

Leaders Guide: Guilt

As people come in, ask them to put their stones around the chalice. You might want to have some extras in case of forgetfulness. Also, bring some extra pens, and some sort of a container, like a box or a grocery bag, to receive the stones.

Open in the usual way with chalice lighting, sharing of joys and concerns and silence.

Do your first round of deep sharing.

Instead of a second round of sharing, ask people to use the bottom part of their bulletins to think and write about one guilt they would like to let go of. Tell people that they will have about five minutes to think and write, and that they will only share what they want to share. Look around as the five minutes is about up, give a 30 second warning, but be lenient if people seem to need more time.

Invite your group to participate in a ritual of letting go of guilt. You might remind them that modern brain studies tell us that the part of the brain that participates in ritual is a part which does not know the difference between play and reality, so that when we do something like pick up a rock which represents a guilt and throw it away, at least part of our brain really thinks that something has happened, and there's real power in this.

Set your container at some distance from the group, so that people will have to get up and walk across the room to dispose of their rock.

The ritual: As each person feels moved, they will pick up one of the rocks, representing some guilt they would like to let go of. They can share briefly with the group the guilt they are giving up, or simply how it feels to be giving up the unnamed guilt, or why they chose the rock they did, or they may choose to simply sit and hold the rock in the supportive silence of the group. When they are ready, they get up, walk to the container, and drop or place the rock, and return to the group.

Do any group business. Call the group's attention to homework for the next session.

Closing: Gather your group in a circle, invite each person to share in one word how they are feeling, and share the closing words.

Closing Words

I can feel guilty about the past, apprehensive about the future, but only in the present can I act. The ability to be in the present moment is a major component of mental wellness." -Abraham Maslow

Sing: Go Now in Peace

Homework: Guilt

BRING: A (clean) stone to this meeting. (it will represent the weight of guilt). Any practical size or type is fine. You won't get it back, so don't bring anything meaningful.

1. Make a list (for your eyes only) of 10-20 things that you feel guilty about, and set it aside. Wait a couple of days, and then, without looking at the first list, make another list. Then compare the lists. Check off the items on the second list that were also on the first. Add to the second list any items on the first list that you think should make the "final cut".
2. Ask yourself: Why do you feel guilty about these items? Is it the voice of your own values speaking, or another voice? Are there things you think you should feel guilty about that you don't? What's going on, there?
3. Ask yourself: Who made me feel guilty as a child? How did they do this? What were their motives? Do I still feel guilty about these things? (Should I still feel guilty for these things?)
4. Ask yourself: What do I do to make others feel guilty? What are my motives? Do I succeed in getting what I want with this tactic? Is this ok with me?
5. Are there items on your list about which you feel motivated to make some changes? What motivations besides guilt do you have?
6. Does Guilt play any positive role in your life?

"It is true that guilt feelings can tyrannize us and prevent our self-fulfillment. But the forces that tyrannize us are also the ones that humanize us, and feelings of guilt, if we deal well with them, can be pointers to a fuller life. It is much like physical pain, which is necessary as a warning and a motivation. When you put your hand on a hot stove, pain motivates you to move it...before too much damage is done. Guilt works the same way. Woe unto the one who never feels guilt; who has no care for what is hurting or wrong or unjust and thus never does anything to change" -from a sermon by Christine Robinson