

Wisdom Circle – Growth

March 2017

PREPARATION

Words of Wisdom

“We do not grow absolutely, chronologically. We grow sometimes in one dimension, and not in another; unevenly. We grow partially. We are relative. We are mature in one realm, childish in another. The past, present, and future mingle and pull us backward, forward, or fix us in the present. We are made up of layers, cells, constellations.”

~ Anaïs Nin

“Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell.”

~ Edward Abbey

“Mistakes are the growing pains of wisdom.”

~ William Jordan

“For a seed to achieve its greatest expression, it must come completely undone. The shell cracks, its insides come out and everything changes. To someone who doesn't understand growth, it would look like complete destruction.”

~ Cynthia Ocelli

“Keep growing quietly and seriously throughout your whole development; you cannot disturb it more rudely than by looking outward and expecting from outside replies to questions that only your inmost feeling in your most hushed hour can perhaps answer.”

~ Rainer Maria Rilke

“Some periods of our growth are so confusing that we don't even recognize that growth is happening. We may feel hostile or angry or weepy and hysterical, or we may feel depressed. It would never occur to us, unless we stumbled on a book or a person who explained to us, that we were in fact in the process of change, of actually becoming larger, spiritually, than we were before. Whenever we grow, we tend to feel it, as a young seed must feel the weight and inertia of the earth as it seeks to break out of its shell on its way to becoming a plant. Often the feeling is anything but pleasant. But what is most unpleasant is the not knowing what is happening. Those long periods when something inside ourselves seems to be waiting, holding its breath, unsure about what the next step should be, eventually become the periods we wait for, for it is in those periods that we realize that we are being prepared for the next phase of our life and that, in all probability, a new level of the personality is about to be revealed.”

~ Alice Walker

Reading by Tania Márquez

Growth is the law of life. Our bodies grow because we are alive; it just happens and we don't give it much thought until we begin noticing changes in our body. It is a law of nature. That's why we call the process of aging "growing old".

Then we learn, we go to school, immerse ourselves in books or learn from the live books that people are and we grow. We learn to see life in a different way and some of our behaviors are altered because of our new understanding. Sometimes, though, it seems like "knowledge" can also hinder our growth, especially when the newly acquired knowledge is used to justify lack of action, involvement, or growth. It seems to me that sometimes we resort to this knowledge to avoid moving into the uncomfortable growing that comes with our life experiences as emotional beings.

And then there's the growth that comes with the life experiences we have. Most of the experiences that help us grow tend to be, at least, uncomfortable and, in the worst case, painful. Life stretches us in ways we couldn't have imagined and as we grapple with the situation, as we look for ways to cope and make meaning, we grow. These experiences of growth usually happen as we relate to others. In fact, people often reflect back to us our growing edges, just like we reflect theirs back to them.

I really like the metaphor of the lobster as a way to understand growth. Rabbi and Psychiatrist Dr. Abraham Twerski explains it in the video link below. In short, the lobster's hard shell, he says, doesn't grow, so as the lobster grows, it creates a new shell and gets rid of the old one. The motivation to grow a new shell, he explains, is the discomfort that the old shell is causing the lobster. What shells did you find yourself of need to shed because it no longer fit you?

You can watch his video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcUAIpZrwog>

Note: I am not suggesting that we should justify pain and suffering as a means to a more illuminated way of being. Historically, oppressors have used this argument to justify injustice. When it comes to the communities we have created, perhaps our growth can only be measured by the growth of the wellbeing of all and not just of the few.

Spiritual Exercise –

Growing edges are the areas in our life where we could use improvement. We are aware of some of them, but not of others. This month, I want to invite you to reflect about the parts of you that could use some improvement; the areas of growth you know and have been working on for a while or the ones that you just recently became aware of and don't know where to begin.

Ask yourself these questions as part of your reflection:

What are my growing edges?

Why is it important for me to work on them? What are some of the challenges I face?

What kind of help, if any, do I need?

How do others reflect back to me my growing edges?

Is this exercises bringing up specific questions for you? What are they?

Questions for Discussion:

- What is your understanding of growth?
- How have you experienced growth?
- As a community, how do we nurture spiritual growth?
- As a community, what are our growing edges?
- When should we be cautious of growth?

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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:

“We speak spring because spring sings in us

We gather to nurture our faith in our own growing

Our own courage to push through

Our own blossoming in beauty

Our own small part in the spring of this world.”

-Evin Carvill Ziemer

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 is your understanding of growth?
- How have you experienced growth?
- As a community, how do we nurture spiritual growth?
- As a community, what are our growing edges?

- When should we be cautious of growth?

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:

"May we live up to a mission that calls us

to care for each other, to help each other,

May we grow in compassion, love, and understanding.

And may we carry those gifts with us everywhere.