

Spiritual Formation Reading Groups

The Spiritual Formation program has 3 important elements; practicing a spiritual discipline, and participation in both a friendship/accountability group and a reading group. Two of the articles you received in your packet, *PYM Spiritual Formation Program Groups Structures and Guidelines* by Margery Larrabee and *The Spiritual Companions Group* by Nancy Bieber, outline what happens in the friendship/accountability groups. These two articles are essential reading for both groups and can be read out loud if you wish during the first meetings of either group.

The reading group should be approached with the same attitude of deep, respectful non-judgmental listening described in both articles, but we felt it would be helpful to outline what happens in a reading group and answer some questions commonly asked by participants of the program. This is a living document so if you have other questions you'd like answered, we would be happy to add them.

How to Approach Readings

- Ideally you read/watch the selections bit by bit, as they are designed to be read/watched over the month.
- Can seem overwhelming at times, but the readings have been carefully chosen to assist you on your spiritual path.
- The goal of devotional reading is to be open to knowing what is expressed by the author.
- Go to your reading group meeting even if you didn't read that month; you can still be fully spiritually present for others and learn from them.

Reading Group Guidelines

- Meet once a month; bring the readings and your reading journal if you keep one.
- You will share your thoughts on the readings and will listen attentively to the other members of the group as each shares.
- You may wish to start with a short check-in after some silence to see how everyone's doing, but remember this is about the readings so don't take too much time on check-in.
- Everyone should have an equal amount of time to share and everyone has the right not to share if they don't want to.

How long does a Reading Group Session last? *Two hours give enough time for everyone to share at least twice and to have worship before and after any activity the facilitator has planned. There is always the option to pass or ask the group to come back to you only after all have shared and others get to speak a second time. At the end of the group take a few minutes to talk about how it went and what you'd like to change before closing worship.*

Is there a period of silence before the session starts and just before we leave the session? Yes, we think worship together centers the group.

Are questions and comments allowed in response to what a presenter shares? In general, no. We suggest you give each person a chance to share perhaps writing down their thoughts before they share. Then as they share their thoughts, we ask that the group listens deeply in a loving way and not comment. That way the group can give their full attention to the speaker and not worry about advice giving, problem solving or sharing their experience on the topic. Refer to the ground rules generated by the group and in the packet.

Is there a period of silence after a presenter speaks and before the next presenter speaks? Yes, that works very well. It allows the group to ponder and take in what has been said.

What is the facilitator's role in the session? The facilitator's role is to guide and plan the session -- to create something that will help people think about the relevance of the reading to their spiritual lives / avoid having a literature critic discussion. The facilitator may wish to use the "General Queries to Accompany Reading/Video List" document found on our website.

Remind people of the guidelines/ group rules. You may choose to call on people in order to avoid confusion during zoom so everyone gets an option to share. Or develop a way so everyone gets a chance to share.

This role changes for each meeting so all have a turn at being the facilitator.

What is the role of the elder? The role of the elder is to support the facilitator and to hold both the facilitator and the group in the Light. The facilitator may choose to call the elder before the meeting and share their plan. The facilitator may ask the elder to call everyone and remind them of the meeting or they may ask the elder to track who has not yet shared during the meeting. The elder is there to give the facilitator complete support and to uplift the group. Both the elder and the facilitator are welcome to take a turn in sharing. Read the one-page article entitled "Elders and Eldering in the PYM Spiritual Formation Program" in the participant packet.

This role changes for each meeting so all have a turn being the elder.

What is the role of the reading group members?

Listener – be open to what others are saying with caring; listen deeply (beneath the words, looking beyond the surface); and hold the speaker in the Light
And

Sharer – be open to sharing your thoughts/spiritual reflections on the readings and be cognizant of your time so all have a turn.

You will find yourself in either of these roles at different times during your meeting.

Roles when you share:

Connector

How can you connect what you read with what you have experienced? How is it the same or different?

Image Maker

What images come to mind as you read?

Implementer

How can you incorporate the reading into your spiritual life?

Inquirer

If you could interview the author, what question would you ask? Why?

Luminary

Which part of the reading really stuck with you? Why?

Which part of the reading really did not sit well with you? Why?

Word Watcher

Are there words that “stick in your craw?” Why?

Are there words that resonate with you? Why?