



SMALL GROUP MINISTRIES

Openness

By being receptive, we can avail ourselves of the spiritual wealth available to us. By being open, we can receive things beyond what we ourselves might imagine.

- *Deng Ming-Dao in Everyday Tao*

This is the heart of our humanity—being here, open and giving to others. There is so much that is lost and never retrieved when we close off to others.

- *Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, Spiritual Literacy*

Opening and Chalice Lighting (3 min.)

Spirit of life, be present with us.

Join us today as we gather in a wider search for truth and purpose.

In this quest, may we greet one another with open hearts and minds;

may we inspire each other to consider new questions and seek deeper meaning;
and may we cultivate wisdom and compassion.

Let all who gather here see a welcome face, hear a kind word,
and find comfort in this community.

- *Kathy A. Huff, 1997 UUMA Worship Materials Collection (adapted)*

Quiet Reflection (2 min.)

Listening is the beginning of understanding... Wisdom is the reward for a lifetime of listening. Let the wise listen and the add to their learning and let the discerning get guidance. - *Proverbs 1:5*

Sharing/Check-In (35 min.)

Take two or three minutes to share how you are spiritually, psychologically, emotionally, and physically. You can speak or you can pass. We want to know how you are in this moment.

Quiet Reflection (1 min.)

Now let's take a few moments to reflect in silence as we hold in our thoughts and in our hearts, the joys, burdens, and sorrows that we have shared tonight, as well as those that still remain too tender to share. Let's enfold each other in the warmth and care of this group, and let each of us accept the love, celebration, and healing offered here.

Topic Readings (3 min.)

Indwelling

If thou couldst empty all thyself of self,

Like to a shell dishabited,

Then might She find thee on the Ocean shelf,

And say — "This is not dead," —

And fill thee with Herself instead.

But thou art all replete with very thou,

And hast such shrewd activity,

That, when He comes, He says — "This is enow

Unto itself — "Twere better let it be:

It is so small and full, there is no room for Me."

- *T.E. Brown, Old John and Other Poems (1893) (adapted)*

A cup is a container for holding something. Whatever it holds has to eventually be emptied out so that something more can be put into it. I have learned that I cannot always expect my life to be full. There has to be some emptying, some pouring out, if I am to make room for the new. The spiritual journey is like that--a constant process of emptying and filling, of giving and receiving, of accepting and letting go.
- *Joyce Rupp*

**Break/ Quiet
Contemplation**
(10 min.)

The old divines talked about the gift of faith. It seems to me that there is an earlier gift, a desire, an openness to receive the light when and if it is offered. This openness is a quality of perception like poetry or divination or the wonderful imagination of a happy child.

- *Morris West, A View from the Ridge*

Doubt is a state of openness and unknowing. It's a willingness to not be in charge, to not know what is going to happen next. The state of doubt allows us to explore things in an open and fresh way.

- *Bernard Glassman and Rick Fields, Instructions to the Cook*

**Sharing/Deep
Listening**
(25 min.)

Speak about this topic in any way that is comfortable to you. If you choose to use the questions, focus on just one or two, as this will allow you to go deeper into the topic.

- What does openness mean to you? Is it openness to new ideas, to opposing opinions, to strangers, to different experiences, to God or the Goddess, to “the light when and if it is offered,” or to something else?
- When do you feel most open to the new or to something beyond yourself? Are there circumstances or environments in which you are more comfortable being open? Do you need to make an effort to remain open?
- Have there been times in your life when you have felt closed or unable to accept certain experiences, ideas, or people? What, if anything, did you do to become more open?
- What is your reaction to today’s readings? Does thinking of yourself as a shell, a cup, a vessel help you remain open to new ideas or greater meanings? Are there other images or techniques that you use to maintain a feeling of openness?

Discussion
(10 min.)

This is a time to supportively respond to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared.

Farewell Ritual
(10 min.)

As far as our love flows; as far as our hope grows; as far as our yearning goes; – we are no farther one from another.

- *L. Annie Foerster (1997 UUMA Worship Materials Collection, from UUA Worship Web)*

Future Topics
(15 min.)

What topics and service projects would you like to explore this year as part of Small Group Ministry?

**Checkout/
Likes & Wishes**
(4 min.)

What did you like about this gathering?

What would you like to see change at future gatherings?

**Closing Reading/
Extinguish Chalice**
(2 min.)

May we go forth from this place thankful for the life that sustains and renews us, and open to the grace that surrounds and surprises us. May we go forth from this place with openness and with thanksgiving!

- *Charles A. Howe, 1997 UUMA Worship Materials Collection*