

Wisdom Circle – The Holy

December 2016

PREPARATION

Words of Wisdom

“A sense of humor is the only divine quality of man”

~ Arthur Schopenhauer

“Divine sound is the cause of all manifestation. The knower of the mystery of sound knows the mystery of the whole universe.”

~ Hazrat Inayat Khan

“To the poet, to the philosopher, to the saint, all things are friendly and sacred, all events profitable, all days holy, all men divine.”

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane.”

~ Mircea Eliade

“Reclaiming the sacred in our lives naturally brings us close once more to the wellsprings of poetry.”

~ Robert Bly

“When man penetrates the mysteries of Nature, the "facts of Nature" become transparent symbols, revealing the "divine energies" and the "angelic" state which fallen man has lost, and which he may recover only for a moment, as when he is enraptured by the beauty of music or of a lovely face. At such moments man forgets his limited self, his individualistic dream, and participates in the cosmic dream, thus becoming freed from the prison of his own carnal soul.”

~ Seyyed Hossein Nasr

“The children of Spirit are laughing, cursing, chatting, walking and running. They ooze holiness in all that they are and do.”

~ Ronald Chapman

Readings:

Prepared by: Tania Márquez

For Christians around the world, the Holy came to the world in the form of a child. Every December, the birth of Jesus is celebrated by Christians everywhere. To me, life striving to live is the real miracle. From the apparent emptiness of a mother's womb, life emerges. Birth is a sacred moment. A common phrase in Spanish for "to give birth" is "dar a luz" (literally, "to give light"). The birth of a child then is a way to "give light" to this world but, what about other acts of creation? What are the things that emerge from us that give light to others?

One of the sources of Unitarian Universalism is the "direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life" phew! Allow me the audacity to say that this can easily be rewritten as "direct experience of the Holy/Sacred/Divine".

Giving birth to the Holy can be one of those direct experiences. But I want to use this metaphor to indicate the many ways we give light to the world when we contribute to its beauty through music, poetry, photography, acts of kindness, etc. In other words, we give light to the world when we share our gifts boldly with others.

But the religious experience is personal in many ways. For that reason, I want to share some readings from different traditions about how others have experienced or described the Holy.

The Beloved

Music, the word we use in everyday language, is nothing less than the picture of the Beloved. It is because music is the picture of our Beloved that we love music. But the question is: What is our Beloved, or where is our Beloved? Our Beloved is that which is our source and our goal. What we see of our Beloved before our physical eyes is the beauty which is before us. The part of our Beloved which is not manifest to our eyes is that inner form of beauty of which our Beloved speaks to us. If only we would listen to the voice of all the beauty that attracts us in any form, we would find that in every aspect it tells us that behind all manifestations is the perfect Spirit, the Spirit of Wisdom.

(Excerpt of "The Mysticism of Sound and Music": The Sufi Teaching of Hazrat Inayat Khan)

Nature

The Sacred Depths of Nature – Ursula Goodenough

Mystery generates wonder, and wonder generates awe. The gasp can terrify or the gasp can emancipate. As I allow myself to experience cosmic and quantum Mystery, I join the saints and the visionaries in their experience of what they called the Divine.

From "The Wild and the Sacred" – Thomas Berry

"...we will recover our sense of wonder and our sense of the sacred only if we appreciate the universe beyond ourselves as a revelatory experience of that numinous presence whence all things came into being. Indeed, the universe is the primary sacred reality. We become sacred by our participation in this more sublime dimension of the world about us."

Vacillation (excerpt)- William Butler Yeates

My fiftieth year had come and gone,
I sat, a solitary man,
In a crowded London shop,
An open book and empty cup
On the marble table-top.

While on the shop and street I gazed
My body of a sudden blazed;
And twenty minutes more or less
It seemed, so great my happiness,
That I was blessed and could bless.

By Williams Wordsworth (excerpt)

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

By Hafiz

Every child has known God,
Not the God of names,
Not the God of don'ts,
Not the God who ever does
Anything weird,
But the God who knows only 4 words
And keeps repeating them, saying:
"Come Dance with Me."

Spiritual Exercise –

This month's exercise is an invitation to the places, things, and people that allow you to experience the Holy. Give yourself sometime this month to immerse yourself in the experience. Maybe that means listening to the songs that take your breath away, maybe it's a walk on the beach during sunset. Perhaps a hike to a mountain during sunrise or experiencing music through dance. Maybe is having a deep conversation with someone or going to a place you consider a sanctuary to pray or meditate.

If you can't think of a specific activity, take some time to go watch the sunset. This Fall season has brought some beautiful sunset skies to our region. Indulge in the natural beauty that surrounds you. Allow yourself to just be, to sit still, and to contemplate nature. Rest in that moment fully.

Come prepared to share your experience with the group.

Questions for Discussion:

- What do you understand by the Holy?
- How have you blessed others? How have you been blessed?
- How do you "give light" to this world?
- Have you ever had an experience of the Holy in an unlikely place or situation?

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Session Plan

This session plan is a suggested guide, not a rigid set of rules. You may adjust this plan as you feel is appropriate in your group.

Gathering & Welcome (~5 min)

Chalice Lighting (~2 min)

Optional Chalice Lighting reading:

Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round about beneath me was the whole hoop of the world. And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy.

-Black Elk

Check-In (20-30 minutes)

As you feel comfortable, take 2-3 minutes to share one thing that is lifting your spirits, and one thing that is weighing you down. This is a time for sharing, but not for discussion.

Business (10 minutes)

Use this time for any new business: Welcoming new members; Scheduling future meetings; Revisiting the Covenant; Answering questions about Wisdom Circle processes; Etc...

Experience with Spiritual Exercise (15-20 minutes)

Silent Reflection (~2 minutes)

Invite participants to share any insights gained from the spiritual exercise. Participants can take turns sharing what their experience with the exercise was. Insight can also come in the form of resistance to a particular spiritual exercise or type of spiritual exercise. This is also a time for sharing but not for discussion. (15-18 minutes)

Discussion (40 minutes)

Introduce Topic and invite participants to begin by responding to the following questions.

- What do you understand by the Holy?
- How have you blessed others? How have you been blessed?
- How do you “give light” to this world?
- Have you ever had an experience of the Holy in an unlikely place or situation?

First Responses (Share in the order you feel moved)

Cross-Conversation (Ask questions that invite deeper reflection; Speak from personal experience, and use "I statements"; Avoid explaining or judging)

Gratitude (5-10 minutes)

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

Closing

Optional Chalice Extinguishing reading:

The great sea has set me in motion, set me adrift, moving me like a weed in a river. The sky and the strong wind have moved the spirit inside me till I am carried away trembling with joy.

-Inuit Shaman Uvavnuk (#527 Singing the Living Tradition)