

Chalice Circle
Compassionate Living

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Cookeville
Cookeville, TN, March 2020

Chalice Lighting: *Exploring Who We Are*, Melanie Davis

Under the right circumstances, playing with fire is a delight - imagine being gathered round a fire pit as the crackling flames invite us to sing, dance, and roast a marshmallow or two.

Our chalice also invites us to play, although with ideas rather than with marshmallows. The flame encourages us to explore who we are, who our neighbors are, and where we are on our spiritual journeys.

Today, we light this chalice in the spirit of play. Let us trust the light to guide us in this hour and in the days to come, finding joy along the way.

Check-in: Mind, body, spirit. This is a time to share and/or reflect silently on how you are doing emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

Opening Words: *The Legacy of Caring*, Thandeka

Despair is my private pain

 Born from what I have failed to say

 failed to do

 failed to overcome.

Be still my inner self

 let me rise to you

 let me reach down into your pain

 and soothe you.

I turn to you

 to renew my life

I turn to the world

 the streets of the city

 the worn tapestries of

 brokerage firms

 crack dealers

 private estates

 personal things in the bag lady's cart

rage and pain in the faces that turn from me
afraid of their own inner worlds.

This common world I love anew
as the life blood of generations
who refused to surrender their humanity
in an inhumane world
courses through my veins.

From within this world
my despair is transformed to hope
and I begin anew
the legacy of caring.

Readings:

“When I accept my own brokenness, and do not judge myself harshly because of it, I find myself capable of more compassion towards others regardless of whether I am aware of the form of brokenness they’ve experienced.” *-Rosalina Chai*

“Compassion allows us to use our own pain and the pain of others as a vehicle for connection. This is a delicate and profound path. We may be adverse to seeing our own suffering because it tends to ignite a blaze of self-blame and regret. And we may be adverse to seeing suffering in others because we find it unbearable or distasteful, or we find it threatening to our own happiness. All of these possible reactions to the suffering in the world make us want to turn away from life.

In contrast, compassion manifests in us as the offering of kindness rather than withdrawal. Because compassion is a state of mind that is itself open, abundant and inclusive, it allows us to meet pain more directly. With direct seeing, we know that we are not alone in our suffering and that no one need feel alone when in pain. Seeing our oneness is the beginning of compassion, and it allows us to reach beyond aversion and separation.” *-Sharon Salzberg, in The Kindness Handbook*

Unless we are very, very careful, we doom each other by holding onto images of one another based on preconceptions that are in turn based on indifference to what is other than ourselves. This indifference can be, in its extreme, a form of murder and seems to me a rather common phenomenon. We claim autonomy for ourselves and forget that in so doing we can fall into the tyranny of defining other people as we would like them to be. By focusing on what we choose to acknowledge in them, we

impose an insidious control on them. I notice that I have to pay careful attention in order to listen to others with an openness that allows them to be as they are, or as they think themselves to be. The shutters of my mind habitually flip open and click shut, and these little snaps form into patterns I arrange for myself. The opposite of this inattention is love, is the honoring of others in a way that grants them the grace of their own autonomy and allows mutual discovery.[...]Compassion is one of the purest springs of love.

-Anne Truitt

Before we can generate compassion and love, it is important to have a clear understanding of what we understand compassion and love to be. In simple terms, compassion and love can be defined as positive thoughts and feelings that give rise to such essential things in life as hope, courage, determination, and inner strength. In the Buddhist tradition, compassion and love are seen as two aspects of the same thing: Compassion is the wish for another being to be free from suffering; love is wanting them to have happiness.

-The Dalai Lama

It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart.

-Anne Frank

“Each of us is more than the worst thing we’ve ever done.”

-Bryan Stevenson

We can't be compassionate when we are “othering”.

-Rev. Deanna Lack

Questions:

- How does your self-talk influence your compassion towards yourself and your compassion towards others?
- Do you practice self-compassion? How? How often?
- How do you practice showing compassion to those you love? To those who challenge you?
- What spiritual practices help you to practice compassion?
- Do you struggle to feel compassion in times of crisis? What helps you to overcome these struggles?
- What role does our mission statement (We gather as an inclusive community to inspire spiritual growth, compassionate living, and joyful service) play in your day-to-day life?
- Does social distancing affect how you practice compassion?

Sharing: This is the time we take to practice sharing and deep listening. Please use this time to respond to the readings and/or questions. Save conversations and responses to others' comments for the open discussion portion. Remember we are here to practice listening, not to practice saving, fixing, or setting each other straight.

Open Discussion: This is a time to respond to others' comments and continue the conversation about the topic.

Closing Words: *When all is quiet and we are small and the night is dark,*

by Jane Ranney Rzepka

When all is quiet and we are small and the night is dark, may we hear the tender breathing of all who lie awake with us in fear, that together we may gather strength to live with love, and kindness, and confidence.

Check-out: How are you feeling now? Is there anything from this session that you plan to take with you into the rest of the week?