

## 11-Flexibility/Rigidity—UUFVB Covenant Groups—November 2016

### Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,  
but connected, in mystery and miracle,  
to the universe, to this community and to each other.

### Check-in: How is your spirit right now?

#### Opening Reading

Day ends, and before sleep  
when the sky dies down, consider  
your altered state: has this day  
changed you? Are the corners  
sharper or rounded off? Did you  
live with death? Make decisions  
that quieted? Find one clear word  
that fit? At the sun's midpoint  
did you notice a pitch of absence,  
bewilderment that invites the  
possible? What did you learn  
from things you dropped and picked up  
and dropped again? Did you set a straw  
parallel to the river, let the flow  
carry you downstream?

*(Before Dark by Jeanne Lohman)*

#### Topic Exploration

Developmentally, we learn to be rigid long before we learn to be flexible. In other words, we learn the rules, before we learn how to bend or break them in order to accomplish a task. School age children are well known to thrive on consistency in the structures that make up their worlds. A sense of safety and security can be derived from knowing that there are set ways to do things and that these set ways result in predictable outcomes. Rigidity thus has some advantages both evolutionarily (rituals relating to greeting strangers results in a lessened likelihood of being killed) and developmentally (if I am careful about playing by the rules, then the other children will want to play with me).

Developmental psychologist Robert Peck describes two types of flexibility that need to be developed if the individual is to be able to adjust successfully to the challenges of adulthood, emotional flexibility and mental flexibility. Emotional flexibility involves two skills. The first is the ability to shift emotional investment between people and activities as we age and change roles (child to parental caregiver, spouse to widow). The second type of emotional flexibility allows the person to freely express emotion,

but to move on from that emotion when it is no longer serving a purpose. Mental flexibility, in contrast to emotional flexibility involves the ability to be open to new ideas and new solutions at any age and actually move from old rigidly-held patterns of behavior or belief in response to new information.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Describe a time in your life when you experienced role change and how emotional flexibility or rigidity helped or hindered you in your adjustment to a new role.
2. Has anyone ever described you (or have you ever described another) as “set in your ways”? Do you really find yourself open to new ideas, or is that, perhaps, just the way you project yourself to others? And what about when the new ideas have to do with sacred cows like politics and religion?
3. Emotional flexibility also refers to a person’s ability to express their emotions fully when appropriate and subsequently be able to get their emotions “under control “ and move on. How do you think emotional inflexibility effects both self and others?
4. Describe how mental flexibility has assisted you in moving beyond a previously-held belief or pattern of behavior.

### **Closing Reading**

What then are the benefits of being mentally flexible? Imagine a storm brewing. Intense winds are blowing hard. Stiff trees are breaking under the pressure while softer more flexible trees are bending and will rise again when the strong winds subside. Now turn this image onto human beings. People who are narrow minded, opinionated, stubborn and bullheaded are more likely to crack under pressure than people who take up a more flexible attitude towards life. It is the difference between bending and breaking under pressure.

(Gudjon Bergmann, *Living in the Spirit of Yoga: Take Yoga Off the Mat and Into Your Everyday Life*)

### **Check- out and reflection on today’s session**

#### **Extinguish the Chalice**

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,  
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.  
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

### **Housekeeping**