

Our topic for this evening was *How Can We Remain Open?* We are grateful for this group that inspires us to live more bravely and mindfully.

There are times in our lives that are very challenging, when we cannot make much meaning out of our chaotic circumstances – nor seem able to exert much control over them. At such times, perhaps the opportunity is to simply be *open to the madness of life*.

Suffering often causes profound growth in wisdom or compassion. We wouldn't choose to go through deep suffering, but we are grateful for the transformation that comes with it. Suffering seems to occur when we are clinging to expectations or control of how something "should" be. When we can truly surrender to the pain, the suffering lessens.

Feeling alone with profound pain, whether due to shame, stigma, or circumstance, certainly deepens experiences of suffering. When we are suffering, what we need most is to be surrounded by those who are able to be present to our brokenness with compassion – rather than judgment – grounded in their own heartbreak. Those who can sit with us, accompanying *us through* our pain, without trying to fix it, diminish it, or explain it, are invaluable. As one Friend shared, we want to know that others have been on the threshing floor and are feeling worked by life just as bread is by a baker's hands (from a poem by Gunilla Norris).

Suffering can be such a profound catalyst for insight and growth that we can sometimes be afraid of growing complacent or on autopilot when our life seems one of smooth sailing. What other ways can help us remain open that do not require suffering? Building some opportunities into our daily lives for awe is one. Friends shared practices of lying in a hammock and looking at the stars while letting the dog out late at night, of keeping a few personally inspiring quotes on our work desk right near our computer, of writing early in the morning, and of mindfully enjoying a perfect popsicle. Intentionally going outside our comfort zone or routine patterns is also useful. Simply being more open to people around us, letting them know us more, letting their lives touch ours, can be profoundly moving and full of grace.

Clearing out the clutter of our lives – both stuff and activities – that block our openness to the Light is really helpful, albeit challenging. We shared gratitude for those who help us with this and loving humor for those whom we help. What more can we let go of?

Our next meeting will be on Monday, December 7, 2015 at 7pm in the Community House. Our topic will be "*sharing our spiritual journeys with significant people in our lives.*" Readings will be posted soon. All are most welcome to join us.

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