

Wisdom Circle – Stories of Hope
December 2018



Chalice Lighting by Debra Faulk

The chalice lit amongst us is a beacon
A beacon of hope, in a world in crisis
A beacon of possibility, made manifest in community
A beacon of warmth through our interconnections
A beacon of light illuminating our shared wisdom
A beacon of connection by our being together

Silence- Take three minutes to settle into this space, to fully arrive. You may also use this time to reflect about the chalice lighting words above.

Check-In

As you feel comfortable, take 2-3 minutes to share whatever you need to share with this group in order to be fully present. This is a time for sharing, but not for discussion.

Business (approx. 10 min)

Use this time for any new business: welcoming new members, scheduling future meetings, revisiting/reciting the covenant, answering questions about wisdom circle processes, etc...

Spiritual Exercise

Share any insight, learning, lesson gained from doing or resisting this month's spiritual exercise. (Focus on your heart/emotions/spirit/personal experience). Because this is a section for personal sharing, attentive listening and no-crosstalk is recommended. Choose one of the following spiritual exercises:

- a) **Journal-** Write what your sources of hope are. Where do you find hope?
- b) **Listening-** Take some time to ask others what hope means to them or where they find hope. Listen attentively and compassionately.

How was this experience for you? What insight did you gain?

Discussion of Reading and Words of Wisdom

Take turns reading the words of wisdom. Share about the one(s) that caught your attention. Discuss the reading and the questions below. Crosstalk can enrich your conversation here (avoid judging or wanting to “fix” things, and speak from your own experience, avoiding generalizations, and identifying who you mean when/if you use the word “we”).

Words of Wisdom

“Let us plant dates even though those who plant them will never eat them. We must live by the love of what we will never see.... Such disciplined love is what has given prophets, revolutionaries, and saints the courage to die for the future they envisaged. They make their own bodies the seed of their highest hope.”

— **Rubem Alves** quoted in *There Is A Season* by Joan Chittister

A part of our obligation to our own being and to our descendants is to study life and our conditions, searching always for the authentic underpinnings of hope.

— **Wendell Berry**

“Believe that what you have to say, what you have lived and thought and felt, is important and deserves to be told to someone else. That doesn’t absolve you from the task of revision. It’s not the fact that you’ve lived it that makes an experience meaningful; that’s where you begin. —**Rita Dove**

“Mama exhorted her children at every opportunity to “jump at de sun” We might not land on the sun but at least we would get off the ground.” -**Zora Neale Hurston**

"But, here is the miracle. We have been recovering from the moment we began to question, know, and understand. From the instant we began to look for language to *name*.” -**Inés Hernández-Ávila**

“Where there is no hope, it is incumbent on us to invent it.” — **Albert Camus**

“Even in the mud and scum of things, something always, always sings.”

— **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Hope

I took a class in seminary with the Rev. Dr. William Schulz, former UUA president and former Executive Director of Amnesty International USA, and for our last assignment we had to write a short essay about our sources for hope. I was a bit disappointed when I received my essay back with an B. Almost automatically, I wrote an email to my professor asking almost for the right answer. I didn’t get a “correct” answer, just an encouraging email from my professor to keep looking. I thought he was very clever in his response, but I still secretly felt as if he was hiding the location of a well of wisdom from me.

As I started thinking about this month's theme, I thought I could probably use parts of that essay for this month's wisdom circles. I found the essay and read it again. Well, a couple of years later, I can see how generous Rev. Bill Schulz had been, but I couldn't see it then. You see, I took the essay part of the assignment too serious and I wanted to have the right answer, as if hope were a tangible universal thing. I'd borrow words and ideas from others that somehow connected to my own experience, like the idea of impermanence from Buddhism, and others. But what the assignment was asking me to do was to use my life experiences as the text to complete it, to get in touch with the times hope showed its face to me and to name them.

There wasn't a right answer. There wasn't anything my professor could've offered me as an answer, because the question is deeply personal. It was not just an assignment but an invitation to a spiritual exercise. I understand now that he was not hiding anything from me nor was he keeping me from reaching some mythical fountain of wisdom. In fact, he was encouraging me to continue on my quest.

I wonder what stories of hope you carry within, what stories inspire you, which ones do you go to when you find yourself in need of hope. When hope is hard to find, I wonder what strategies you use to remind yourself of where to find it or renew it.

This month of December, as millions in the world celebrate their own sacred stories of hope, I hope you will pause a bit to name your own.

Discussion Questions:

What is hope?

Has your understanding of hope changed through the years?

Share a time when you found hope in an unexpected place.

Gratitude: Share 1-2 things that have been meaningful to you from this session.

Extinguishing of the Chalice:

By Martha L Munson

We extinguish the chalice here that it might glow gently in our hearts.

May it light your path as you leave this place.

May it guide your way until we are together again.