

Wisdom Circle – Service

February 2017

PREPARATION

Words of Wisdom

“No one is useless in this world who lightens the burdens of another.”

~ Charles Dickens

“When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed.”

~ Maya Angelou

“A kind gesture can reach a wound that only compassion can heal.”

~ Steve Maraboli

“Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”

~ Martin Luther King Jr.

“No one has ever become poor by giving.”

~ Anne Frank

“The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But...the good Samaritan reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'”

~ Martin Luther King Jr.

“Service is the rent we pay for being. It is the very purpose of life, and not something you do in your spare time.”

~ Marian Wright Edelman

Reading by Tania Márquez

I think I have struggled to write this month's reflection because the theme of service does not seem to be a topic to talk about. Ideally, I would have invited you to serve others in some way and then we would have seated together to share a meal and talk about what new insights and reflections we all have about service. See, the action would have come before the reflection. Perhaps this is a thought we can return to in the future to actually make it happen.

To be of service was a highly regarded character trait in my culture and, especially, in my family. At a young age, I learned that everyone's purpose in life was to be of service to others, regardless of our occupation. Service, however, wasn't something to be planned or scheduled, and it was not only about giving or helping to the less fortunate. On the contrary, it was about placing ourselves in a position to serve others, to recognize and affirm our interconnectedness and humanity through our actions. There was no room for feelings of superiority or paternalistic behavior in true service. I always understood service as an embodied quality that could be quickly recognized in those who possessed it.

Where does the need to serve others comes from? Is it a sense of duty? Is it empathy? Is it a spiritual practice?

Every Sunday we repeat aloud that we aspire to make service our form of prayer. I interpret that ritual as renewing our commitment to work and act to alleviate the suffering of others or to tend to the needs of others. But in order to alleviate their suffering or to tend to their needs, we first need to be able to see them. How do we do that? How can we be aware of when others need us? Sometimes we do see the need but we just don't know how to respond or don't feel like we have the skills to respond.

For years I felt that I just didn't know how to be of service because I often hesitated to do the things that others were doing. I wasn't bold like my siblings who often helped strangers when they were in need. For them, being a first responder to the needs of others seemed to be second nature. So when I compared myself to others, I never quite made the mark (my own self-imposed mark of course).

It took me a long time to figure out that I could serve people in other ways, but to still feel like I was putting the gifts I have to serve others. But when we come together as a community, we can better see how each one of us has gifts that can help us make this world a better place for all.

Service, however, is not the final destination. We can't never stop serving because in a world that needs so much, the work is never done. Our job then is to use our gifts to serve others, not just because they need it, but because we can; to serve others not because it makes us feel good or because it will enhance our curriculum vitae, but because we truly understand that our well-being is wound up to the well-being of all. Through service we can make our connections visible and our actions can then truly become prayers that heal, help, and transform the world.

Spiritual Exercise –

Our transformation theme this month is service. So I'd like to encourage you to be of service to others this month. Find an opportunity to do something different than the work you usually do. Ideally, find an opportunity to volunteer in a service related task that are more likely to slightly stretch you: serving meals, sorting food or clothing, moving items, cleaning, etc. The idea is to place yourself in a position of help and not of leadership and then to reflect on your experience.

If you want to try this for the entire (and beyond), begin your day with this mantra "How can I be of service today?" and be open to the opportunities that will arise throughout the day. Share your experience with the group.

Questions for Discussion:

- What do you understand for service? Has that change over time?
- Think about a time where you benefited from someone else's service in a meaningful or memorable way.
- Are there services you receive from others that you often take for granted?
- Where does the need to serve others come from? Is it a sense of duty? Is it empathy? Is it a spiritual practice?
- How can we better live into our aspiration to make service our prayer?

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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:

*“May Love be the spirit of this church,
May the quest for truth be its sacrament,
And service be its prayer.
To dwell together in peace,
To seek knowledge in freedom,
And to help one another in fellowship
This is our aspiration.”*

-Maria Mitchell (Singing the Living Tradition #537)

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 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 for service? Has that understanding changed over time?

- Think about a time where you benefited from someone else’s service in a meaningful or memorable way.
- Are there services you receive from others that you often take for granted?
- Where does the need to serve others comes from? Is it a sense of duty? Is it empathy? Is it a spiritual practice?
- How can we better live into our aspiration to make service our prayer?

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 Hymn:

#402 *From You I Receive (Singing the Journey)*

“From you I receive, to you I give. Together we share and from this we live”

The image shows a musical score for hymn #402, "From You I Receive". The score is written in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature and a tempo marking of quarter note = 120. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The lyrics are: "From you I re-ceive, to you I give, to- geth- er we share, and from this we live." The score includes two staves of music with lyrics underneath. Chord symbols are placed above the notes: F, Bb, C, F, Dm, Gm, C7, and F. The text "Words & music: Joseph and Nathan Segal, © 1969 Nathan Segal" is at the bottom left, and "RABBI Irregular" is at the bottom right.