

Session 1: Welcoming the Soul

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Session Metadata	
Session	1
Title	Welcoming the Soul
UU Source	Introduction
Unit	Foundation
Head / Hands / Heart	N/A
Has Exercise	No
Has Ritual	No
Has Spiritual Practice Presentation	No
Special Blocks	Covenant Creation

Preparation

Email to Participants

Dear UU Wellspring Participants,

As we continue our UU Wellspring journey together, we will explore how we want to be together with one another and how we will create a bold space for each of us to listen to our own still small voice within. Together, we will work on a covenant that guides us in our group practices to create a bold space that allows us to have meaningful experiences together.

Parker Palmer, a Quaker who shares life lessons in books such as **Hidden Wholeness**, helps us understand that we create circles of trust to entice the shy soul to come forward. He writes, "Philosophers haggle about what to call this core of our humanity, but I am no stickler for precision. Thomas Merton called it 'true self' Buddhists call it 'original nature' or 'big self.' Quakers call it 'the inner teacher' or 'the inner light.' Hasidic Jews call it 'a spark of the divine.' Humanists call it

'identity and integrity.' In popular parlance, people often call it 'soul.'" Palmer continues, "'This is the first, wildest, and wisest thing I know,' says Mary Oliver, 'that the soul exists, and that it is built entirely out of attentiveness.' But we live in a culture that discourages us from paying attention to the soul or true self-and when we fail to pay attention, we end up living soulless lives." (excerpted from *Hidden Wholeness*, p. 33-35)

Additionally, Palmer writes: "Instead, I have met too many people who suffer from an empty self. They have a bottomless pit where their identity should be—an inner void they try to fill with competitive success, consumerism, sexism, racism, or anything that might give them the illusion of being better than others. We embrace attitudes and practices such as these not because we regard ourselves as superior but because we have no sense of self at all. Putting others down becomes a path to identity, a path we would not need to walk if we knew who we were." He continues, "A strong community helps people develop a sense of true self, for only in community can the self exercise and fulfill its nature: giving and taking, listening and speaking, being and doing.

"A circle of trust, I said, has no agenda except to help people listen to their own souls and discern their own truth. Its purpose is not to help people recommit to a particular role or even become better at it, though one or both may happen. In a circle of trust, we practice the paradox of "being alone together," of being present to one another as a "community of solitudes." Those phrases sound like contradictions because we think of solitude and community as either-or. But solitude and community, rightly understood, go together as both-and. To understand true self—which knows who we are in our inwardness and whose we are in the larger world—we need both the interior intimacy that comes with solitude and the otherness that comes with community." (excerpted from *Hidden Wholeness*, p. 38-39, 47, 53-54)

To prepare for our session focused on how we want to be together this year, please view these videos and journal your reflections.

- A short [video by Julica Hermann De La Fuente on Covenanting](#) in UU Wellspring. The reading referred to is: "[We Covenant](#)" by Janice Marie Johnson
- [Chapter 1](#) (4 min) and [Chapter 2](#)** (4 min) *Hidden Wholeness* by Parker Palmer.
- [Covenanting in UU Wellspring](#) Note that the video is almost 15 minutes long, and you need to build in extra time for journaling throughout the video. There are several pauses with journal prompts as well as directions to pause to read the next three documents.
- [Bound in Covenant](#)**** by Rev. Victoria Safford
- **[White Supremacy Culture document](#),** by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun. Please pay particular attention to the antidotes. (for a deeper and more interactive look at these points check out [THIS WEBSITE](#))
- "[We Covenant](#)" by Janice Marie Johnson in Quest.

As time permits over the next few sessions:

- Familiarize yourself with [Widening the Circle of Concern](#)^{**},^{**}the work of the [Commission on Institutional Change](#) and this interchange about Liberating [Covenants](#).
- [“A Conversation on Covenant Creation: Article 2 Study Commission Panel”](#)

Reflection Questions

- Parker Palmer has described the soul with a metaphor: the soul as a wild animal that needs to feel safe before showing itself- does that ring true to you?
- Parker Palmer also describes a life of wholeness, of living “divided no more.” Are there people you’ve known who have lived this way? What characteristics let you know that they lived undivided lives? What are the obstacles to living an undivided life? What are the risks?

You might want to review or expand on your responses to these questions that were part of the Covenanting in UU Wellspring Video.

- In anticipation of writing a covenant together, make a list of words that describe how you want to feel in this group. You might want to think about groups that worked well for you and think of what the group norms were that contributed to that feeling.
- What do you need in this circle to trust? If you find yourself writing some ideas for the covenant, please avoid jargon, for example, rather than saying “step back, step forward,” try writing it in a way that all will understand, such as “If you are speaking too much, listen more. If you are not speaking up, share your thoughts.”
- What will be most difficult for you in a circle of trust?
- What are the power differentials that you need to be aware of?
- What do you want to bring to the covenant discussion?
- What kind of confidentiality will you need in this group?

Spiritual Practice:

Also, a reminder to start/keep doing your spiritual practice. It’s easy to forget if you’re not in the habit, so we’ll be reminding each other throughout the year. If you haven’t made an appointment with a spiritual director, or spiritual companion, this would be a good time to do so.

Links for Spiritual Directors/Companions****Here is a [link to the spiritual direction video](#) you watched prior to the retreat in case you want to review it now. Below are some links for Spiritual Direction Resources. Please be aware that every spiritual director has different first-session protocols. Some offer a *pro bono* session and others a brief telephone conversation. Use bios from [UUSDN.org](#) or [SDICompanions.org](#) to get some of your questions answered in advance. Although you can contact a couple of spiritual directors, once you find one that you could be comfortable opening up to, there is no reason to continue contacting folks. A good fit may be the first person you contact! It is in the ongoing sessions that you will experience spiritual opening. If you want to explore the groups UU Wellspring has put together this year:

- [****Groups](#)

And if you are planning to work with a spiritual friend, please share this link with them to guide them in holding space for you.

- [Video Link](#) to send to a “spiritual friend” who might companion you.

Finally, as a reminder, please bookmark this link to our Zoom meeting: [link]

We recognize that the retreat and first session have a lot of intensive prework. Thank you for attending to these foundational pieces that will bring depth to your work together as a group.

I look forward to seeing you!

Session Plan

Note to Facilitator

Note to Facilitator: Please prepare for the next session by watching the [important video](#) from Julica Hermann de la Fuente on how we can use covenants to include rather than exclude full participation. Participants have a shortened video as prework, and the transcript is below. (You may also turn on closed captions.)

“Hello Friends,

My name is Julica Hermann De La Fuente. This short video is about covenanting. Thank you so much for agreeing to facilitate the UU Wellspring program. I hope that it is as powerful for you as it has been for me and I want to give us an opportunity to think a little bit more about what role does the covenant play in creating the container that’s going to give you the richest and deepest conversations possible in your groups.

Usually when Unitarian Universalist sit together to covenant, there’s a couple of things that are fairly common:

One, someone shows up with a list of agreements everyone looks it over they read it out loud. Maybe they take turns reading each bullet point. Everyone says fine, good let’s go.

Two, we assume that the people in the room are all the same and usually what that means is we assume that all the people in the room are white.

So ,when we say I’m going to take risks, that is a covenant that helps white people push themselves, But I have heard colleagues of color say I take risks every day !I need to pull back and take a rest. That’s the covenant that I’m making with myself. Similarly, when we say we assume

good intentions, it means that we don't want to take responsibility for how our comments or our behaviors land in the group because if I don't mean anything by it then it shouldn't have any impact. And that's not true, of course, there is a gap between intention and impact sometimes. And so, an effective covenant will challenge us to attend to the impact of our communication rather than just the intention.

I think also it's important to separate safety from comfort. Yes, it is important to create a fundamental container of safety and by that we mean a container where you can trust that other people will honor and respect your experience, will treat you with kindness, will hold your experience confidential. All of those things are important. But when we when we say, "therefore I always need to be comfortable, I always need to feel cozy," then we are not creating enough space for us to challenge ourselves and to do the deep spiritual work that these programs are really preparing us to do.

So, as we look more deeply into what does that mean to feel safe versus comfortable, and when we focus on safety and separate it from comfort, we are able to be more authentic take more risks and go deeper together. And that is a powerful experience, because ultimately that's what we're trying to do: is to create a space where folks can say how it truly is with their heart, and with their souls. And that's where the growth happens right. So, I encourage you to help your participants play with discomfort and curiosity. I encourage you to build bold spaces rather than focusing just on a comfort or safety and I hope that you find that sweet spot of learning that is somewhere in between total conflict avoidance and everything is safe. I'm not really going to say what I mean and pushing people so far that no one can participate because it just doesn't feel risk, it just doesn't feel safe enough to be that risky. So may you find that sweet space of learning and may your covenant support you in that process blessings on your groups and your facilitation and thank you again."

- Also, be sure to watch the [“Covenanting in UU Wellspring”](#) video and respond to the journal prompts.
- You or a volunteer will read the covenant aloud regularly and refer to it as a living document. Read it through every time until you feel that no adjustments are needed to get started. Once you have confirmed the covenant as a group, there is a part of the session where you will be prompted to either ask if we need to review it, or occasionally, that we will read the entire covenant.

Chalice Lighting and Silence

Let's light the chalice with our opening words from the retreat, then lean into ten minutes of music and silence to mark this moment, the start of our first circle, and to fully show up in this space.

“We begin by remembering the sound and the feeling of the one Being, the Wellspring of love. We affirm that the next thing we experience shimmers with the light of the Whole Universe.”

“We begin by remembering” is one translation of the Arabic word *Bismallah*, which is used at the beginning of prayer and from a translation by Neil Douglas-Klotz in *The Sufi Book of Life*.

Music Suggestion: “[Calm Wind](#)” (3 min 11 sec) by Peter B. Helland followed by silence.

Online Tip: Set up any videos in advance to remove YouTube ads or use a paid streaming account if you have access to one. You can also set up Zoom to play the music without the video by sharing your Zoom screen, choosing “Advanced” and “Share Computer Audio.” You’ll see a red and green bar at the top of your computer saying “sharing your computer sound.” Anything you play on the computer will then be heard by your group, even if you have your Zoom muted.

Check-In

For our check-in each week, you may speak as you feel ready; in other words, we won’t call on people. We will honor each speaker not with comments but with silence. In order to have some silence between each person speaking, we’ll take a few deep breaths after someone speaks before the next person starts.

The questions we will answer every week are:

- What are you carrying in your heart?
- How is your spiritual practice or spiritual companioning going?

Reflection

Usually our reflection time will be at least half of our session. This session will share the reflection time with time devoted to creating our covenant as a foundation for our future discussions. Creating the covenant after a couple of times together is fruitful in knowing a little more about each other.

Please note that today and in every session, if I’m not asking the right questions, answer the questions you need to answer. Parker Palmer suggests we take notes on what arises internally, rather than on what other people say – we’re trying to find our own truth. Feel free to use your UU Wellspring journal to keep notes on your continued reflections, both before and during each session.

Reflection Questions (The following questions should not all be asked – they are samples from which you can select a few.)

- Parker Palmer has described the soul with a metaphor: the soul as a wild animal that needs to feel safe before showing itself- does that ring true to you?
- Parker Palmer also describes a life of wholeness, of living “divided no more.” Are there people you’ve known who have lived this way? What characteristics let you know that they lived undivided lives? What are the obstacles to living an undivided life? What are the

risks?

Break

Covenant Creation

****Note to Facilitators:****Please be sure to watch the [“Covenanting in UU Wellspring”](#) video and respond to the journal prompts yourself. Facilitate the covenant creation process by talking with the group about the importance of taking time to create a covenant for your group since you will be meeting over the course of most of a year and so we want to create sacred space that allows for our shy souls to emerge.

Option 1: If You Already Worked on the Covenant at the Four Hour Retreat Begin Here: (35 min)

Say: At this first session after the retreat, it is a good idea to spend some time revisiting the covenant conversation. The practice of listening without responding is often a struggle for many participants. People want to connect, and that is usually done through words of affirmation. But in UU Wellspring, silence is how we honor each other’s truth. This can be challenging for many people.

Note: Along with the covenant as written so far, it will be helpful to revisit the conversations you had around the covenant during the retreat. Because we are approaching covenant a little differently, there may be some questions or concerns.

“We began writing our covenant at our opening retreat. Let’s look at where we started and continue this work, keeping in mind that we are invested in creating a covenant that works for everyone and includes opportunities for reconciliation.”

Note that our UU Wellspring covenant includes Parker Palmer’s suggestion of “no fixing, no advising, no saving, no setting each other straight.” We will also include, “We will pause and explore when we observe behavior that causes harm..”

Encourage people to notice how their soul is showing up or what is scaring it away. Make space for the hard conversations, and remind participants that this doesn’t have to be finalized today; this conversation can and will be ongoing.

Continue the Deep Work of Covenanting

Continue working on the draft and if needed, invite a volunteer or two to work on a final draft rather than wordsmithing as a group. When you review the covenant in Session 2, you can review the covenant and make amendments then.

Option 2: If this is the First Time You Will be Talking about Covenant Begin Here (35 min)

If you are online, and this is your first time covenanting, follow this process

Open a document that you will share during the covenanting session that includes:

- No fixing, no advising, no saving, no setting each other straight.
- We will pause and explore when we observe behavior that causes harm.

Say: We will begin our covenanting process by sharing the feeling words that you wrote in your journals. How do you want to feel?

Ask participants to write the words or phrases in the chat.

Once finished, ask one person to read all of the words and phrases in the chat aloud.

“Next we will share what we need in order to trust in this group in the chat.”

Invite each person to write what they need in order to trust this group in the chat. When they are finished, ask someone to read the words and phrases aloud.”

“As you heard in the video, our UU Wellspring covenant will include Parker Palmer’s suggestion of “no fixing, no advising, no saving, no setting each other straight.” We will also include, “We will pause and explore when we observe behavior that causes harm.”

Reveal the covenant by sharing your screen with a shared document that has the following already on it:

- No fixing, no advising, no saving, no setting each other straight.
- We will pause and explore when we observe behavior that causes harm.

Next ask someone to suggest an idea for the covenant based on the feeling and trust words and phrases. Encourage comments and add it as a draft statement to the covenant. Add the phrases as people share them. If you want everyone to be able to write directly on the document, you will need to use a Google doc, or a shared document of some sort, share the link in the chat and have each person open the document on their own device. Make sure you have given editing rights to anyone who has the link. They will not be able to write on the shared document through zoom (Advanced users can use the whiteboard feature.)

Encourage people to notice how their soul is showing up or what is scaring it away. Make space for the hard conversations, and remind participants that this doesn’t have to be built and completed today; this conversation can and will be ongoing.

Once you have discussed and have a list for a draft covenant, encourage the group to think about it until the next session. Perhaps you can share the link for a google document in your next email.

Continue the Deep Work of Covenanting

In the next few sessions when you revisit the covenant, continue to revise and eventually ask one or two volunteers to meet and finalize the draft, which they can bring to the next session for consensus or discussion. This could be now or several sessions in the future.

If you are in person, and this is your first time covenanting, follow this process

“We will begin our covenanting process by sharing the feeling words that you wrote in your journals. How do you want to feel?”

Ask participants to write the words or phrases they wrote in their journals on sticky notes for people to add to chart paper, a smooth surface such as a wall, or a white board. Once finished, ask one person to read all of the words and phrases aloud.”

“Next we will share what we need in order to trust in this group.”

Use the stickies again for each person to write and post on the chart near the feeling words that they most need from this group to trust. Tell them this is not an exact process and they can move the *feeling* and *trust* stickies around. Once all of the feeling words and needs for trust words and phrases have been posted and initial movement has occurred, read aloud the groupings.

“As you heard in the video, our UU Wellspring covenant will include Parker Palmer’s suggestion of “no fixing, no advising, no saving, no setting each other straight.” We will also include, “We will pause and explore when we observe behavior that causes harm.”

Post flip chart paper or use a white board to capture ideas for the covenanting session that includes:

- No fixing, no advising, no saving, no setting each other straight.
- We will pause and explore when we observe behavior that causes harm.

Next ask someone to suggest an idea for the covenant based on the feeling and trust words and phrases. Encourage comments and add it as a draft statement to the covenant.

Encourage people to notice how their soul is showing up or what is scaring it away. Make space for the hard conversations, and remind participants that this doesn’t have to be built and completed today; this conversation can and will be ongoing.

Once you have discussed and have a list for a draft covenant, encourage the group to think about it until the next session. Perhaps you can share the link for a google document in your next email.

Continue the Deep Work of Covenanting

In the next few sessions when you revisit the covenant, continue to revise and eventually ask one or two volunteers to meet and finalize the draft, which they can bring to the group for consensus or discussion. This could be at the next session or several sessions in the future.

So What?

We will end every session by thinking about what we are called to do in the world as a result of the readings and reflection. What does this reflection call you to do? In our circle? In your ministry? In your life?

Gratitude and Closing

Invite everyone, as they are moved, to say one or two words about something from this session for which they are grateful or how they are feeling in this moment. After everyone has said a word, close with a brief statement of thanks and appreciation such as, “For all this and more, we are grateful.”

Revision #2

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