

Drumming from the Heart

Drumming from the Heart is an expression of religious faith in a drum circle that nurtures a spiritual experience of Rhythm as:

- ☉ Meditation
- ☉ Celebration
- ☉ Healing
- ☉ Community
- ☉ Discipline
- ☉ Wholeness

This brochure presents ‘drumming’ as an expression of Unitarian-Universalist faith. There are the sources of faith from which we draw inspiration. There are the principles of faith by which we play and pray together. There is individual and group experience of sacred space in sound.

Sources of Faith

Drumming from the Heart draws from Earth-Centered traditions. It is grounded in ancient wisdom of the “circle” as oneness. We all live with a natural rhythm, the pulse of a heartbeat. The Heart is a symbol of life on Earth.

We seek harmony with the natural rhythms of life around us and within us. We commune with those in the circle so we may all sense a unity with something greater. When we are centered on a common rhythm with soulful intent, we sense *monokos* – being one with the source of life.

Drumming from the Heart is a direct experience and expression of life. It is a spiritual exploration of the wonders and mysteries by blending various rhythms into a single pulse of vibrant energy. It is percussion *IMPROV* in which there is a common structure (rhythms) and an open flow (variations and overtones).

Rhythm is an experience of the Whole person – mind, heart, body, and soul. In the repetition,

Seekers unite in sharing our ‘outer self’ with others while we seek to touch the sacred with our ‘inner self’. The rhythm becomes a prayer...and drummers may sense *At- One-Ment*.

Principles of Faith

Inherent worth – each person is welcome to find a place within the circle. There is no qualification regarding level of expertise. Each person can participate at a level of comfort and can find one’s own style of playing. With each new group, each person must be a beginner, open to new ideas and experience. We encourage each person to give expression to one’s own inner light (or pulse).

Justice and Equity – There are no “mistakes” in Improv rhythms. Everyone should be committed to keep the poly-rhythmic patterns of the moment. Yet, patterns do break down, get boring, or extend beyond one’s comfort and ability. If you get lost, return to the basic rhythm. If it gets ‘too much’, then simplify and support others in the groove. If it gets boring, then add some variation, overtones, or spice to the space. “Mistakes” sometime happen when trying to hold on with the rational mind. Be willing to be a Holy Fool and follow the ‘stumbling’ to a new variation.

Acceptance and Encouragement – each group must establish itself as a sharing circle. Each person must be aware and listen to others in the circle. Each person must be willing to support and follow a base rhythm or some new variation as they happen. More experienced players should assist newcomers to get familiar with the instruments and in settling any apprehension. To play together, we must get to know each other by the way we play. At first, this is awkward. As the group achieves its own level of oneness, players that meditate can move deeper into knowing their inner self.

Free and Responsible Search – This is IMPROV drumming, experimental and experiential. There are some basic rules to respect instruments (use only

hands on hand drums, do not wear rings when playing hand drums, use mallets or sticks when appropriate). There are rules of respect to others (play with the group, play so you can listen to others, keep the beat). The search is how to explore and discover variations to the beat, to add overlays, and to create sacred space in sound.

Democratic process – the drum circle works with group consensus. Each person can share from prior experiences what they like. Depending on the group, the play may settle or vary on tempo (fast and slow); on volume (soft and quiet or loud and thunderous); and on number of variations the group can sustain. Within the group, leadership can alternate among different people to establish new rhythms.

Community – In a circle, seekers create a community for a sense of peace from everyday life, of harmony with others, and of unity with all life. The community is inclusive of others without regard to age or ability. It is multicultural and intergenerational sharing of ideas and traditions. The drum circle encourages dancers, singers, chanters, flutists, etc who want to share the beat.

Interconnected – At first, it can be a challenge and a bit awkward to get familiar with each other in a large group. It does take courage and patience to search and share with each other in community. It takes some time to settle into rhythms that touch the spirit. Then the group will start playing with enthusiasm. *Entheos* – means to be filled with divine spirit within one’s self. Entrusted and empowered to explore “as One”, players may experience an epiphany.

Community Building

Drum circles draw from an ancient and enduring wisdom that encourages a community in sacred space. At beginnings of new circles, we need to learn and be aware of different levels of experience and the size of the group.

With a small group, players can rotate instruments and leadership in ways so the group remains together – in sync.

For larger groups, arrange ensembles of like instruments. There should be a drum ensemble of three drum leaders. There should be section leaders for wood, shaker, and metal ensembles. Each ensemble can maintain its own rhythm and add overtones to the base rhythm. Individuals may try different ensembles.

Earth Centered – Heart Beat

Seekers create traditions to pass living values on to future generations. The Heart Beat is a symbol of all animal life. It is inclusive of all with a heart.

We can start each circle in grateful meditation on a “heart beat”. From our hearts, we open ourselves to share with all in the circle. Together, we seek to create a sacred space/sound by playing common rhythms.

Inherent Worth – All Beginners

Each new drum circle is a new experience. In this way, each player is a beginner. Some beginners need orientation to the drum circle and instruction on various instruments. Some beginners are more comfortable in following a beat or a leader.

In larger groups, players with more experience should be leaders who greet others and make them feel comfortable. Beginning leaders can explain some instruments and can lead a beat.

Justice, Equity, Compassion

A drum circle is about creating and sharing in spiritual community. The more experienced players have to establish a rhythm so all players can find their comfort in the group. It is important to provide newcomers with a chance to ask questions. Answers should help lessen any fear or uncertainty.

As a group, there is a need to balance the level of instruction and experimentation with sacred play. Instruction and experimentation helps players to transcend everyday concerns and to focus on the rhythm. As the group develops trust, there will be more variations and overtones, and more creative energy. If the group unites in At-One-Ment, then sacred play is prayer.

Acceptance and Encouragement

Each person joins the circle to unite in community. The circle is willing to expand and include others that want to co-create a beat. Each person must listen to the tempo and volume of the beat. Each person must do their best to follow the beat and any variations.

Players are encouraged to try different instruments. Each instrument has a different voice. Different people play the same instrument with unique styles.

Players are encouraged to lead a beat or an ensemble. Sharing a unique style adds to the depth and richness of the experience. “Feel like you are making a mistake” – then turn off your critical mind of worry and follow the Holy Fool to a new variation.

Free and Responsible Search

IMPROV drumming is a creative and challenging search for rhythm. Someone has to establish a clear and compelling beat for the rhythm. Others can follow the rhythm, echo in response, add

offbeat counterparts, or blend in overtones. Somehow, there is a marvelous bliss of focusing on the beat and yet sensing multiple levels of sounds in syncopated harmony.

As the circle is willing and able, the experience is enriched with dancers, or chanters, or non-percussion soloists. This sharing and supporting deepens the spiritual experience.

Democratic – Choice

You can have a choice in selecting an instrument to play, in picking a rhythm to follow, or even leading a rhythm. It is okay to share – “In my drum circle, we ...”. The circle strives to support all players in an experience of mystery and wonder. The circle strives to empower and encourage leadership.

Creative Community

IMPROV drumming is always a unique experience – it has never been done before. Contributing to a rhythm, you sense being part of a greater whole. Your willingness to learn, explore, and create will shape your spiritual experience in play. Play is prayer.

Interconnected - Oneness

IMPROV play is fun. The joy of creation provides a memorable experience. The exhilaration of soaring energy is boundless freedom. At times, some are able to forget their everyday selves. They can touch their inner soul in ways restore balance and wholeness.

When our hearts unite in rhythm, I am ready to play with you again. Let our play be our prayer.

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