive to it. What do you notice in yourself as you focus on this one thing? Do you find it easy to focus on it or do you get drawn away by other thoughts or sensations? It is ok to notice yourself being drawn away, but when you recognize your attention has shifted, return to the something you originally focused on.

(wait around 20 seconds)

Shift your attention as you are comfortable away from the something you've been focused on and turn to your breath. Do not change your breathing, just notice it. After you have three inhalations and exhalations, return your attention to this group.

Theme and Activity

Activity

Today, we are talking about bearing witness to one another. As Unitarian Universalist religious educator CB Beal writes, "Bearing witness involves being present with someone else's feelings, expressing empathy, without taking those feelings in or having to make them go away." Each of us have unique ways in which we express these feelings. Some do it through storytelling while others will do it through naming emotions. There are as many ways of expressing our experiences as there are people. Bearing witness allows us to understand a person, not for how we think and feel about things, but how the person we are bearing witness to thinks and feels.

Many of us were raised to know the "Golden Rule" which is "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." However, in bearing witness, this rule is ineffective because your neighbor may not wish to be treated as you would wish to be treated. For today's activity, you are invited to instead consider the "Platinum Rule" which is, "do unto others they would have you do unto them." Put another way, treat the people they way the wish to be treated. This means that we need to get to know the person and learn what matters to them.

Invite participants to write in a journal, draw on a drawing pad, or simply sit in reflection of this question:

- When were you attended to in a way that matched how you wish to be treated?
- When have you felt deeply understood on your own terms?
- When have you been able to understand someone else for their way of thinking and feeling?

Readings

It takes a lot of courage to show your dreams to someone else. ~ Erma Bombeck

“I want to know
if you can sit with pain
mine or your own
without moving to hide it
or fade it
or fix it.”

~from “The Invitation” by Oriah Mountain Dreamer

Questions for Sharing

- When have you experienced someone bearing witness to your feelings and experiences?
- When have you bore witness to someone else’s feelings and experiences?
- How did you know that you were bearing witness with empathy and understanding?

Silence

Responses to questions without cross talk

Discussion (optional)

Likes and Wishes

Please tell us what you liked and what you wish might have been different about this meeting.

Closing Words

Risks by Leo Buscaglia

“To laugh is to risk appearing a fool,
To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.
To reach out to another is to risk involvement,
To expose feelings is to risk exposing your true self.
To place your ideas and dreams before a crowd is to risk their loss.
To love is to risk not being loved in return,
To live is to risk dying,

To hope is to risk despair,
To try is to risk failure.
But risks must be taken because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.
The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing.
He may avoid suffering and sorrow,
But he cannot learn, feel, change, grow or live.
Chained by his servitude he is a slave who has forfeited all freedom.
Only a person who risks is free.”