

Session Twenty-Nine

No Fate But What We Make

Goals for Participants:

- to explore whether or not there is a power which directs human affairs
- to examine how the choices we make affect the rest of our lives and the lives of others
- to see how our actions become significant when our choices affect our futures and the lives of others
- to explore the second Principle and how our actions affect how we interact with others in just, equitable and compassionate ways

Session in Brief:

1. **Preparing for the Day's Journey.** Chalice lighting/Check-in/Thoughts for the Day. (10 min)
2. **Taking a Stand.** (5 min)
3. **Heart of the Journey.** Playing the Cards You're Dealt. (15 min)
4. **Getting There.** Working With What You've Got. (15 min)
5. **Stopping to Rest.** Reflection and Journaling. (5 min)
6. **Going Out into the World.** Taking a Stand (Reprise) and Closing Circle. (10 min)

Supplies You Will Need:

chalice and matches (or lighter)
basket or hat for quotes
copies of the hymnal *Singing the Living Tradition*
deck of playing cards
writing paper
newsprint or posterboard
pens or thin markers
craft paper
paints and paintbrushes
newspaper (to keep table clean while painting)
bell, gong or chime

large, clear bowl of water
smooth stones, at least one for each participant
(or alternatively, marbles)
CD or tape of meditative music (optional)
CD or tape player (optional)

Advance Preparation:

Make a copy of the quotes for this session in the appendix at the back of the curriculum, cut into strips of paper, fold and place in a basket or hat to be shared as part of the opening ritual.

Write out these same quotes from the appendix on construction paper or newsprint and post one on each wall of the classroom.

Prepare the papers for the Working With What You've Got project. (See Resource 29-A for some writing prompt suggestions.) To start the art project papers, paint three shapes of varying sizes in three different colors on sheets of craft paper (you might do circles on one paper, squares on another, etc, so that they vary slightly from one project to another). You will need one project "start" for each of the participants, so you will need several papers with writing prompts and several papers with shapes painted on them.

Decide whether or not to use meditative music for the closing exercise with the stones and the water "ripple ritual;" locate an appropriate meditative style CD or tape to use if desired.

Preparing for the Day's Journey

Chalice Lighting/Affirmation.

Ask a participant to light the chalice as the group says their unison affirmation:

We light this chalice to remind us of the journey we all embark upon in our lives, the journey that is the search for truth as each of us perceives it.

Check-in.

Invite the participants to share what has been happening with them and their lives since your group was last together, or how they are feeling this morning.

Sharing the Thoughts of the Day.

Ask for volunteers to select from the basket of quotes that you have prepared and to read them to the group. Ask participants to consider the quotes silently until all are read and then offer a time for comments.

The more alternatives, the more difficult the choice.

– Abbe D’Allanival

It is our choices .. that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.

– J.K. Rowling, from *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

There is no fate, but what we make.

– The character of John Connor in the movie, *Terminator Two*.

“Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice; it is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved.”

– William Jennings Bryan, early 20th century lawyer, statesman, and politician

Taking a Stand

Participants will stand on the north pole (yes) or the south pole (no) but in answer to today’s statement – and in a twist for this session, **participants can stand on the center point if they choose to do so.**

I am in control of my own destiny.

Once everyone has decided where to stand, ask for reflections on why they chose the spot they did. *If anyone did choose the middle spot (and even if no one did) talk about how “both yes and no” might be a valid and understandable answer for this statement.*

Heart of the Journey

Playing the Cards You’re Dealt. Expand upon the Taking a Stand Exercise by asking the participants if they feel as if things happen to them all of the time, or if they feel they have the power to make things happen. Transition into the next part of the session by asking the participants if they believe in the concept of fate.

Explain that believing in **fate** means that what happens to you is a result of things outside your control. The idea of **karma** means that we reap what we sow; or in other words – we get what we deserve.

To further explore the concept of fate, play the Game of Fate using a deck of regular playing cards. Deal out one card to each person and explain that they can look at their card but not show it to anyone else. Then turn over the top card of the remaining pile of cards. Explain that this suit of cards (whether spades, clubs, hearts or diamonds) is “trump.” Trump is considered “higher” than any other card, so a “trump” card can even take an Ace of another suit.

There are only two rules for play in this game. Everyone must follow suit (for example, if diamonds are led, everyone must lay down diamonds if they have one) but they do not have to play “trump” just because they have it (they can choose to hold onto it instead). The highest card wins.

Now, ask the participants of the group to “bid,” or in other words, predict whether or not they will win this hand (have the highest card value), even though they do not know what cards the other players have – they can only rely on the knowledge of their card and how they might guess it will play (for example, an Ace might win if no trump is played). Have them say, “one” if they think they will have the highest card played or

“zero” if they don’t think they will. Then the person to your left should lay their card down first. The others must follow suit. Who had the highest card? Did that person think they were going to win it?

Collect all the cards, shuffle them and invite the person on your left to deal out two cards to each person, one at a time. Now have the participants predict whether they will “take the trick” (have the highest card) one time, two times or zero times. Invite someone to write down the “bids” so it is easier to remember. Remind the participants that they must follow the suit led if possible, but they do not have to play a trump card if they decide not to.

Then play the hand. Did those who thought they would take the tricks do so? How did it work out?

Continue playing the game, with the dealing of the cards going to the next person on the left with each different round, and each time dealing one more card out to the group. Keep playing until round six when each person will have six cards and will need to predict whether they can take zero through six tricks.

After you’ve played the sixth round, collect the cards and encourage the group to talk about what that experience was like. Did it become easier or harder the more cards they had to play? How did the cards which were played before they had a turn affect how they played their cards? Were they able to predict how many “tricks” they would end up with? How did their predictions change as the game progressed? Did they develop any strategies of how to play their cards to get the number of “tricks” they’d predicted? How did their choices affect the way others played their cards? How did their choices affect the outcome of the game?

Expand the discussion by asking the participants how this game mirrors real life. If no one brings it up, mention that we are all given different things in our life – some “cards” may be good, others may be “bad.” It’s how we play the cards that are dealt which makes a difference, and how we feel about the cards which we hold in our hand.

Getting There

Working With What You’ve Got. None of us is working with a clean slate, and our actions have an effect not only upon the future, but upon other people who interact with us in life. As Unitarian Universalists, we believe in justice, equity and compassion in human relations. How does this concept of fate (doing the best with what we’ve got) affect our sense of justice, equity and compassion in our dealings with others? What is our responsibility toward others when all of our actions have the potential of affecting someone else? How can we do the best that we can when so much depends upon factors outside of our personal control, for example:

what city/town we live in
what part of the city/town we live in
who our parents are
what our parents do for a living
whether our parents are divorced or still together

Can the participants think of other things in their lives that are outside of their control? Using newsprint or posterboard, make a chart with two columns. Mark the left column “Outside Our Control” and the right column “Within Our Control.” Add any comments participants may have already mentioned as being out of their control, then ask them to name some things which are within their control (such as the friends they choose to hang around with or the after school activities they engage in). *Note: Some things may belong in both columns (for example, if participants are required to play piano by their parents but they don’t want to do so).*

Next ask the participants to think about those things which they listed as being out of their control and how they might turn them to their best advantage, or to take the “fate” which was given them and make it work for them. Jot down any ideas they might have on the newsprint/poster.

Then explain that they will each be given the opportunity to work on a group activity which is built upon what the person before them has

already created. These projects will involve either a writing component (such as a short story) or an art component (such as creating a painting, mural or other picture). Each person should pick a project to start with (either a writing project or art project), but let them know they will not be finishing it.

For this activity, one person at a time contributes to the piece, and the others follow in succession, working with what the others have already created and adding to it. Use a small bell, chime or gong and ring it at one-minute intervals to signal that the person currently working must stop and the next person should begin. When the bell, chime or gong rings, the project must get passed to the next person in the circle to carry on with what has already been created. Continue until everyone has had a chance to contribute to each of the projects or time runs out.

***Note to teachers:** If you have a really large group, consider breaking into two teams and plan to have each of the projects rotated among the participants of the teams rather than the whole group.*

Stopping to Rest

Reflection and Journaling. Ask the participants for some feedback on the experience of adding to projects already started and worked on by others. What was that like? Was it hard to give up a project once they'd started working on it? Did it get tougher the more people had added their influence to the project before they got it handed to them? How do they think their addition to the project affected others? How might this experience affect their future dealings with others in a way which is just, equitable and compassionate?

After all participants who wish to share have reflected verbally with the group, invite all participants to reflect in their journals with words or pictures which express their experience here today.

Going Out into the World

Taking a Stand (Reprise).

Ask participants to take a stand again on the statement which was posed earlier today. North is “yes”, South is “no.” **They are also able to stand on the center point today.** Where do they stand now?

I am in control of my own destiny.

Ask participants to share reasons why they're now standing where they are. Did they change their opinions or ideas? Why or why not? Do they feel stronger about the position than they did before, or a little less? Encourage as many as possible to share.

Note: *There is no Quick Stop for today's session since the Closing Circle duplicates this activity. If your group regularly does the Quick Stop, just skip to Closing Circle.*

Closing Circle.

Ask someone to read this quote from Joseph Epstein:

We do not choose to be born. We do not choose our parents, the country of our birth, or the immediate circumstances of our upbringing. We do not, most of us, choose to die; nor do we choose the time and conditions of our death. But within this realm of choicelessness, we do choose how we live.

Start playing the meditative music for the closing water ripple activity (optional).

Encourage participants to come forward and share one thing they appreciate about their lives or something they would like to make happen. As they share, have them select a stone (or marble) to place in the bowl of water. After everyone has had a chance to drop their stone in the water, say some words of reflection such as:

Just as the stones you have dropped here in this bowl have sent ripples out along the water, our actions make a difference and send out some ripples of their own. Let us always be mindful of this.

group or on that particular day, drop the meditative music and do the closing as a Quick Stop instead, asking each participant to verbally share one thing they appreciate about their lives

Extinguish the chalice with these unison words:

We extinguish this chalice, but not its light. That we take with us as we go out into the world, sharing it with those we encounter on our journey.

Notes from field testing:

The card game was very popular in the field testing, and the youth not only enjoyed it, they understood the lesson behind it. Said one teacher, “The kids got into it and made the connections to life very clearly and articulately.” Another teacher said, “They loved the card games!”

One group had such meaningful conversations around the ideas raised by the card game and the Out of Control/Within Control discussion that they ran out of time for the group projects.

Some of the groups really liked the rock and ripple ritual at the end of the session, but for one group of mostly 6th graders, it was not taken seriously and they laughed throughout the closing. The success of this activity is probably related to the maturity of your group, whether or not they like engaging in ritualistic activities like this and the particular energy in the group for the day. Sometimes even a mature group can be too riled up to settle down for a ritualistic closing like this if the weather is too beautiful outside or earlier physical activities (such as the card game) continues to keep the group on a high energy level throughout the entire session. If the ritualistic closing does not seem to be appropriate for your