

Spiritual Exercises

1. *Your Many Sanctuaries.* Over the few weeks leading up to your group meeting, make time to take stock of all the various places, spaces, relationships and experiences that function and have functioned as sanctuary for you. Here's the crucial part: As you remember and notice them, identify a symbol or token that represents them. For instance, collect a picture of the person who has been sanctuary for you. If it's a physical space like your church sanctuary, grab a hymnal. If it's the arboretum where you often take your lunch, then grab one of their brochures. Those who find sanctuary in music might pull out a CD cover. Those who find refuge in the woods might press a fall leaf. Or use your phone as your collection device and spend the month taking pictures of all of your sanctuaries. The point is to gather these symbols of sanctuary in one place and see what that "pile of sacred support" says to you. Noticing the size and diversity of the pile is the point: It's all too easy to go through life feeling vulnerable and alone. Pulling all our sanctuaries into one space helps anchor us in the truth that life itself is more of a sanctuary than we sometimes think. Bring your symbolic tokens and pictures to your group to share.
2. *End Your Day with Sanctuary.* Even if we don't refer to them as such, many of us have "morning rituals of sanctuary." We meditate, take the dog for a long walk, swim or read a devotional. It's all about getting the day off on the right foot. But psychologists tell us that ending the day with the experience of sanctuary can be even more important. This month, find a practice to "end you day with sanctuary." Here's a great article with a bunch of ideas and explanations why it's so key to spiritual centeredness: https://www.bakadesuyo.com/2016/02/evening-ritual/?utm_source=pocket&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=pockethits
Come to your group ready to share your experience of engaging the article and the story of which evening sanctuary practice you picked.

Session Plan

Chalice Lighting

Everyone has a sanctuary, if only in the mind. Even if we can't say what it is, we know of its power. It is a place where we feel grounded, unhurried, and renewed. We go there whenever we can, which never seems often enough. Or that's what we tell ourselves.
~Terry Hershey

Check-in *Share briefly what's been on your mind lately or your highs and lows since we last met. We give each other the gift of listening without asking questions or offering advice to allow people the safety to share what's in their hearts.*

Quotes for Inspiration/Readings

Word Roots: Sanctuary comes from the Latin sanctus meaning "holy", a place set aside for holy worship. In modern times it also refers to "place of refuge or protection" as in a bird sanctuary. The English word "holy" is from Old English hālig, of Germanic origin; related to Dutch and German heilig, or whole. So sanctuary implies a sense of wholeness, integration.

Music was my refuge. I could crawl into the space between the notes and curl my back to loneliness. ~Maya Angelou

I have told you that, no matter how many times you have refused to enter the sanctuary, you have only to knock and the door will be opened to you. I have said to you Ask and it shall be given you, but you refuse to believe in me. You think that someone is counting your

sins, your moments of indecision or recalcitrance, but it is not true. You are the only one counting. I say to you brother, stop counting, stop making excuses, stop pretending that the door is locked. I am here at the threshold. Reach out and take my hand and we will open the door and walk through together. I am the door to love without conditions. When you walk through, you too will be the door. ~Paul Ferinni

"How the Stars Get in Your Bones" ~Jan Richardson
(Full poem found at <http://sanctuaryofwomen.com/blog/>)

[...]See how the sorrow in you slowly makes its own light, how it conjures its own fire... I tell you, this blazing in you — it does not come by choosing the most difficult way, the most daunting; it does not come by the sheer force of your will. It comes from the helpless place in you that, despite all, cannot help but hope, the part of you that does not know how not to keep turning toward this world,

to keep turning your face toward this sky, to keep turning your heart toward this unendurable earth, knowing your heart will break but turning it still. I tell you, this is how the stars get in your bones. This is how the brightness makes a home in you [...]

Questions

1. Who has most shaped your understanding of sanctuary? Which of their "lessons" is most relevant to you today?
2. When did you first discover that "sanctuary" was more than a physical place?
3. When was the last time you restored yourself with the sanctuary of silence, music, or beauty?
4. What if sanctuary isn't a place, but that moment when you realize that you don't have to keep trying to prove yourself? What if sanctuary is the awareness that we've already "arrived"? That we're already enough?

Sitting in Silence *Take a few moments to sit quietly and reflect upon your thoughts.*

Sharing/Deep Listening *Respond with your thoughts and experiences with the topic. We create a safe space by listening deeply and not responding. When sharing, connect with what is true for you. When listening, give the speaker your full attention rather than thinking about what you will share.*

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

Extinguishing the Chalice

The Arabs used to say,
When a stranger appears at your door,
feed him for three days
before asking who he is,
where he's come from...
That way, he'll have strength

enough to answer.
Or, by then you'll be
such good friends
you
don't care...

—Naomi Shihab Nye



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Learn how to join at <http://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com>