

Small Group Ministry Guide
For

*From Zip Lines to Hosaphones: Dispatches from the Search
for Truth and Meaning*
by Jane Ranney Rzepka (Skinner House Books, 2011)

Created by Laurel Hallman

Jane Rzepka says in her introduction that “people need a little something in the religion department”:

We want to be reminded.... We want to help out, and be a part of things.... We want to be among those who move toward justice. ... Toward celebration. Toward love.

This collection of twelve small group sessions is intended to inspire you to gather with a few friends, meet on a regular basis (say once a month for a year) and use Jane’s wisdom to make these desires a tangible part of your life together. Each page of this guide gives the leader specific references for an opening, some possible discussion questions, and a closing. The title of each session refers to a selected essay in the book. The Opening Words sometimes refer to the light of our chalice. You may also want to mark the time together with a bell. All of the Opening Words and Closing Words are from the Unitarian Universalist hymnbook, *Singing the Living Tradition*. It may be helpful for the participants in the group to know that these words are from a section of readings in the back of the hymnbook.

The Check-In is included to provide a time when the participants briefly describe how they are doing physically, mentally and spiritually. The Focus section allows a few minutes for the leader or member of the group to summarize the section of *Zip Lines* which will be the focus for the time together. The Questions section suggests questions to guide the reflections of the members. Usually each person contributes uninterrupted except for clarifying questions, and then the group moves on to the next person. It is not unusual for a group like this to go around the circle twice, or until each person in the group feels satisfied that the discussion is complete and says “pass.” The Closing Words are available for the leader or a participant to read along with a closing ritual which the group or the leader has developed to mark the ending of the time together.

Individuals may choose during the month to read all of the pages between the selected readings. Or they may wish to read only the designated pages, perhaps writing a journal response each time they read it in preparation for the monthly gathering. The leader may wish to give the participants the questions for the next meeting to allow them to reflect on them throughout the month in between meetings.

It is important for your group to agree on a regular time and place and format for your gatherings. It is also important that you agree together to make your gathering a priority in your lives, since the depth of your time together will grow in proportion to your commitment.

Welcome to this wonderful journey as you read Jane Rzepka’s insightful and often disarming book together with your friends.

TITLE: How We Break the Rules (pp 3-7)

OPENING WORDS:

Flame of fire, spark of the universe
that warmed our ancestral hearth—
agent of life and death,
symbol of truth and freedom.
We strive to understand ourselves
and our earthly home.

Leslie Pohl-Kosbau

CHECK-IN

FOCUS

QUESTIONS:

What surprised you the most about Jane's list of rules UUs break?

From your experience so far of your Unitarian Universalist congregation have you noticed a 10th Religious Rule that UUs break?

CLOSING WORDS:

We extinguish this flame but not
the light of truth,
the warmth of community,
or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts until
we are together again.

Elizabeth Selle Jones

TITLE: Our Slippery Spirituality pp 33-36

OPENING WORDS:

May we be reminded here of our highest aspirations,
and inspired to bring our gifts of love and service
to the altar of humanity.

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings
but connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe,
to this community and to each other.

Anonymous

CHECK-IN

FOCUS

QUESTIONS:

Have you known someone who has some of the qualities Jane has described?

How have they influenced you?

In what ways have you learned “to handle dynamite”?

CLOSING WORDS:

At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.

Albert Schweitzer

TITLE: Drawing the Breath of Life pp 45-52

OPENING WORDS:

We gather this hour as people of faith
with joys and sorrows, gifts and needs.

We light this beacon of hope,
sign of our quest
for truth and meaning,
in celebration of the life we share
together.

Christine Robinson

CHECK-IN

FOCUS

QUESTIONS:

Tell a story from your life when, like Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, your religion grew out of your direct experience, when you realized your religion couldn't be "second-hand."

Where are you these days, "with living"?

CLOSING WORDS:

A person will worship something—
have no doubt about that.

We may think our tribute is paid in
secret in the dark recesses of our hearts—
but it will out.

That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts
will determine our lives, and character.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

TITLE: Corn and Chaff Together, pp 60-62

OPENING WORDS:

We come together this morning to
 remind one another
 To rest for a moment on the forming edge of our lives,
 To resist the headlong tumble
 into the next moment,
 Until we claim for ourselves
 Awareness and gratitude,
 Taking the time to look into one
 another's faces
 And see there communion: the
 reflection of our own eyes.

This house of laughter and
 silence, memory and hope,
 Is hallowed by our presence
 together.

Kathleen McTigue

CHECK-IN

FOCUS

QUESTIONS:

Jane says we are “people together, a religious community of folks who understand the pleasure and pain of living on this planet.” How do you sense this happening among us?

What helps you in the times you are most aware that you are 100% mortal?

CLOSING WORDS:

Lead me from death to life,
 from falsehood to truth.
 Lead me from despair to hope,
 from fear to trust.
 Lead me from hate to love,
 from war to peace.
 Let peace fill our hearts,
 our world, our universe.

Project Ploughshares

TITLE: What Holds Us Together? pp 70-77

OPENING WORDS:

Come into the circle of love and justice.
Come into the community of mercy, holiness, and health.
Come and you shall know peace and joy.

Adapted from Israel Zangwill

CHECK-IN

FOCUS

QUESTIONS:

What do you think holds us together?

What does it mean to you to “promise to walk together”?

CLOSING WORDS:

Take courage friends.
The way is often hard, the path is
 never clear,
and the stakes are very high.
Take courage.
For deep down, there is another
 truth:
you are not alone.

Wayne B. Arnason

TITLE: God (and Variations on the Theme) pp 90-96

OPENING WORDS:

To worship God is nothing other
than to serve the people.

It does not need rosaries, prayer carpets, or robes.

All peoples are members of the same body,
created from one essence.

If fate brings suffering to one member,
the others cannot stay at rest.

Saadi

CHECK-IN

FOCUS

QUESTIONS:

Jane says that “each of us has the same assignment: to name the source of our blessings, the foundation of all that is good, the ground of our being.” What can you say for now in response to Jane’s “assignment”?

How would you describe a simple experience in your life which deeply moved you? Did it change you in any way?

CLOSING WORDS:

Be ye lamps unto yourselves; be
your own confidence.

Hold to the truth within
yourselves as to the only lamp.

Buddhist

TITLE: The Dim Soul and What to Do About It pp 132-135

OPENING WORDS:

Come into this place of peace
and let its silence heal your spirit;
Come into this place of memory
and let its history warm your soul;
Come into this place of prophecy and power
and let its vision change your heart.

William F. Schulz

CHECK-IN

FOCUS

QUESTIONS:

What nourishes your soul?

Do you have strategies for “spiffing up your dim soul” when you are feeling out of balance or dulled by life’s demands?

Can you make some promises to yourself about “focusing on some of the time-tested classics: Gratitude. Love. Perspective. Attention”?

CLOSING WORDS:

Be ours a religion which, like sunshine, goes everywhere;
its temple, all space;
its shrine, the good heart;
its creed, all truth;
its ritual, works of love;
its profession of faith, divine living.

Theodore Parker

TITLE: Carry-Ons for Life pp 153-156

OPENING WORDS:

May the light we now kindle
 inspire us to use our powers
 to heal and not to harm,
 to help and not to hinder,
 to bless and not to curse,
 to serve you, Spirit of freedom.

Passover Haggadah

CHECK-IN

FOCUS

QUESTIONS:

Tell about a time when you discovered a new level of spiritual freedom. Perhaps it was when you let go of a way of being, or some belongings, or a habit that was weighing you down.

What would you put in a carry-on bag if you were told you could only put in the bag what nourishes you?

CLOSING WORDS:

May all sentient beings be well
 and enjoy the root of happiness:
 Free from suffering and the root of
 suffering.

May they not be separated from
 the joy beyond sorrow.

May they dwell in spacious
 equanimity

Free from craving, fear, and ignorance.

Bodhisattva Vows (adapted)

TITLE: Stepping Off the Platform and Other Sabbatical Escapades pp 157-163

OPENING WORDS:

I am being driven forward
Into an unknown land.

The pass grows steeper
The air colder and sharper
A wind from my unknown goal
Stirs the strings of expectation.
Still the question
Shall I ever get there?
There where life resounds
A clear pure note in the silence.

Dag Hammarskjold

CHECK-IN

FOCUS

QUESTIONS:

When have you “stepped off a platform” in your life? How did it turn out?

What does “life is short” mean to you?

CLOSING WORDS:

We receive fragments of holiness, glimpses of eternity, brief moments of insight. Let us gather them up for the precious gifts that they are and, renewed by their grace, move boldly into the unknown.

Sarah York

TITLE: Two Pockets pp 197-200

OPENING WORDS:

Each morning we must hold out the
chalice of our being to receive, to carry,
and give back.

Dag Hammarskjold

CHECK-IN

FOCUS

QUESTIONS:

Describe a quality or skill or way of being in which you are capable and strong.

Describe a time in which you realized how interconnected everything is, including your connection with all life.

CLOSING WORDS:

If, here, you have found freedom,
take it with you into the world.

If you have found comfort,
go and share it with others.

If you have dreamed dreams,
help one another,
that they may come true!

If you have known love,
give some back
to a bruised and hurting world.

Go in peace.

Lauralyn Bellamy♦

TITLE: Who's to Blame? pp 208-216

OPENING WORDS:

Who has cut a channel for the
 torrents of rain
and a way for the thunderbolt
to bring rain on a land where no one lives,
on the desert, which is empty of human life,
to make the ground put forth grass?

Job 38

CHECK-IN

FOCUS

QUESTIONS:

How do you cope when “your gods or your universe or your world view has failed you?”

What role, if any, does forgiveness play in your life?

CLOSING WORDS:

And now, may we have faith in life to do wise planting that the generations to come may reap even more abundantly than we. May we be bold in bringing to fruition the golden dreams of human kinship and justice. This we ask that the fields of promise become fields of reality.

V. Emil Gudmundson