

Spiritual Deepening Circles: October- Connection and covenant

Session 1

Arriving	10 min	Facilitators arrive 10 min before start. Greet each person – ask them to make a name tag Welcome - Announce who's absent;
Singing	2 min	Gathered Here in the Mystery of the Hour
On our hearts	3 min	Each person can say if something is on their heart. Limit 1-2 sentences This is not a time for extended check-in
Gathering	3 min	Reading: On the Brink by Leslie Takahashi Light the Chalice
Connecting	5 min	(see instructions) Give these instructions, then one minute of silence. <i>What is one thing you would like people to know about you?</i>
Name Game:	1 min	each person states their name, all people repeat name three times.
Reading	3	From "A Hidden Wholeness" by Parker Palmer
Introduction of the covenant	10min	Give everyone a copy - read out loud. Tell them we will talk more about the covenant at our next meeting. For this session we will focus on: We will refrain from comments, questions, or dialogue during the sharing. Can they agree to this for the first meeting?
Reflection	5 min	Pass out reflecting questions
Sharing #1	30 min	Sharing on the reflecting questions. Popcorn style. Time limits controlled by facilitators.
Silence	1 min	May use bell or sound, timer or 12 deep breaths
Sharing #2	30 min	Each person has been asked to bring an object that is significant to them. Share popcorn style,
Silence	1 min	May use bell or sound, timer or 12 deep breaths
Responding	15 min	(time permitting) Second opportunity for sharing, responding to others, no questions or dialogue.
Silence	1 min	May use bell or sound, timer or 12 deep breaths
Take Away	10 min	What is one thing that you will take away from the circle tonight? - Go round, 1-2 sentences
Closing	3 min	By Erika Hewitt – this is in two parts. You may have facilitators read; or break the circle into two groups. Read Twice.
Business	3 min	Date, time and place of next meeting. Final comments by facilitators, reminder of confidentiality and no unsolicited comments/advice.
Singing	2 min	Trust the light within your heart Extinguish the chalice

Spiritual Deepening Circles: October- Connection and covenant

Session 1

Gathering Reading

On the Brink

All that we have ever loved
and all that we have ever been
stands with us on the brink of all that we aspire to create;
a deeper peace,
a deeper love,
a more embracing hope,
a greater generosity of spirit,
a deeper joy in this life we share.
—Leslie Takahashi

Spiritual Deepening Circles: October- Connection and covenant

Session 1 Reading

From A Hidden Wholeness by Parker Palmer

This reading is from a book by Quaker leader and educator, Parker Palmer; his ideas form the basis for how we function in spiritual deepening circles. Here he refers to “circles of trust” which are the Quaker form of deep listening circles.

“No fixing, no saving, no advising, no setting each other straight.” The rule is simple but abiding by it is hard work for people accustomed to straightening each other out as a way of life. Once when I introduced the rule at the start of a long-term circle, someone blurted out, “then what in heaven’s name are we going to do with each other? You’ve just excluded the only things we know how to do!”

And that, as they say, is no joke, especially for those of us in the so-called helping professions, who sometimes act as if our entire reason for being is to set other people straight. I recently facilitated a session where one participant was so certain that another’s mortal soul depended on her advice – rules be damned – that I had to ask her three times to cease and desist.

So what do we do in our circle? We speak our own truth; we listen receptively to the truth of others; and we offer each other the healing and empowering gifts of silence and laughter.

This way of being together is so countercultural that it requires clear explanation, steady practice, and gentle but firm enforcement by a facilitator who can keep us from reverting to business as usual. But once we have experience it, we want to take this way of being into other relationships, from friendships and the family to workplace and civic life.

If we are to embrace the spirit as well as the letter of the law that governs a circle of trust, we need to understand why the habit of fixing, saving, advising, and setting each other straight has such a powerful grip on our lives. There are times, of course, when that habit is benign, when what grips us is simple compassion.

You have a problem, you share it with me, and wanting to help, I offer you counsel in the hope that it will be useful. So far, so good.

But the deeper your issue goes, the less likely it is that my advice will be of any real value. I may know how to fix your car or help you write a paper, but I do not know how to salvage your failing career, repair your broken marriage, or save you from despair. My answer to your deepest difficulties merely reflects what I would do if I were you, which I am not. And even if I were your psychospiritual clone, my solution would be of little use to you unless it arose from within your soul and you claimed it as your own.

In the face of our deepest questions – the kind we are invited to explore in our circles- our habit of advising each other reveals its shadow self. If the shadow could speak its logic, I think it would say something like this: “If you take my advice, you will surely solve your problem. If you take my advice but fail to solve your problem, you did not try hard enough. If you fail to take my advice I did the best I could. So I am covered. No matter how things come out, I no longer need to worry about you or your vexing problem.”

The shadow behind the “fixes” we offer for issues that we cannot fix is, ironically, the desire to hold each other at bay. It is a strategy for abandoning each other while appearing to be concerned. Perhaps this explains why one of the most common laments of our time is that “no one really sees me, hears me, or understands me.” How can we understand another when instead of listening deeply we rush to repair that person in to escape further involvement? The sense of isolation and invisibility that marks so many lives due in part to a mode of “helping” that allows us to dismiss each other.

When you speak to me about your deepest questions, you do not want to be fixed or saved: you want to be seen and heard, to have your truth acknowledged and honored. If your problem is soul-deep, your soul alone knows what you need to do about it, and my presumptuous advice will only drive you soul back into the woods. So the best service I can render when you speak to me about such a struggle is to hold you faithfully in a space where you can listen to your inner teacher.

October 4, 2019



Covenant for UUSS Spiritual Deepening Circles

- Participation in this program represents a commitment of each of us to the people in our Circle, and the group's commitment to each of us.
- We will make attendance a priority, and adhere to starting and ending times. We will inform the facilitator in advance if we cannot attend or if we have a special request.
- We will share as deeply as we're able (but will feel comfortable passing if we wish to), and listen respectfully and deeply.
- We will refrain from comments, questions, or dialogue during the sharing.
- We will assume good intentions and show good will. In the spirit of the UUSS Mission and Values, we strive to move beyond tolerance to acceptance and understanding, both with regard to that which is shared within the Circle, as well as with regard to others outside our community.
- We will keep confidential any stories or personal experiences shared in the Circle.
- We honor that what is brought to the circle belongs to the person who shares; we will refrain from advice or questions without permission or invitation from the person who shared. This applies to conversation in or out of the circle.
- We avoid triangulation by bringing our conflicts and concerns with the group to the group as a whole or to the facilitators.

UUSS Mission — We come together to deepen our lives and be a force for healing in the world.

UUSS Values — We value the goodness in every person, the openness and curiosity that illuminate that goodness and the love and courage that sustain us.

Spiritual Deepening Circles: October- Welcome
Session 1 - Reflecting questions

These questions are to stimulate your thoughts about the reading from Hidden Wholeness. Please take a few minutes to reflect on these questions or anything that has come up for you in response to the reading.

Why is it often so hard to really listen to someone?

Have you had a time in your life when have you felt heard, when you believed that someone truly understood what you were saying?

What was that experience like for you?

Spiritual Deepening Circles: October- Connection and covenant

Session 1: Closing Reading

Reader 1: I don't have anything to say.

Reader 2: Well, I do – but it might not be interesting to anyone.

1: I have secrets inside of me, and struggles, and I don't know if I'm ready to share them.

2: I want to hear what you have to say.

1: I want to speak of the deepest things together.

2: I want to hear what you dream about, what you hope for.

1: I want to know how you have come to arrive at this resting point along your journey.

2: What if I speak and you don't understand me?

1: I will listen, and listen again, until my hearing becomes understanding.

2: What if I can't find the words to share the world inside of me?

1: I believe that wise words will emerge from you.

2: How can I trust you to hold my life's stories? You, who I may not even know?

1: By knowing that, as I receive part of your story, I will give you part of mine.

2: How will this work? What will happen? What awaits us?

1: We can find out anything by beginning.

Everyone: Let us begin to listen, and trust, and to know one another more deeply.

Erika Hewitt

October 4, 2019

Spiritual Deepening Circles: October- Connection and Covenant Session 2

Arriving	10 min	10 minutes before starting time Welcome - Announce who's absent;
Singing	2 min	Gathered Here in the Mystery of the hour
On our hearts Go round	5 min	– each person can say if something is on their heart tonight. Limit 1-2 sentences
Silence	1 min	
Gathering Reading	3 min	
Connecting	10 min	Tonight's connecting question "where in your life <u>do</u> you feel connected with other people?"
Completing	10 min	Complete any sharing of objects unfinished from first session.
Reading		Readings on Covenant
Our covenant	10min	Give everyone a copy - read out loud. Discuss facilitators role in upholding covenant. Ask for questions and comments. (Facilitated discussion= people should be recognized by facilitator before speaking.)
Reflection questions	7 min	Hand out the sheet with the questions – read aloud. Allow at least 5 minutes for reflection and note taking.
Sharing	60 min	Popcorn style, time limits controlled by facilitators, no dialogue, questions or comments
Silence	1 min	May use bell or sound (or 12 deep breaths)
Responding	10-15 min	Second opportunity for sharing, responding to others, no questions or dialogue.
Take Away	10 min	What is one thing that you will take away from the circle tonight? - Go round, 1-2 sentences
Closing	3 min	Reading Sarah York
Covenant Review	5 min	Ask: How was the deep listening experience? Did we uphold the covenant? What was challenging? Your attendance at the next meeting signifies a commitment to the covenant – contact facilitators with Q or concerns.
Business	2 Min	– Final comments by facilitators, reminder of confidentiality and no unsolicited comments/advice. Date/time of next meeting

**Spiritual Deepening Circles: October- Connection and Covenant
Session 2**

Gathering Reading

Each of us brings a separate truth here,
We bring the truth of our own life, our own story.
We don't come as empty vessels...
But rather we come as full people –
people who have our own story and our own truth.
We seek to add to our truths and add to our stories.
This room is rich with truth, rich with experience.
All manner of people are here:
needy...joyful...frightened...anxious...bored...
We all bring our truth with us.
May we all recognize the truth and the story in everyone's life.
And may we hear and honor the truths that we all bring
as we gather together.
Together we have truths.
Together we have a story.
Together we are a community.
~*Penny Hackett-Evans*

Spiritual Deepening Circles: October- Connection and Covenant

Session 2

Thoughts on Covenant

The covenant for Spiritual Deepening Circles represents the promises we make to each other for how we will be together. Our covenant creates the structure that allows for the safety needed to share our thoughts and feelings. Your commitment to the covenant is first a commitment to yourself- to make the effort to do what you have agreed to do. And equally important it is a commitment to the group to uphold your responsibility for the success of the circle. The covenant allows us to building trust and a sense of community.

Rev Lucy Bunch

Our communities of memory and promise are founded upon covenants because we all need a defense against the impulse of immediate feelings that challenge our best intentions. It is necessary to be reminded from time to time of what you said you were going to do, and what you really want, over and above the lure of momentary comfort.

Kendyl R Gibbons

It is covenant that brings us out of isolation, out of selfish concerns, out of individualism, to join ourselves to something greater, to become a part of a community that is working to practice love, to dwell together in peace, to seek knowledge and wisdom together, to find better ways to live our lives and live in the world. This...is sacred, religious work.

Susan Frederick Grey, Unitarian Universalist Association president

Spiritual Deepening Circles: October- Connection and covenant

Session 2 - Sharing questions

These questions are to stimulate your thoughts about the circle covenant and commitments in general. Please take a few minutes to reflect on these questions. You don't have to answer all of them, just choose the ones that spark an answer in you.

1. Where or with whom do you feel like you have a sense of belonging? What messages do these people and/or communities send to make you feel like you belong?

How have your covenanted relationships (for example, marriage, parenting, being a son, daughter, or sibling, commitment to a church or community) been of value? What have you liked best about them? What have you disliked?

How is commitment to a community different from commitment to a person?

Please share an answer to this question with your circle:

2. What is the most important aspect of the circle covenant to you? What do you think will be the most challenging?

Spiritual Deepening Circles: October- Connection and covenant
Session 2

Closing Reading

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