

Applying Our Spiritual Practice

In this session, we explore ways that our spiritual practice can support the transformation of suffering arising from race-based oppression. Much of our suffering and ignorance in this area is unconscious, outside of our ordinary awareness. It is therefore necessary not only to do deep personal work, but to step into community in order to reveal material that cannot be seen through personal reflection. Also, to understand that what we see/experience as personal, is in fact simply a reflection of a larger impersonal experience.

The pain of this uncovering can be very intense, as we cling to our ideas of ourselves as “good white people” or “good social justice practitioners.” But as Bryan Stevenson said during the 2017 Ware Lecture, “We will not change the world if we’re not willing to do uncomfortable things.”

Being in community is intrinsic and inescapable to being a Unitarian Universalist. In this session we begin to explore the notion of a Beloved Community and how that might appear to us.

Before Your Meeting

Please read / watch / listen to these items before your meeting

- [Board Panel Discussion, General Assembly 2017](#) (video)
- [Social Justice as a Spiritual Practice](#) by Laura Wagner [pdf]
- [Building the Beloved Community](#) by William Lefore [webpage]

Please do these two practices before your Session 8 meeting:

1. *Using compassion as a skillful response.*

Thich Nhat Hanh says, “According to Buddhism, compassion is the only source of energy that is useful and safe. With compassion, your energy is born from insight; it is not blind energy.”

Assignment: Consider your own narrative of race and your suffering within it. Use your daily compassion practice to cultivate compassion for your own suffering, and to reflect on its relationship to the suffering of others.

2. *Seeing “identity” as constantly arising yet changing due to circumstances.*

Assignment: Reflect on the readings and teachings in this series. How have they allowed you to see both the power and the impermanence of your racial/cultural identity? Does this knowledge help you to act more skillfully?

Facilitation

Your group should choose a facilitator for this meeting. The facilitator role will rotate each meeting.

The facilitator’s role is to guide the group through the proposed agenda. The facilitator is not expected to have any special knowledge about the topic, and responds to each question as a participant. The facilitator’s role incorporates two jobs:

1. Make sure all voices are heard. We suggest “going around” to have each person speak during most sections of the agenda, rather than open discussion.
2. Keep time and keep the group moving through the agenda.

Proposed Agenda

- Sit (5 minutes)
 - Review Communication Guidelines that will support your group (5 minutes)
 1. Read aloud your group's guidelines developed in the first session
 2. Discuss any revisions to the guidelines
 3. Confirm that all members can abide by the group's guidelines, or at least open to practicing with them
 - Mindful Sharing (80 minutes)
 - Instruction: Mindful sharing involves each participant sharing from personal experience. There is no discussion or cross-talk during this time period, only personal sharing.
 - Each person in the group can share 3-5 minutes on each question (gauge the time depending on the number of people in your group, allowing about 20 minutes for each of the 4 questions). Speak to whatever questions are most salient.
-

- **Discussion Questions**

1. Answer for yourself one of the questions given to the UUA Board Panel: What qualities will we need to embody together as we continue the work of building Beloved Community?
-

2. In *Social Justice as a Spiritual Practice*, Laura Wagner tells us:

“It has been said that we are all broken.

Our wholeness comes,

when we gather together.”

How do these lines resonate with you? Do you find them to be true?

3. As you reflect on your own narrative of race, what has come up for you? How has your cultivation of compassion affected your ability to stay with these reflections?

4. In what ways has this series of readings/conversations allowed you to see both the power and the impermanence of your racial/cultural identity? Can or does your compassion practice provide useful guidance?

- Group Reflection (10 minutes)
 - Instruction: Group Reflection is like Mindful Sharing in that there is no discussion or cross-talk, however the focus is on what kind of experience the participants had during the meeting rather than on the content covered.
 - Each person in the group can share 2-3 minutes about what it was like to participate in the group (gauge time based on number of people in the group)
 - PROMPT: What was it like to engage in Mindful Sharing today? How has this been for you so far?
- If there's time left, finish with a closing sit (5 minutes)