

Interfaith Amigos Spiritual Read

DISCUSSION GUIDE

**FINDING PEACE
through
SPIRITUAL PRACTICE**







Interfaith Amigos

January-February 2017

PURPOSE

The Interfaith Amigos share how to connect our inner and outer worlds to collaborate on critical concerns of our time by:

-  Exploring interfaith traditions and rituals to cultivate understanding, respect and connection.
-  Learning about *and* experiencing a wide variety of meditative practices to deepen spirituality and find peace.
-  Fostering sustainable engagement in social justice and environmental causes to make a real difference.
-  Boldly examining challenging issues of violence, prejudice, polarization, anger and despair to unite rather than to divide.

CONVERSATION GUIDELINES

1. Give yourself the special gift to authentically explore interfaith dialogue and spiritual practices for personal, social and environmental healing.
2. Read the chapter ... and still come if you haven't.
3. Offer an open, compassionate heart. We are not judging, correcting or fixing. Use "I" language; speak for yourself unless invited to do otherwise.
4. Keep confidentiality, which is essential to this Spiritual Read.
5. Share, be vulnerable, accept risk and be yourself. Ultimately, *you* decide how much or how little you wish to say. Know that you may "pass" at any time.
6. Promote group trust and harmony.
 - a. Let one person speak at a time; no side conversations. Everything that anyone has to say is important.
 - b. Pay attention to the flow of the conversation and notice what wants to be said rather than what *you* want to say.
 - c. Ensure that each person has an opportunity to speak, while knowing that no one has to do so.
 - d. Be aware of your 'air time,' and the Facilitator's hand signal to close.
 - e. Start on time and end on time.
7. Have a Facilitator, use the Discussion Guide with freedom to digress, and be willing to work in the full group and in pairs.

Read, Share, Enjoy!

INTRODUCTION ON THE WAY TO PEACE

1. Welcome
2. Brief Introductions (3 minutes)
 - a. Full birth name and name you use now
 - b. Place of birth
 - c. Ancestral roots and current family
 - d. Faith, beliefs, current/past spiritual communities (2-4 sentences)
 - e. Your passions and pursuits
 - f. Reason for joining this Spiritual Read
3. Purpose, Discussion Guide, Format & Conversation Guidelines
4. Identify your particular interests for this Spiritual Read.
5. Many people think peace is the absence of conflict. The Interfaith Amigos believe that living with conflicts leads to positive change. When did you feel grounded, at peace and connected with the Divine or something larger?
6. What is your reaction to learning from our differences rather than trying to minimize them? Give an illustration.
7. How do you feel about trying a spiritual practice that is not your own?
8. Share a spiritual practice that you have tried and like doing.
9. About Next Week
 - a. Read *Discovering the Need for Spiritual Practice, Inner Change Leads to Lasting Outer Change* (Chap 1).
 - b. Select a Spiritual Practice to try from this chapter or the Introduction.
10. Circle of Gratitude

WEEK ONE

DISCOVERING THE NEED FOR SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

INNER CHANGE LEADS TO LASTING OUTER CHANGE (CHAP 1)

1. Welcome & Announcements
2. Share your experience of a Spiritual Practice that you tried.
3. **Discussion Questions:**
 - a. What occurs when outer change is not accompanied by inner change? Do you have a personal story? (Pairs)
 - b. The Interfaith Amigos make no claim to the superiority of any tradition. What is your understanding and experience with others?
 - c. By 2050, a Pew report predicts 2.8 billion Muslims, 2.9 billion Christians and 16 million Jews. What do you see as possible implications of these world statistics?
 - d. **Judaism** – What level of awareness or spiritual practice spoke to you and why (pp. 22-24)?
 - e. **Christianity** – Prayer is an important Christian spiritual practice. What is prayer to you, and how does it work?
 - f. **Islam** – What is the Qur'an? Who was Muhammad? Why is there a split between Sunni and Shia Muslims (pp. 75-76)? What is Sufism? Explain the term "hadith." Describe obligatory prayers.
 - g. Share a spiritual moment or divine experience that changed you. (Pairs)
4. About Next Week
 - a. Read *Polarization: Our Basic Challenge, What Is It and Why Is It a Problem?* (Chap 2).
 - b. Select a Spiritual Practice to try from this chapter or previous one.
5. Circle of Gratitude

POLARIZATION: OUR BASIC CHALLENGE

WHAT IS IT & WHY IS IT A PROBLEM? (CHAP 2)

1. Welcome & Announcements
2. Share your experience of a Spiritual Practice that you tried.
3. **Discussion Questions:**
 - a. What is new or striking to you?
 - b. Describe a time when you fervently believed you were on the 'right' side and the opposing view was wrong, or without basis?
 - c. What do you do about religious or political conflict within your family?
 - d. "But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"
A. Solzhenitsyn (p. 38) Discuss your understanding of evil.
 - e. **Judaism** – Acknowledge your urges of "yetzer ha-ra" and the "yetzer tov". Give an example.
 - f. **Christianity** – Is unconditional love possible, or is it an ideal? When have you experienced it? (Pairs)
 - g. **Islam** – Prophet Muhammad said, "Know thyself and thou shalt know the Sustainer." What are ways to tame your ego? (Pairs)
 - h. How do you deal with someone who is abusive or violent despite your most sincere efforts to connect? (Pairs)
 - i. What Sacred Name might you bestow upon yourself (pp. 54)? (Pairs)
4. About Next Week
 - a. Read *Moving Beyond Past Conditioning, Awakening to Authentic Social Justice* (Chap 3).
 - b. Select a Spiritual Practice to try from this chapter or previous one.
5. Circle of Gratitude

MOVING BEYOND PAST CONDITIONING

AWAKENING TO AUTHENTIC SOCIAL JUSTICE (CHAP 3)

1. Welcome & Announcements
2. Share your experience of a Spiritual Practice that you tried.
3. **Discussion Questions:**
 - a. What is new or striking to you from the list of Injustices (pp. 57-58)?
 - b. What prejudice did you grow up with that you don't have now?
 - c. Describe a time when you (i) were the minority in a crowd, (ii) approached for money by a beggar, **or** (iii) encountered a group of black youth? How did you feel, and what bias arose? (Pairs)
 - d. **Judaism** – Strangers in strange lands and persecution are key themes of Judaic history. How do they shape Judaic values?
 - e. **Christianity** – “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6) creates exclusivity and religious divides. What does this verse mean to you? Is it any different from the Qur'an being held as the *only* true version of divine revelation?
 - f. **Islam** – What surprised you about Qur'anic rights granted to women vs. patriarchal domination you hear about today?
 - g. What gives you hope to raze religious walls and heal hurts?
4. About Next Week
 - a. Read *Overcoming Despair, Carrying on in the Face of Overwhelming Environmental Problems* (Chap 4).
 - b. Select a Spiritual Practice to try from this chapter or previous one.
5. Circle of Gratitude

WEEK FOUR

OVERCOMING DESPAIR: CARRYING ON IN THE FACE OF OVERWHELMING ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS (CHAP 4)

1. Welcome & Announcements
2. Share your experience of a spiritual practice that you tried.
3. **Discussion Questions:**
 - a. What is new or striking to you?
 - b. Which environmental concern worries you, and how do you keep it from overwhelming you? Do the Amigos' views on despair help you?
 - c. What could you do differently to better the environment? (Pairs)
 - d. Do you discern differences in how the three faiths understand despair? Share a personal experience of despair? What happened? (Pairs)
 - e. **Judaism** – How does the core teaching of “Oneness” raise awareness of the environment?
 - f. **Christianity** – What does “I have been given dominion over creation” mean to you?
 - g. **Islam** – If people honored Muhammad's, “The earth is your mother,” what would change?
 - h. What burning *local* environmental issue exists in our community, and what more can be done?
4. About Next Week
 - a. Read *In the Face of Failure, Dealing with Anger and Burnout* (Chap 5).
 - b. Select a Spiritual Practice to try from this chapter or previous one.
5. Circle of Gratitude

WEEK FIVE

IN THE FACE OF FAILURE DEALING WITH ANGER AND BURNOUT? (CHAP 5)

1. Welcome & Announcements
2. Share your experience of a Spiritual Practice that you tried.
3. **Discussion Questions:**
 - a. What is new or striking to you?
 - b. How was anger handled in the home of your upbringing? Now? (Pairs)
 - c. What problem in the world raises your ire and why?
 - d. **Judaism** – Do you agree with the Talmud’s teaching that anger is akin to idolatry? Why?
 - e. **Christianity** – How can anger be considered a force for good? Give an example in your own life.
 - f. **Islam** – Prophet Muhammad consistently chose forgiveness over retaliation (42:40). How does this teaching fit with the media’s portrayal of Islam?
 - g. When did you feel burned out? What occurred to renew a sense of joy, meaning, energy and aliveness? (Pairs)
 - h. Silently meditate: Who may you bathe with the Light of forgiveness?
4. About Next Week
 - a. Read *Meeting Fear without Violence, Transcending Defensiveness* (Chap 6).
 - b. Select a Spiritual Practice to try from this chapter or previous one.
5. Circle of Gratitude

MEETING FEAR WITHOUT VIOLENCE TRANSCENDING DEFENSIVENESS (CHAP 6)

1. Welcome & Announcements
2. Share your experience of a Spiritual Practice that you tried.
3. **Discussion Questions:**
 - a. What is new or striking to you?
 - b. Think about one of your fears. Is it healthy ... or not?
 - c. Describe a time when you felt held hostage to fear or anxiety. What released you? (Pairs)
 - d. Remember a failure. Who did you disappoint? How do you feel now? (Pairs)
 - e. **Judaism** – What does fear inspire *and* hinder in the Jewish faith?
 - f. **Christianity** – “... do not worry about your life, or your body, what you will wear ... Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap or gather into barns, and yet the Holy One feeds them.” Mt 6:25-26 How well do you follow Jesus’ teaching? (Pairs)
 - g. **Islam** – Explain whether the Qur’an condones violence, and what the term “jihad” means.
 - h. The world is awash with mass violence? What in this chapter gives insight to you about breaking negative patterns?
4. About Next Week
 - a. Read *Love as a Force for Change, Focusing on the Positive* (Chap 7).
 - b. Select a Spiritual Practice to try from this chapter or previous one.
5. Circle of Gratitude

LOVE AS A FORCE FOR CHANGE FOCUSING ON THE POSITIVE (CHAP 7)

1. Welcome & Announcements
2. Share your experience of a Spiritual Practice that you tried.
3. **Discussion Questions:**
 - a. What is new or striking to you?
 - b. Gandhi taught that peace between countries rests on love between individuals. How is such peace achievable?
 - c. How do you love someone near and dear who causes you pain? How do you love a stranger or enemy who causes you pain?
 - d. **Judaism** – What does love God with “all your heart, all your soul and all your might” (Deut. 6:5) mean to Rabbi Falcon? To you?
 - e. **Christianity** – Rev. Mackenzie says the resurrection of Jesus is a metaphor for death, forgiveness and life anew. If you agree, what ‘resurrection’ in your life brought you a fresh start? (Pairs)
 - f. **Islam** – Imam Rahman explains that compassion is love made manifest. Do you believe love is ‘being’ or ‘doing’ and why?
 - g. How may health/wealth crises lead to deeper spiritual meaning (Rumi)? Give an example in your life. (Pairs)
 - h. What in your life brings you great joy, laughter, love or passion? (Pairs)
4. About Next Week
 - a. Read *Making Spiritual Practice a Way of Life, The Daily Inner Work of Peace* (Chap 8) & Conclusion, *Problems, Promises & Possibilities*.
 - b. Select a Spiritual Practice to try AND also learn about one “Rhythm of the Year” practice that is unfamiliar to you.
5. Circle of Gratitude

MAKING SPIRITUAL PRACTICE A WAY OF LIFE

THE DAILY INNER WORK OF PEACE (CHAP 8)

1. Welcome & Announcements
2. Share your experience of a Spiritual Practice that you tried.
3. Share your experience of learning about *one* “Rhythm of the Year” practice that is unfamiliar to you, e.g., Judaic, Christian or Islamic festival, holy day, etc. Describe it and give your comments.
4. The Spiritual Read is almost over. Is there a Spiritual Practice that you learned and will continue to do? What is it and why?
5. What helps you to be authentic and consistent with your everyday practices?
6. What ‘aha,’ illumination or learning did you gain from the Spiritual Read?
7. Describe your hope for the world.
8. Sunday, March 5, Celebration of Our Journey, 2-4 PM
Unity Spiritual Enrichment Center, 3918 San Juan Avenue,
Port Townsend, Across from Blue Heron School

- **Meet participants of the Spiritual Read and share!**
- **Enjoy music by Simon de Voil, Interfaith Minister**
- **Experience the Poetic Justice Theatre Ensemble, Mandala Center for Change**
- **Savor scrumptious goodies**

9. Circle of Gratitude

CELEBRATION OF OUR JOURNEY



Date: Sunday, March 5, 2-4 PM

Accessible Location: Unity Spiritual Enrichment Center
3918 San Juan Ave, Port Townsend
(Across from Blue Heron School)

- Share with Spiritual Read participants
- Honor all paths
- Enjoy music by Simon de Voil, Interfaith Minister
- Experience the Poetic Justice Theatre Ensemble, Mandala Center for Change
- Savor scrumptious goodies

WEEK TEN