

Spiritual Deepening Circles: March 2020: Gratitude

Session 1

Arriving	10 min Before start time	Greet each person
Singing	2 min	Gathered Here in the Mystery of the Hour Light the chalice
On our hearts Go round	5 min	– each person can say if something is on their heart tonight. Limit 1-2 sentences this is not a time for extended check-in
Gathering	3 min	Reading Kenneth Patton
Connecting (go round)	10 min	Pose this question, then one minute of silence. “What was the best part of your day today?” 1-2 sentences
Activity Naikan practice	15 min	(make sure that everyone has something to write with and something to write on) <i>We will pass out a piece of paper for you that has the instructions for the activity written on the top. (Read the instructions from the paper, respond to any questions) Are there any questions? You will have 10 minutes for this activity. After 10 minutes we will check in to see if anyone needs more time.</i>
Sharing	60 -75 min	Popcorn style,
Silence	1 min	May use bell or sound, timer or 12 deep breaths
Responding	10 min	(time permitting) Second opportunity for sharing, responding to others, no questions or dialogue. No one speaks twice before everyone who wants to speak has spoken once.
Silence	1 min	May use bell or sound, timer or 12 deep breaths
Take Away	10 min	Go around – one thing that you will take away from this session in a few words. For example: what moved you or what insights did you have.
Closing	3 min	Reading
Business		Final comments by facilitators, reminder of confidentiality and no unsolicited comments/advice and date of next meeting.
Singing	2 min	Trust the Light Within Your Heart
		Extinguish the chalice

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Session 1 Gathering reading

Who can make an accounting of gratitude?

For the universe we give thanks, an expanse of life to stretch us with wonder...

For the earth we give thanks, fragment of the stars that is our home...

For life we give thanks, the burning of stars ordered and tempered here allowing us life and breath...

For growth we give thanks, for the heritage of the spirit, for all the forces past our knowing, power past our control...

For the ages which follow us, for the eternity of days, in which life is ever renewed and fulfilled, we give thanks.

Kenneth Patton,

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Session 1 Activity: Naikan practice

At this session we are going to engage in a practice called Naikan, which is Japanese for “inside looking” or self-reflection.

Our practice today will focus on your relationships to people in your life. Begin by thinking of three people who are important to you. Then choose one of these people and reflect on the three questions below. You will have 10 minutes to choose the person and to reflect on the questions. If you have time, you may choose to reflect on more than one person from your list. Please reflect silently.

What have I received from this person?

What have I given to this person?

What troubles and difficulties have I caused this person?

What I am grateful for about this person?

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Session 1 Closing reading

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

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Session 2

Arriving	10 min	10 minutes before starting time
Singing	2 min	Gathered Here in the Mystery of the Hour Light the chalice
On our hearts Go round	5 min	– each person can say if something is on their heart tonight. Limit 1-2 sentences this is not a time for extended check-in
Gathering	3 min	Reading
Connecting	5 min	Pose this question, then one minute of silence. “What’s wrong?” 1-2 sentences
Activity 1 (do both activities)	10 min	Activity 1: Remember the bad See instructions
Silence	2 min	May use bell or sound, timer or 12 deep breaths
Activity 2	15 min	Activity 2: Gratitude list (make sure that everyone has something to write with and something to write on) See instructions.
Silence	1 min	May use bell or sound, timer or 12 deep breaths
Sharing	30-60 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. No one speaks twice before everyone who wants to, speaks once.
Take Away	10 min	Go around – one thing that you will take away from this session in a few words. For example: what moved you or what insights did you have.
Closing	5min	Reading
Business		Final comments by facilitators, reminder of confidentiality and no unsolicited comments/advice and date of next meeting.
Singing	2 min	Trust the Light Within Your Heart Extinguish the chalice

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Session 2 – Gathering Reading

ONE MORNING Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

One morning we will wake up
and forget to build that wall we've been building,
the one between us the one we've been building for years,
perhaps out of some sense of right and boundary,
perhaps out of habit.

One morning we will wake up and let our empty hands hang empty at our sides.
Perhaps they will rise, as empty things
sometimes do when blown by the wind.
Perhaps they simply will not remember how to grasp, how to rage.

We will wake up that morning and we will have
misplaced all our theories about why and how
and who did what to whom, we will have mislaid
all our timelines of when and plans of what
and we will not scramble to write the plans and theories anew.

On that morning, not much else will have changed.
Whatever is blooming will still be in bloom.
Whatever is wilting will wilt.
There will be fields to plow and trains to load and children to feed and work to do.

And in every moment, in every action, we will
feel the urge to say thank you, we will follow the urge to bow.

Activity 1 reading

From Thanks by Robert Emmons

Remembering the Bad

For most people, life is generally perceived to be pleasant. Research has shown that memories of past events tend to be biased toward the positive. Despite this preference for the positive, there is no reason why the blessings that are listed in our daily gratitude inventories should be only pleasant. We need to remember the bad things as well. During on Thanksgiving sermon, the Reverend Peter Gomes encouraged his congregation to “think of your worst moments, your sorrows, your losses your sadness and then remember that here you are, able to remember them. ...you got through the worst day of your life.. you got through the trauma, you’re making your way out of the dark, you are surviving in spite of difficulty..... remember the bad things and then look to see where you are.” When we remember how difficult life used to be and how far we have come, we set up an explicit contrast in our mind, and this contrast is fertile ground for gratefulness.

Why would remembering the worst that life offered be an effective strategy for cultivating gratitude? Because it capitalizes upon natural mental tools and normal human processes. For one, psychological research has established that “bad is stronger than good.” Negative stimuli often evince powerful reactions that can be difficult to ignore or surmount. The adversities of life seasoned with strong emotions are deeply etched in our memories and for this reason are easy to recall. Therefore, to be grateful in our current lives, it is helpful to remember how awful it was, is, or could be. Secondly our minds think in terms of counterfactuals – mental comparisons we make between the way things are and how thing might be different. At times these counterfactuals may be counterproductive to our mental well-bring as we lament opportunities lost or regrets over what might have been. But we can harness the power of counterfactual thinking by reminding ourselves of how much worse life might be than it is.

Activity 2 reading

Gratitude as a Chosen attitude

From reading accounts of gratitude from people around the world and throughout history, I became convinced that gratitude is an approach to life that can be freely chosen for oneself. It does not depend upon objective life circumstances such as health, wealth, or beauty. Saying that gratitude is a choice means that we can select it from an array of responses to what life offers.

What does it mean to say that gratitude is a choice? It means that we sharpen our ability to recognize and acknowledge the giftedness of life. It means that we make a conscious decision to see blessing instead of curses. It means that our internal reactions are not determined by external forces.

That gratitude is a conscious decision does not imply that it is an easy decision. The ability to choose gratitude may not come easily, naturally or effortlessly. While gratitude is pleasant it is not easy. We have to work at it. It must be consciously cultivated. A number of personal burdens and external obstacles block grateful thoughts. A number of attitudes are incompatible with a grateful outlook on life, including perceptions of victimhood, an inability to admit one's short comings, a sense of entitlement, and an inability to admit that one is not self-sufficient. In a culture of self-aggrandizement and perceptions of deservedness, gratitude can be crowded out. It is also easy to see how gratitude can have a difficult time surviving in a culture that celebrates consumption. But in gratitude we recognize that we are not ultimately producers and consumers but, above all, the recipients of gifts.

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Session 2 Activity 2: Gratitude List

Make a list of all the things for which you are grateful. This is a brainstorm – write down anything that comes to mind, as many as come to you in 5 minutes. Include people, places, things, ideas, whatever.

1	21
2	22
3	23
4	24
5	25
6	26
7	27
8	28
9	29
10	30
11	31
12	32
13	33
14	34
15	35
16	36
17	37
18	38
19	39
20	40

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Session 2 Closing Reading

A planet is born, a spark ignites,
something completely new comes into being;

All: we give thanks for the mystery and miracle of life.

A waterfall descends, a rainbow arcs through the sky,
the ocean opens to an endless horizon;

All: we give thanks for the mystery and miracle of beauty.

The stars pierce our hearts,
peace envelops us, we are blessed;

All: we give thanks for the mystery and miracle of wonder.

In the midst of pain, we find our way to hope and restoration;

All: we give thanks for the mystery and miracle of healing.

In the midst of fear, we do what is right
and speak our truth in faith;

All: we give thanks for the mystery and miracle of courage.

In our aloneness we see someone in greater need
and offer ourselves to them;

All: we give thanks for the mystery and miracle of compassion.

We gather in community, in friendship, and cherish each other;

All: we give thanks for the mystery and miracle of love.

Amanda Udis-Kessler