

Silence

Chalice Lighting

Amid all the noise in our lives,
we take this moment to sit in silence—
to give thanks for another day;
to give thanks for all those in our lives who have
brought us warmth and love;
to give thanks for the gift of life. —Tim Haley

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

Shared Readings:

Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub;
It is the center hole that makes it useful.
Shape clay into a vessel;
It is the space within that makes it useful.
Tao Te Ching

Not merely an absence of noise, Real Silence begins
when a reasonable being withdraws from the noise in
order to find peace and order in his inner sanctuary.
Peter Minard

Perhaps the most important thing we bring to another
person is the silence in us. Not the sort of silence that is
filled with unspoken criticism or hard withdrawal. The sort
of silence that is a place of refuge, of rest, of acceptance
of someone as they are. We are all hungry for this other
silence. It is hard to find. In its presence we can
remember something beyond the moment, a strength on
which to build a life. Silence is a place of great power and
healing.

Rachel Remen

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round I Briefly describe how you feel during the few
minutes of silence observed in Covenant Groups,
church services, or other occasions.

Round II Using insights you gained from doing the
homework, talk about the role of silence in your past
and present life. Are you satisfied with the silent times
you have? What, if anything, would you change? What
obstacles are there to making any changes?

Round III In this session, did you discover anything new
about your relationship with silence? What has been
most meaningful to you?

Silent Meditation

Let us begin a time of extended meditation with these words:
If waters are placid, the moon will be mirrored perfectly. If
we still ourselves, we can mirror the divine perfectly. But if
we engage solely in the frenetic activities of our daily
involvements, if we seek to impose our own schemes on
the natural order, and if we allow ourselves to become
absorbed in self-centered views, the surface of our waters
becomes turbulent. Then we cannot be receptive to Tao.

There is no effort that we can make to still ourselves. True
stillness comes naturally from moments of solitude where
we allow our minds to settle. Just as water seeks its own
level, the mind will gravitate toward the holy. Muddy water
will become clear if allowed to stand undisturbed, and so
too will the mind become clear if it is allowed to be still.
--Deng Ming-Dao, from *365 Tao: Daily Meditations*

Song "Go Now in Peace"

Group Business

Pass out homework for the next session.

Silence

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.
- to avoid cross talk, giving feedback or trying to fix anyone
- 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.

Leader's Notes for *Silence*

This session focuses on silence and closes with an extended time of silent meditation.

Chalice Lighting: (2 min)

Ask someone to read the chalice lighting reading found in the bulletin

Sharing of Joys and Concerns: (10 min)

Ask group members to tell in one or two sentences...How you are today? Share information about absent members.

Silence: (2 min)

Give your group the gift of two minutes of silence.

Shared Readings: (3 min)

Go around your group, letting each person in turn read from Shared Readings found in the bulletin until all readings are finished.

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening: Do your rounds of deep sharing/deep listening. Pay close attention to the time allotted each person to ensure all get to share at least once.

Round I (10 min)

In one sentence, describe how you feel during the few minutes of silence observed in Covenant Groups, church services, or other occasions.

Round II (35 min)

Using insights you gained from doing the homework, talk about the role of silence in your past and present life. Are you satisfied with the silent times you have? What, if anything, would you change? What obstacles are there to making any changes?

Round III (15 min)

In this session, did you discover anything about your relationship with silence? What has been most meaningful to you?

Silent Meditation: (10 minutes)

In place of the closing words, this session will end with a silent meditation.

- Begin by asking someone to read the words in the bulletin.
- Then lead the group through this exercise. At each ellipsis (. . .) pause for several breaths.

"There is rarely enough silence in our services.

Perhaps we are too busy for silence.

Perhaps we are afraid of what we might discover.

Today we will give silence its place.

Today our meditation will include several minutes of silence, a luxury in this far from silent world.

Let us pause to listen to the unheard world. . . .

Relax into a comfortable position

Breath in and out very slowly

Quiet yourself and listen to the rhythm of your breath, your heart

Listen to the silence

*You will think something
let it pass into you and through you*

*You will feel something
let it pass into you and through you*

Spend some time in the unheard world

(Several minutes of silence)

We begin to return now to the world we usually hear

As you do, try to bring something of that unheard world with you

And remember to give yourself permission to return to the unheard world. Amen”

--Stephen W. Dick Source: 1997 UUMA Worship Material Collection

Song: (1 min)

Go Now in Peace

Group Business: (2 min)

Pass out Q and Q (homework) for next time.

Silence

Those who nurture a relationship with silence find that it enriches their lives. During meaningful times of silence we can find peace, healing, growth, and new insights into life. Many of us, however, find that we have little time for silence, and when we do find ourselves in a period of quiet, we do not know how to make use of it.

Mellon Kennedy writes, "We live in a time and a culture where silence is often viewed as a void to be filled, particularly in groups. 'Silence is something like an endangered species,' remarks therapist, Gunilla Norris. In our quest for efficiency, silence seems like a waste of the precious resource of time. We quickly become uncomfortable and jump to 'fix the problem' with words. Other times and other cultures have viewed silence differently. The mystical traditions of the world teach us that silence is to be cultivated. They teach us that our spiritual flowering is nurtured by spontaneous and intentional moments of silence, even in groups. Rather than an absence, silence is seen as full and rich. Silence can invite us to slow down, relax and go deeper. Perhaps that's actually why it can make us so uncomfortable."

Not only are times of silence rare in our lives, but even when they occur, it is hard for some of us to still our minds and receive the gifts of silence. In his book *Nurturing Silence in a Noisy Heart*, Wayne Oates says, "Silence is not native to my world. Silence more than likely, is a stranger to your world too. If you and I are ever going to have silence in our noisy hearts, we are going to have to grow it . . . You can nurture silence in your noisy heart if you value it, cherish it, and are eager to nourish it." Learning to still our minds is not an easy task. Thomas Merton observes in *No Man Is An Island*, "There are times, then, when in order to keep ourselves in existence at all we simply have to sit back for a while and do nothing. And for a man who has let himself be drawn completely out of himself by his activity, nothing is more difficult than to sit still and rest, doing nothing at all. The very act of resting is the hardest and most courageous act he can perform: and often it is quite beyond his power."

To prepare for the next Covenant Group meeting, you will explore your relationship with silence.

- To begin with, give yourself an interlude of silence to see how it affects you. Read the following words and then give yourself several minutes to sit quietly. *"Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead, find the room for hope to enter, find the frame where we are freed; clear the chaos and the clutter, clear the eyes, so we can see all the things that really matter, be at peace, and simply be."* Shirley Erena Murray
Was the silence restful or uncomfortable? Did you experience serenity or did the details of everyday life fill your mind?
- Now read these thoughts on silence and reflect on how silence influences your life.

"There is no need to go to India or anywhere else to find peace. You will find that deep place of silence right in your room, your garden or even your bathtub." Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

In quietness and confidence shall be my strength. Isaiah 30:15

Where shall the world be found, where the word resound? Not here, there is not enough silence. TS Eliot

My need to be alone is balanced against my fear of what will happen when suddenly I enter the huge empty silence if I cannot find support there. May Sarton, Journal Of A Solitude

The mystery does not get clearer by repeating the questions. Nor is it bought with going to amazing places. Until you've kept your eyes and your wanting still for fifty years, you don't begin to cross over from confusion. Rumi, The Mystery

The mystical way is the inner way. Man tries to find in his inner life a connection with the "reality of the unseen," "the source of being," "the point of silence." There he discovers that what is most personal is most universal. Carl Rogers, On Becoming a Person

Nothing in all creation is so like God as stillness. Meister Eckhart

"Empty yourself of everything. Let the mind rest at peace. The ten thousand things rise and fall while the Self watches their return. They grow and flourish and then return to the source. Returning to the source is stillness, which is the Way of nature." Lao Tsu

Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations.

Henry David Thoreau, Walden

Finally, contemplate your responses to these questions.

1. Think of a time when a period of silence was meaningful to you. Describe how it affected you.
2. When do you have times of silence in your daily life? Do you seek these times, or do you try to fill them with thoughts and activities?
3. How comfortable are you with silence? Does your mind relax into the stillness, or do you find it difficult to quiet your thoughts? Have you discovered ways to quiet your mind so that you can experience the silence?
4. For some people, periods of silence enrich their lives. For others, silent time is wasted time that could be better spent accomplishing something. How much silence do you need in your life?
5. For some, it is necessary to be alone and in a quiet place to be able to experience silence. How does this relate to your experiences with silence? How have you created moments of silence during your everyday busyness?
6. If silence is valuable to your growth and well-being, how can you build more quiet time into your life and make the time you have more meaningful?