

The Sources of Our Faith World Religions

Chalice Lighting

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

Shared Readings:

The living tradition we share draws from many sources:

- 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;
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion and the transforming power of love;
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- Humanist teaching which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.
- Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature

John Buehrens speaks of a vast "Cathedral of the World" where the light of one Truth shines through uncountable windows, and where we, by the light from our window, can behold only part of the cathedral. While it would be impossible in one lifetime to explore the whole of this great cathedral, by visiting some of the places that are illuminated by other windows we can see more of the light and know more of the truth. This is the richness we derive from our interest in the world's religions.

Activity with stained glass window

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening, between sharing read one round of quotes

Group Business

Closing Words and Song "Go Now in Peace"

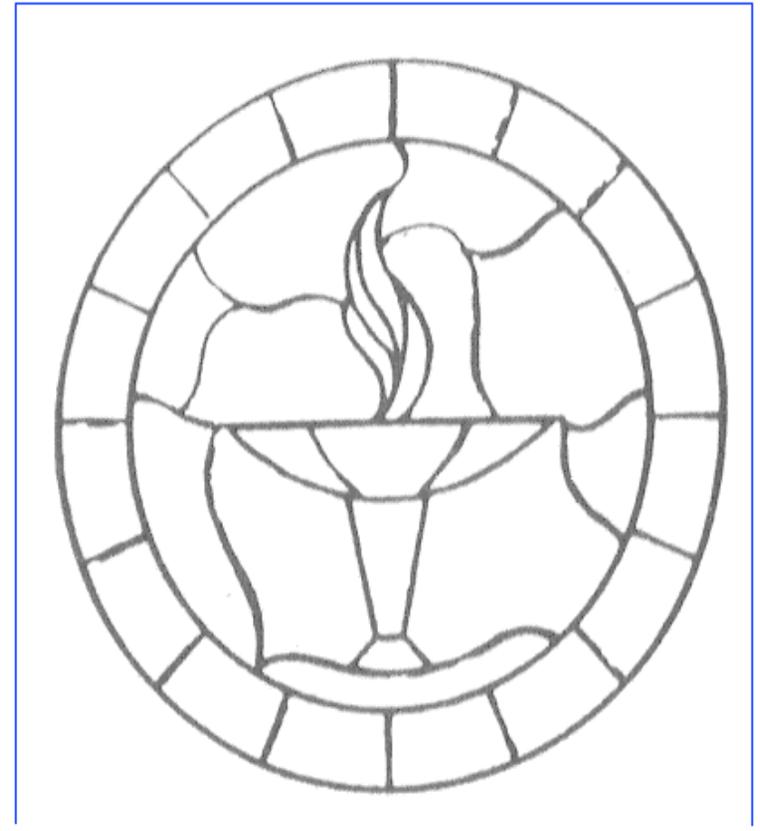
The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group.
- to honor the group by letting the leader know if I will be absent and to come to the group one last time and say goodbye if I need to quit.
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others.
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and not tell other people's stories.
- to listen to what others share with an open heart, and to share deeply in my turn.

Covenant Groups

World Religions



Leader's Notes for World Religions

***Cut quotes and put in a basket. They will be used during the deep sharing.

Sharing of Joys and Concerns: Remind your group that the Sharing of Joys and Concerns is an opportunity for each person to EITHER contribute a one-word description of how they are feeling at the moment, OR to share something that presses on them, good or bad, which they want the group to know. If someone is absent, you can share the reason for their absence in the group (if you have it).

Silence: Give your group the gift of three minutes of silence.

Shared Readings: Remind your group that 6 of the themes this year will come from this document they see as a reading, "The Sources of our Living Tradition". Go around your group, letting each person in turn read a sentence of the document. Continue around the circle for the reading by John Buehrens.

Activity: In the stained glass on the front of the bulletin, draw pictures or write words naming gifts we have received from another religion. For instance I might draw myself meditating...or write the word "introspection"...or draw a person being still...or write compassion of Thich Nat Hahn. Give them time to ponder this and write a few things.

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening: Note that deep sharing may come from homework, quotes, and/or bulletin drawing. Pass basket around circle once, with everyone reading a quote, before each person does deep sharing. When everyone has shared, ask for second thoughts as time allows. In a second "round" everyone who wishes to add second thoughts or thoughts sparked by what was shared may do so. It is not appropriate to ask questions about what someone else shared, only to reflect on what the sharing sparked in oneself. Discussion, if time.

Group Business: Pass out homework for next time

Closing words: Invite people to hold hands around the chalice and say one or two words about an insight they have had this evening.

Sing: Go Now in Peace

Each interprets in his own way the music of heaven. Chinese proverb

The ways of God are as the number of the souls of the sons of man. Persian Proverb

Search yourself and you will find God. Kurdish proverb

If you do not find God in your own soul, the world is meaningless to you. Kabir

I will be truthful. I will suffer no injustice. I will be free from fear. I will not use force. I will be of good will to all men. Mahatma Gandhi

Waking up this morning, I smile. Twenty-four brand new hours are before me. I vow to live fully in each moment and to look at all beings with eyes of compassion. Thich Nhat Hanh

Each of the great religions has a distinctive note, to be likened to the strings of a harp. Jacob Trapp

The supreme aim of Oriental mythology, consequently, is not to establish as substantial any of its divinities or associated rites...prayers and chants, images, temples, gods, sages, definitions, and cosmologies are but ferries to a shore of experience beyond the categories of thought, to be abandoned on arrival. Joseph Campbell

God speaks to us in three places: in scripture, in our deepest selves and in the voice of the stranger. Thomas Merton

If one of the wisdom traditions claims us, we begin by listening to it. Not uncritically, for new occasions teach new duties and everything finite is flawed in some respects. Still we listen to it expectantly, knowing that it houses more truth than can be encompassed in a single lifetime. Huston Smith

We have all been summoned to become Cosmic Dancers who do not rest heavily on a single spot but lightly turn and leap from one position to another. Nietzsche

Look at every path closely and deliberately. Try it as many times as you think necessary. Then ask yourself, and yourself alone, one question...Does this path have a heart? If it does, the path is good; if it doesn't, it is of no use. Carlos Castenada

In Zen, once you've pinned something down and defined it, you've killed it.
Sean Murphy

Today, like every other day, we wake up empty
and frightened. Don't open the door to the study
and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.
Let the beauty of what we love be what we do.
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.
Rumi

Religions may not come up with all the same answers, but they do ask many of the same questions. Questions about the nature of the universe. Questions about the nature of good and evil. Questions about the nature of humanity. Questions about how we should and must live our lives. As religious liberals, we acknowledge and respect all who grapple honestly with those questions. Mark Hayes

Every man prays in his own language,
And there is no language that God does not understand.
Duke Ellington

Different people have different roads to follow, and we must go with others on the best road for them, not the one upon which we are most comfortable. Our task is to encourage people in the development of their own values, not in accepting ours. We are loving when we perceive differences and encourage others on their own unique ways.
Morton Kelsey, *Companions on the Inner Way*

For in Zen, intellectual learning is nothing but the studying of the menu, while actual practice is the eating of the meal.
Philip Kapleau

The way that can be spoken of
Is not the constant way;
The name that can be named
Is not the constant name. Lao-tzu

God is a great underground river. There are many wells into this river:
Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Sufism, the Goddess, native traditions, Christianity.
To connect with the great river, we all need a path, but when you get down there,
there's only one river.
Matthew Fox

Perhaps the only philosophy or theology that can help us cross the stream is one
that acknowledges that when you have learned it all and lived it thoroughly, then
you had better get ready to have it all collapse as you discover the highest
wisdom is that you know nothing.
Bernadette Roberts, The Experience of No-Self

Believe nothing because a so-called wise man said it.
Believe nothing because a belief is generally held.
Believe nothing because it is written in ancient books.
Believe nothing because it is said to be of divine origin.
Believe nothing because someone else believes it.
Believe only what you yourself judge to be true.
Buddha

Every act done in the sunlight of awareness becomes sacred. Thich Nhat Hanh

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there. Rumi

When you seek it, you cannot find it. Zen Saying

He who knows does not speak;
He who speaks does not know.
Lao Tzu

"When I point to the moon, don't stare at my finger." This small piece of advice is attributed to the Buddha. He is a great teacher, but "even Buddhas only point the way." Cling to the finger and you'll never see the moon. Words, any words, even the words of Scripture, are fingers that point to something else. As long as we cling to words we will never have real vision. William Johnston

Homework - World Religions

Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life

In the West you observe, watch, and act.	...	In the East we contemplate and commune
In the West you wrest from nature her secrets, you conquer her...and sometimes fail to realize her sacredness.	...	In the East nature is our eternal sanctuary... and the sacredness of God's creation is only next to the sacredness of God himself.
In the West you love equality, you respect man, you seek justice.	...	In the East love is the fulfillment of the law, we behold God in humanity.
In the West you establish the moral law, you insist upon propriety of conduct...	...	In the East we aspire after absolute self-conquest, and the holiness which makes God its model.
In the West you work incessantly, and your work is your worship.	...	In the East we meditate and worship for long hours, and worship is our work.

Perhaps one day...the Westerner and the Easterner will combine to support each other's strength and supply each other's deficiencies. And then that blessed synthesis of human nature shall be established which all prophets have foretold, and all the devout souls have sighed for. Protap Chunder Mosoomdar

- In Buddhism it is the wisdom of self-discipline: quenching the fire of desire in the cool waters of meditation.
- In Hinduism it is the note of spirit: a universe throbbing with divine energy and meaning.
- In Confucianism it is reciprocity: mutual consideration is the basis of society.
- In Taoism it is to conquer by inaction: be lowly and serviceable like a brook; become rich by sharing.
- In Islam it is the note of submission: "Our God and your God is one, to whom we are self-surrendered."
- So each religious tradition has its own particular gifts for the seeker and for the world. Unknown

Huston Smith, scholar of world religions, notes that we humans have three alternative approaches when confronted with the plurality of religions in today's world. The first position is that one religion is better than any other. The second approach to comparative religions says, oh well, they are basically all alike, all the same. One can find parallels among various faiths...golden rule, virtues of humility, charity and truth. A third way of looking at world religions likens them to a "stained glass window, whose sections divide the light of the sun into different colors."

Some questions to ponder:

1. What wisdom do you draw from the East...from the West?
2. What experiences have you had with this source - the plurality of religions?
3. Which one resonates with you and feel the most comfortable with...what feeds you?
4. Which seems the most distant?
5. How do you view our "stained glass window"- the mural of symbols in the front of our church?