

# The First Parish Church of Groton, Small Group Ministry

## Session : Shadow Self

Facilitator / Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Supplies:** Chalice, matches, printed questions for each participant, pencils, pens

### 1. Chalice Lighting/Opening Words: 2 min

The inspiration for choosing this topic comes from a Feb. 6, 2011 Rev. Elea Kemler, First Parish Church of Groton Massachusetts, sermon: "Groundhogs, Dragons and Lambs in the Belly."

How could we forget those ancient myths...about dragons  
that at the last moment are transformed into princesses?  
Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are princesses  
who are only waiting to see us act, just once, with beauty and courage.  
Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence,  
something helpless that wants our love.  
~Rainer Maria Rilke

### 2. Check-in/Sharing: up to 30 min (Divide the time by number of participants, allowing for short interval of silence in between sharing.) Invite people to check in by sharing:

- *How is it with your spirit? –or–What has stirred your passion this week?*
- *And/or: Did you have any further thoughts about last week's topic?*

### 3. Topic: TOTAL TIME 60 min

#### A. Introduction and Questions: 5 min

When we were one or two years old we had what we might visualize as a 360-degree personality.

Energy radiated out from all parts of our body and all parts of our psyche.

A child running is a living globe of energy. We had a ball of energy, all right;  
but one day we noticed that our parents didn't like certain parts of that ball.

They said things like: "Can't you be still?" Or "It isn't nice to try and kill your brother."

Behind us we have an invisible bag, and the part of us our parents don't like,  
we, to keep our parents' love, put in the bag.

By the time we go to school our bag is quite large.

Then our teachers have their say: "Don't get angry over such little things."

So we take our anger and put it in the bag.

By the time my brother and I were twelve in Madison, Minnesota,  
we were known as "the nice Bly boys."

Our bags were already a mile long.

~Robert Bly, in Meeting the Shadow

The Shadow describes the part of the psyche that an individual would rather not acknowledge.  
It contains the denied parts of the self.

Since the self contains these aspects, they surface in one way or another.

The greatest power comes from accepting your shadow parts  
and integrating them as components of your Self.

~Carl Jung

Perhaps the most important reason to unpack the bag of our shadows  
is that there are hidden treasures in there.

Inside the bag there are aspects of ourselves waiting to be claimed and used.  
And often our shadows are transformed when we show those aspects of ourselves  
some compassion, when we give them a little light and air and understanding.

Our wounds and sorrows, our secret fears and desires,  
all that which we seek to deny or ignore in ourselves,  
can actually be a source of strength and liberation  
if we meet them with courage and compassion.

Striving for perfection cuts us off from our wholeness, our strength, our passion.

Our shadows contain the seeds of our light.

~Rev. Elea Kemler

**(Distribute Questions, last page, & Read out loud)**

**B. Silence for Reflection/Writing/Drawing: 10 min**

Invite group into 5-10 minutes of silence during which they are asked to reflect on the questions.  
Participants are invited to use this time for writing and drawing their responses if they wish.

**C. Sharing: 40 min**

Invite each person to share their response as they feel moved, rather than clockwise. Give each person  
equal time to share. *If time* after each person has shared, invite people into a more free flowing  
discussion of the theme. Coaches may need to direct the conversation back to the questions.

**4. Check-out: 10 min**

Encourage people to check out with a final thought or reflection about the theme (or any other thoughts  
about the session) and how the session might shape or impact their life in any way in the week ahead.

**5. Introduction of Next Week's Topic 1 min**

## 6. Closing Words 1 min

Help me to be a beginning for others,  
to be a singer to the songless,  
a storyteller to the aimless,  
a befriender of the friendless.

To become a beginning of hope for the despairing,  
...Of reconciliation for the divided.  
To become a beginning of freedom for the oppressed,  
Of comfort for the sorrowing,  
Of friendship for the forgotten.

To become a beginning of beauty for the forlorn,  
...Of wholeness for the broken,  
Of peace for the frightened and violent of the earth.

Help me to believe in beginnings,  
To make a beginning,  
To be a beginning,  
So that I may not just grow old,  
But grow new  
Each day of this wild, amazing life  
We are called to live.  
~Ted Loder

## 7. Blessing to Extinguish the Chalice 1 min

May the efforts we have made here today  
to listen with caring and compassion sustain us in the days ahead.  
May these efforts bring peace into our lives  
and into the lives of all those whom we touch.  
And now, may love surround us, may joy gladden us, may peace lie deep within.  
May our lives and the lives of all those we love go well.

# Questions for Reflection: The Shadow Self

1. Can you identify with Bly's idea that we've "gathered shadows in a bag" from an early age and that unpacking this bag enables us to live more authentically?
2. Do you agree with S. Kelley Harrell's statement: "You don't find light by avoiding the darkness"? Have you seen that by facing weaknesses or negative tendencies, you've gained opportunities to work on them?
3. Can you relate to the concept in David Whyte's poem: "What disturbs and then nourishes has everything we need".
4. What does Elea's statement mean to you: "Striving for perfection cuts us off from our wholeness, our strength, our passion"?
5. How do you strive to maintain your "authentic" self?