

USG SGM ~ Welcoming ~ August 2022

drawn from Soul Matters materials, see the full packet for more of all of these elements

www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com

Chalice Lighting When you recover or discover something that nourishes your soul and brings joy, care enough about yourself to make room for it in your life - Jean Shinoda Bolen

Check-in *Share your highs and lows since we last met focusing on what drains you and what lifts you up. 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.*

Intro: Being a People of Welcoming

Welcoming is most often associated with “bigness.” We speak about “expanding the circle” and making more room. We talk about make ourselves larger through the practice of welcoming in new experiences and new ideas. But there is also the work of becoming smaller. And sometimes that is the even more important work.

For instance, those of us who are white are learning that true welcoming of diversity just can't happen until we shrink and de-center our voices. We also know that expanding community and welcoming newcomers requires right-sizing our needs and putting our preferences second. Welcoming regularly involves the smallness of humility and willingness to listen and learn. The great spiritual teachers remind us that the key to feeling at home in the universe is seeing ourselves as a tiny but precious part of a greater whole, rather than believing that the whole world revolves around us. Downsizing and living simply allows us to welcome in more experience, adventure and peace. And, of course, there's also the work of downsizing our egos enough to admit mistakes, ask for forgiveness and welcome in the work of repair.

Bottom line: There is a deep spiritual connection between the smallness of self and the expansiveness of relationship. It's a curious and wonderful truth: the road to widening the circle often starts with limiting our own size. By becoming “smaller,” we paradoxically are better able to welcome in and receive the gift of “more.”

Spiritual Exercise: Noticing All That You've Welcomed in With Your Life

We rarely take the time to step back and welcome in the full scope and story of our lives. Spiritual teachers from all traditions tell us this practice is essential. A greater sense of our whole story makes it easier to accept the things that didn't go as planned and helps us have gratitude for the gift of having a story at all. We also end up feeling more connected to the whole and holy, realizing we are part of an even greater story. Here are your instructions for welcoming in these gifts of acceptance, gratitude and interconnection:

1. Set aside time to read and watch Jenny Hollowell's wonderful piece called “A History Of Everything, Including You.” Be sure to do it multiple times over 2-3 days. Read it here:

<https://www.youmightfindyourself.com/post/77776946967/a-history-of-everything-including-you>

Here is the Radio Lab podcast episode where she shared it: <https://radiolab.org/episodes/298146-trouble-everything>

2. As you go over it numerous times, let Hollowell's story help you retrieve and welcome in parts of your story that may have been forgotten or not visited for a long time. Take your time with this. Don't rush. Let the memories come up naturally and at their own pace. Consider writing them down as they come.

3. Then take a morning or an evening to pull your story together. You can keep it simple and create a timeline. Or do as Hollowell did and make it into a story - a short story of your life.

4. Come to your group ready to share how it changed your relationship with your story. What new feeling or insight did the exercise give you? Did a greater acceptance come? Did a deeper sense of gratitude emerge? Did your story expand or deepen in a surprising way? Did it become more truthful? More remarkable? Were you, like Hollowell's partner, left feeling “Can you believe it?!” Do you now have a different story to tell?

Quotes for Inspiration/Readings

We are lonesome animals. We spend all our life trying to be less lonesome. --John Steinbeck

Whiteness has been used throughout the histories of America and Europe to praise desirable groups of people and exclude undesirable groups. But “whiteness” is not an ethnic group, a cultural group, or a nationality. In the United States, the Supreme Court legally defined what it meant to be “white” in a pair of decisions in 1922. In other words, whiteness was created by law to let some people in and keep others out...

- Sarah C Stewart, from The Story of Whiteness, <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/story-whiteness>

Belonging: It's not quite love and it's not quite community; it's just this feeling that there are people, an abundance of people, who are in this together. - Marina Keegan

Where you belong is where you choose to constantly choose to show up. - Karina Antonopoulos

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

- Hebrews 13.1, King James Version of the Bible

The more you judge, the more you will feel different and on the outside. - Karina Antonopoulos

Questions

Pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is to figure out what being a part of a people of Welcoming means for you and your daily living.

1. Do you spend more time welcoming in gifts or keeping out threats?
2. Can you remember the last time you truly “widened the circle”?
3. Might widening the circle mean you stepping away from the center?
4. What would it mean to give yourself permission to shut the door for a while? Have you been too welcoming and tolerant of a toxic relationship or soul-killing commitment?
5. Is your house really ready for guests? Sometimes we need to get our house in order before we welcome in the new? What kind of clutter in your life needs cleaned up?

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 and Gratitude *This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared. Consider lifting up one comment or experience for which you are particularly grateful.*

Singing

Would You Harbor Me? (musical video meditation) by Sweet Honey in the Rock

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0XBXJjoXJ4>

Wayfaring Stranger, Rhiannon Giddens <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1Z4PAZX9Bs>

Extinguishing the Chalice: I believe every inch of America is sacred, from sea to shining sea. I believe we make it holy by who we welcome and by how we relate to each other. Call it my Muslim eyes on the American project.

“We made you different nations and tribes that you may come to know one another,” says the Qur’an.

- Eboo Patel