

Wisdom Circle – Our Ancestral Heritage

October 2017

PREPARATION

Chalice Lighting

Optional Chalice Lighting: (You may read or sing)

“We are lovers of life and the builders of nations
we are seekers of truth and keepers of faith
makers of peace and the wisdom of ages

We are our grandmother’s prayers
and we are our grandfather’s dreamings
we are the breath of our ancestors

we are the spirit of God

For each child that's born
a morning star rises and sings
to the universe who we are.”

- Ysaye M. Barnwell

Check-In

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 (approx. 10 min)

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

If this is your first meeting of the year, please take some time to review the covenant. Covenants are more than a set of rules, they are at the center of our theology and how we agree to be with each other matters.

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.

1. Chose two or three people you claim as your ancestors (cultural or personal), and write about how you have been influenced by them. What wisdom did you inherit? What are some of the home remedies, personal traits, values that your ancestors held and made sure to pass on to their descendants? What part of their life calls to you? Which of their values have you chosen to embrace?

If you feel called to, take a few minutes after you complete this exercise to express your gratitude for the gifts you have received from them.

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 or identifying who you mean when/if you use the word “we”).

Words of Wisdom

“People say you're born innocent, but it's not true. You inherit all kinds of things that you can do nothing about. You inherit your identity, your history, like a birthmark that you can't wash off. ... We are born with our heads turned back, but my mother says we have to face into the future now. You have to earn your own innocence, she says. You have to grow up and become innocent.” -Hugo Hamilton

“I am everyone who played a role in creating me...my ancestors.” Jeffrey G. Duarte

“I realized that my mother had not taught us the tribal language because she knew her children would not be strong enough to carry the responsibility of being the last fluent speakers. She protected us from that spiritual burden. She protected us from that loneliness.” ~ Sherman Alexie

“We're all ghosts. We all carry, inside us, people who came before us.”

~ Liam Callanan

“The songs of our ancestors are also the songs of our children”

~ Philip Carr-Gomm

“When we respect our blood ancestors and our spiritual ancestors, we feel rooted.” ~ Thich Nhat Hanh

Reading by Tania Márquez

Excerpt from the sermon “The Dreams of Our Ancestors”

When I say that we are the dreams of our ancestors, I am not only referring to the ancestors we can trace back in our lineage. I am also referring to those who paved the way for us.

American Novelist and scholar Ralph Ellison once wrote, “Some people are your relatives but others are your ancestors, and you choose the ones you want to have as ancestors. You create yourself out of those values.”

I never knew Olympia Brown who is recognized as the first American ordained female minister, but I claim her as my Faith ancestor. She felt a strong call to ministry and fought the systems that were preventing women from becoming ministers. She also knew she was opening doors to those who were coming after her. She knew she was fighting for a bigger dream. But as often happens when we dream, the specifics of how that dream will become a reality escape us. Olympia Brown challenged the misconceptions of her time about women’s right to preach. She wanted to make the pulpit available to women. But she couldn’t imagine that she was paving the way to ministry for many lesbian, queer, black, Latinx, Asian, and Native-American women.

Paul Tsongas, late senator from Massachusetts said “We are a continuum. Just as we reach back to our ancestors for our fundamental values, so we, as guardians of that legacy, must reach ahead to our children and their children. And we do so with a sense of sacredness in that reaching.”

Understanding our lives as a continuum, seeing our lives in relationship to those who came before us and those who are coming after us, is a reason for hope. Some of us often feel exhausted and question whether we have done enough or whether our work will ever make a difference. As we go through life planting seeds, we must remember that flowers bloom at their own time, and their time may or may not be in our time. So, we must trust that they will. We must trust that others will follow even when we can’t yet see their silhouettes on the horizon. We must continue weaving our dreams into the fabric of our human history. We must surrender our desire to know and see and trust

that when our dreams escape from our lifetime, they will become the reality of those that come after us.

Honor the dreams of your ancestors by holding the vision, the dreams, your dreams, that will sustain those yet to come. You are already someone's ancestor. Your way of being in the world touches lives and sends a ripple effect that will never be fully known to you.

Questions for Discussion

1. Who are the ancestors you claim?
2. How did someone's dream pave the way for you?
3. Think about the work you do; whose vision are you holding?
4. How do you honor your ancestors?
5. What ancestral wisdom was passed down to you?

Silence: Take two minutes of silence to reflect on the group's session.

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

Extinguishing of the Chalice:

We extinguish this chalice flame,
daring to carry forward the vision of this free faith,
that freedom, reason and justice
will one day prevail in this nation and across the earth.

-Maureen Killoran