

Theme for September - An Open Heart:
The Practice of a Generous Spirit

***Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, around the table,
or with each other:***

While it is true that religion is often seen as one of the major sources of conflict and problems in our time, it also true that each major faith has at its core an ethic of compassion, an ethic of opening your heart to engage the joy and pain of others. In this way it can be said that how we treat others (more than what or how much we believe) is the test of spirituality.

When and how do you engage with the joy and pain others? Do you ever feel that for your own safety you need to close off from the world? How does having a closed heart show up for you and in others....cynicism, fear, anger, blame? Are you able to stand in some else's shoes?

What are some practices that help you keep an open heart? How do you act when your heart is open? How do you act when you feel closed?

Do you wish that you were more generous in spirit? What limits your generosity toward others? What expands it?

How do you think you're supposed to be if you're being generous in spirit? Are these actions selfless or do they feed the giver and receiver?

Resources for September Questions:

KINDNESS

by Naomi Shihab Nye

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,

the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes any sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

IF THERE IS TO BE PEACE

By Lao-Tse

If there is to be peace in the world,
There must be peace in the nations.

There is to be peace in the nations,
There must be peace in the cities.

If there is to be peace in the cities,
There must be peace between neighbors.

If there is to be peace between neighbors,
There must be peace in the home.

If there is to be peace in the home,

There must be peace in the heart.

1 CORINTHIANS 13, adapted

It doesn't matter that I talk like a poet or sing like an angel -

If I'm no good at loving, my life is all noise, no music.

It doesn't matter that I know all about religion and have faith to work miracles -

Without love, it gets me nowhere.

Or if I share all the firm's profits with my employees and then give away

my share to the poor -

If I act without love, all this counts for nothing.

Love means being patient with people, and kind.

Love is never snobbish or rude or selfish.

Love doesn't keep count of someone else's faults; it prefers to see the best in them.

Love goes on trusting and hoping; it never gives in, and it never ends.

There are three things that last: faith, hope, and love.

And love crowns them all - so see that you put love first.
