

M11 -- The Circle as Container

Order of Worship (for leader only)

Preliminaries

- Go over announcements
- Get volunteers to light the chalice and to read the opening reading, if you choose not to read around the circle.
- Describe the purpose and the method of sharing to be used, as described below.

Purpose of this session *(to read or paraphrase)*

To allow the group to consider the ways in which each of us helps create, in our groups, a vehicle for relationship, reflection, community, listening, and ultimately the potential for transformation. To consider specific ways in which each member's participation can help enhance or deepen his own and the group's experience.

Style of meeting/type of sharing *(to read or paraphrase)*

The intention is that this meeting will have a reflective, meditative quality. We will take a full five minutes for the meditation. I encourage you to stay in touch with that more inner place during the session and to respond out of what's moving in you as you hear the questions. Don't try to think the questions through too much.

I will offer questions and you are invited to respond to them, as you feel moved to. You may not have a response to every one, or you may have more than one response to some of them. Many of the questions will just elicit a word or phrase; it doesn't need to be a fully formed thought.

We will be using the deep listening format, so we won't be discussing ideas back and forth. However, you may find that something said by someone else sparks a new idea in you, that you want to add.

For those who notice that an answer to every question wells up right away, you may want to hold back a little bit. You may find that sometimes it can deepen a notch if you let it "cook" a little longer. For those who find it difficult to bring anything out at all, I encourage you to push yourself and share something. Even when an idea is not fully formed, it can still be important to speak it, and the whole group is enriched when we hear from everyone.

(Co-leader's name) will be taking some notes today/tonight, and these will be shared back around the group via email or written copies. Your names and specific responses will not be shared outside the group.

Time guidelines

Preliminaries, including describing style of meeting – 10 mins

Opening song, reading and candle lighting – 10-15 mins

Meditation – 5 mins

Sharing – 75-85 mins (allowing for 10-12 min for each of the boldface questions, 5-7 mins for the others)

Closing reading and song –5 mins

Opening Song: Gathered Here (words on separate page)

Opening Reading (around the circle): The goals that were set forth for the small groups as they were being established were to

- Draw us into mutual ministry
- Strengthen our congregation
- Deepen our understanding of UU principles and values
- Continuously develop lay leadership
- Challenge us to action and spiritual growth
- Express our principles and values in the community
- Help members identify their own calling and expression of lay ministry

Lighting individual candles: Point out floating candles on altar. As you light your own candle, and place it in the bowl, please share, what drew you to join this group?

Meditation: *Invite members to make themselves comfortable, to put down their things, and to let go of their outer-world concerns for this brief time. Encourage them, during the meditation, to reflect on the ways in which the group has been important to them, whether it's new relationships, a change in their experience of the church community, effects felt in one's personal life, or other areas.*

Sharing

Today/tonight we will be using the ancient art of alchemy as a metaphor for our group process. Alchemy was practiced in medieval times and its goal was to produce the “elixir of life” or the “philosopher’s stone.” Anything touched by the philosopher’s stone was turned to gold. Alchemy can be seen as a metaphor for the process of transformation.

The alchemists started with the *prima materia* –the undifferentiated substance from which all things are made. This was placed in a vessel and various processes were performed on it, such as heating or dissolving. What might be the *prima materia* we bring with us to this group? (*Example: our hopes and fears about the group, our personal histories*)

Describe a literal vessel or container. What characteristics would it need in order to withstand the various processes?

In what ways might our circle be thought of as a container?

As you have experienced our group so far, what elements have you felt strengthened the container: helped you to feel safe and supported, willing to risk and be challenged?

(Examples: deep listening, starting/ending on time. Encourage people to be specific, to include practical details as well as feeling tone, and to include everything they experience as helpful.)

Most lists of alchemical operations begin with *calcinatio* or fire which entails applying intense heat for the purpose of reducing the substance to a more essential form, one that was thought to actually contain the fire within itself.

How have you experienced the fire or heat in this group? *(Examples: deep listening, risking sharing something personal, topics or questions provided, meditation or ritual)*

What might we do as individuals, leaders, or as a group to “adjust the heat?”

We’ve been talking so far about a strong, intact container. There are times, however, when the container may have a crack, and the steam or energy can leak out.

What things have you experienced as a leak, or do you think might feel like that?
(Example: people arriving late, or not calling to say they’re not coming; someone not following the deep listening format)

What might we, as individuals, leaders, or as a group, do to avoid some of these leaks? *(Again, encourage people to be specific and to really explore this)*

Recall that the goal of the alchemists was to transform base metal into gold, or the philosopher’s stone. Thinking back to the *prima materia* we each named at the beginning, what kind of transformation might be possible in the container of this circle?

We’ve spent a lot of time reflecting on our circle as a container, how it’s functioning so far, how it might be strengthened. Why is this so important? In a word or a phrase, what might this vessel carry?

After members have finished responding to the last question, leader to read the closing reading.

Closing Reading:

Inside this clay jug there are canyons and pine mountains, and the maker of canyons and pine mountains!

All seven oceans are inside, and hundreds of millions of stars.

The acid that tests gold is there, and the one who judges jewels.

And the music from the strings no one touches, and the source of all water.

If you want the truth, I will tell you the truth:

Friend, listen:

The God whom I love is inside.

-Kabir

Closing Song: leader to move group into Alleluia