

USG SGM ~ Welcome ~ September 2023

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



Chalice Lighting

I was beginning to learn that home is the space within us and between us where we feel safe—and brave. It is not a physical space as much as it is a field of being.
- [Valarie Kaur](#)

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.*

Introduction:

Notice how often we speak of welcoming as “*widening the circle*” and “*making more room*.” We place a priority on *expanding* our minds by welcoming new experiences and new ideas. Those that help usher in love are “*big-hearted*.” A welcoming person has “*open arms*.” But what about that smaller trail? The one that runs right alongside the wide road? The one that whispers, “Don’t forget the work of becoming *smaller*”? This path must be traversed as well.

For instance, those of us who are white are realizing that to truly welcome diversity, we must quiet and de-center our voices. We long-timers are discovering that welcoming newcomers requires right-sizing our needs and putting our preferences second. Environmentalists have been saying for years that we can’t save the wider world without shrinking our wants. The spiritual masters remind us that feeling at home in the universe demands that we see ourselves as a tiny part of a greater whole, rather than believing that the whole world revolves around us. And isn’t it downsizing and living simply that allows us to welcome in more experience, adventure and peace? Of course, there’s also the work of downsizing our egos enough to admit mistakes. Without that how can we ever welcome in forgiveness and the work of repair? The bottom line is there is a deep spiritual connection between the smallness of self and the expansiveness of relationship. By becoming “smaller,” we paradoxically are better able to welcome in and receive the gift of “more.”

Spiritual Exercises

1) Welcome in the World Nearby

[Alastair Humphreys](#) is an adventurer. He’s cycled around the world, rowed the Atlantic, walked across southern India, just to name a few. But lately he’s gone from big to small, from global and grand to local and familiar. He ordered a 12-mile square map of the area where he lives, and then he spent a year exploring each half-mile square on that map. The result? The world around him came alive again. He tells the story of this local adventure [here](#).

How might you do a bit of the same this month? How might you welcome in the “world nearby” more deeply?! There’s no one right way. Don’t get caught up on exploring a 12-mile square area; the small area around your home is likely plenty. Maybe you look for a road you rarely travel on and walk or bike it so you can take it in slowly. Maybe you go to one of your favorite parks or coffee shops and soak it in until you notice something new or see it in a new light. Or how about spending a couple weeks taking pictures of your neighborhood, capturing it from a new perspective or placing it in a new frame. Or you could go on a treasure hunt to document as many of the unique sounds of your local world. And what about drawing or painting it? Whatever approach you use, the goal is to welcome in the world around you in a new way, and by doing so to enable that nearby world to come alive! Come to your group ready to share what surprised you most and what gift the exercise gave you.

2) Welcome the Unwelcomed with Words

Many spiritual traditions call us to welcome the unwelcomed. Here's how the Buddhist teacher, [Pema Chödrön](#), describes this holy work:

"Accepting something isn't the same as liking it. To accept a feeling that we habitually associate with discomfort doesn't mean we immediately turn around and start enjoying it. It means being okay with it as part of the texture of human life."

The poet Pádraig Ó Tuama tackles this work with words, in his poem, *The Facts of Life*, found here: <https://medium.com/bricology/the-facts-of-life-a-poem-by-p%C3%A1draig-%C3%B3-tuama-ea7111ae2f72>

Notice how Ó Tuama begins with a list of "facts" that are mostly hard and unwanted, but as the poem goes on, he weaves in more and more "facts" that are hopeful and full of peaceful acceptance. Using Ó Tuama's poem as a guide, write your own "Facts of Life poem." Begin it with a list of the hard and unwelcome facts you've encountered and slowly weave in the hopeful facts and insights that make up, as Pema Chodron says, the *full* texture of your life. Be sure to note that Ó Tuama gives you an easy structure to work with by starting each sentence with "That..."

Quotes for Inspiration/Readings

[Hospitality] is the first step toward dismantling the barriers of the world. Hospitality is the way we turn a prejudiced world around one heart at a time. -Joan D Chittister

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,
where he's headed.
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

Ah, Grief, I should not treat you
like a homeless dog
who comes to the back door...
I should trust you.
I should coax you
into the house and give you
your own corner...
-Denise Levertov

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

America needs to reconcile with itself and do the work of apology: To say to indigenous, black, and brown people, we take full ownership for what we did. To say, we owe you everything. To say, we see how harm runs through generations. To say, we own this legacy and will not harm you again. To promise this non-repetition of harm would require nothing less than transitioning the nation as a whole. It would mean retiring the old narrative about who we are—a city on a hill—and embracing a new narrative of an America longing to be born, a nation whose promise lies in the future, a nation we can only realize by doing the labor: reckoning with the past, reconciling with ourselves, restructuring our institutions, and letting those who have been most harmed be the ones to lead us through the transition.
- Valarie Kaur, on our society welcoming in the work of apology

Jung once said he began calling God all those "things which cross my willful path violently and recklessly, all things which upset my subjective views, plans and intentions, and change the course of my life for better or for worse." The divine is that power which disrupts everything. What if our practice were to court a similar holy disruption? To welcome in everything which challenges my perspective on how the world works, which upsets all the plans I have for myself, and turns them on their heads? - Christine Valters Paintner

We belong to every part of our lives and every part of our lives belongs to us. Even the failures. The cruelty. The betrayals. The addictions. The cowardice. Until we embrace and welcome back those scared and tender parts with the kindness and forgiveness we so generously give to others, we will never be whole. We will never be home.
- Rev. Scott Talyer

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 Welcome means for you and your daily living.*

- 1) Who welcomed you in when you needed it most? How has that gift changed you? What would you say to the person if you had the chance?
- 2) What do you know now about welcoming in the present moment that you didn't know when you were younger?
- 3) What would you tell someone younger than yourself about welcoming in grief?
- 4) Do you know what it's like to encounter a welcome that requires you to remove parts of yourself to belong?
- 5) Has welcoming change gotten easier or harder as you've grown older?

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 (or watching a video of someone else singing)

Home - Philip Phillips <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoRkntoHkIE>

Extinguishing the Chalice

He drew a circle that shut me out--
Heretic, a rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in!
-Edwin Markham