

April Theme

Sacrifice: The Practice of Perseverance

The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But...the good Samaritan reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?' - Martin Luther King, Jr.

Introduction

Our modern ears are understandably sensitized by the myth-laden word 'sacrifice'. For many of us, it connotes old paradigms from childhood that may include unpleasant and unhealthy notions of self-denial, along with frightening beliefs about placating an angry God through arcane rituals. Throughout much of religious history, in pagan and monotheistic traditions alike, an emphasis on killing to appease some distant god or gods was a common theme. Over millennia, the movement has been one of human sacrifice to animal sacrifice to various modes of seeming self-sacrifice, usually involving the body.

From the perspective of our Unitarian Universalist faith, this is superstition wrapped up in an effort to invite the sacred. Indeed, the etymology of the word sacrifice comes from the Latin lexicon: 'sacre'- holy, sacred and 'facio'- to make or do- so, 'to make holy.' Understanding sacrifice to make some aspect of our lives or our very being holy is returning the word to its original, transcendent roots, an evolution in the understanding and meaning of sacrifice. We affirm in our covenant to 'act with works of love', and this may include forgoing our immediate wants. Sacrifice is defined as 'an act of giving up something valued for the sake of something else regarded as more important or worthy.' We can choose the greater good over the limiting returns of self-concern.

For our families and friends, for the values and causes we hold dear, and most importantly for our own well-being, we devote time, attention and resources; not in a selfish or egoistical way, but with the wider lens of seeing what's important in our life vs. doing what is easier or more desired in the moment. We can begin exploring sacrifice by reflecting on the hundreds of choices we make each day for the sake of something bigger than ourselves. Perhaps we skip a night at the movies to attend a teacher conference, or say no to certain foods we crave in pursuit of our wellness goals that help us to be more available to our loved ones. We may give time and resources to serve at soup kitchens or visit the elderly. We willingly join our spouse doing something they enjoy. Parents sacrifice time, money, and often their own needs for their children every day. Sometimes, our sacrifices feel like no burden at all and we may do so happily, but often the constancy of demands or the difficulties in staying true to our commitments can be daunting.

Practicing perseverance, defined as 'the continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition', will help us stay the course when giving up feels too great, while offering us opportunities to learn about ourselves and our ability to stay strong, even when tempted to abandon our values or the promises we have made to ourselves and others. As Louis Pasteur remarked late in life, "Let me tell you the secret that has led to my goal. My strength lies solely in my tenacity." The practice of perseverance can be made lighter by keeping in mind what we hold sacred, and by drawing on inspiration from a variety of sources: poetry, history, heroes like Gandhi and Dorothy Day, and heroes in our own neighborhood who rise above inordinate challenges. Persevering may help us expand our idea of what is possible by inviting into our hearts an inclusivity of love for everyone.

Lastly, we can ask the question, "What am I giving to?" instead of "What am I giving up?" If we aim to make our relationships holy, when we give our time and attention we can view such sacrifice as an affirmation of what we value. If we value justice and give of ourselves, we are giving to justice as a sacred goal vs. giving up a whole Saturday, for instance. This simple

This month's theme was composed by Katherine McHugh and the Worship Associates.

but profound shift in perspective can be of great assistance as we navigate sacrifice and the practice of perseverance. “Giving up” becomes a side note to the ever holy and ever expanding “giving to.”

Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, or with each other:

1. Is it a sacrifice when it doesn't feel that hard?
2. When it comes to living the values we espouse, what are we willing to sacrifice?
3. What may we sacrifice in our lives, the ultimate sacrifice, in service of or for the love of?
4. What is the relationship between sacrifice and freedom?
5. Where do you go for inspiration, and what sources sustain you as you persevere?
6. Where do you sacrifice in life and for what? When does it pay off? When does it cause you harm?
7. How do you persevere?
8. What in your life is worth persevering for?
9. When you have ‘fallen’ many times over something in life, how do you get up one last time, even when it feels futile?

Quotes and Short Readings

I stand on the sacrifices of a million women before me thinking what can I do to make this mountain taller so the women after me can see farther...

~ *Rupi Kaur*

Our ideals, like the gods of old, are constantly demanding human sacrifices.

~ *George Bernard Shaw*

True love is selfless. It is prepared to sacrifice.

~ *Sadhu Vaswani*

Perseverance is a great element of success. If you only knock enough and loud enough at the gate, you are sure to wake up somebody.

~ *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

A river cuts through a rock not because of its power but its persistence.

~ *Unknown*

Fall down seven get up eight.

~ *Japanese proverb*

You can have anything in life if you will sacrifice everything else in life for it.

~ *J.M. Barrie*

Continuous effort- not strength or intelligence-is the key to unlocking our true potential.

~ *Winston Churchill*

For more on this month's theme go to: <http://uuac.org/worship/themes-for-spiritual-practice/>

The Worship Associates are: Jen Ryan Brown, Alexandra Businger (chair), Alan Cantor, Erin Collier, Jess Jonas, Katherine McHugh, Megan Momtaheni, and Gary Strichartz.

Out of our unknowing and sacrifice we come, bearing our wounds, our wonders and our gifts.
~ *Alice Walker*

Nevertheless, she persisted.
~ *Senator Mitch McConnell*

The price of anything is the amount of life you are willing to exchange for it.
~ *Henry David Thoreau*

Only yesterday I was no different than them, yet I was saved. I am explaining to you the way of life of a people who say every sort of wicked thing about me because I sacrificed their friendship to gain my own soul. I left the dark paths of their duplicity and turned my eyes toward the light where there is salvation, truth, and justice. They have exiled me now from their society, yet I am content. Mankind only exiles the one whose large spirit rebels against injustice and tyranny. He who does not prefer exile to servility is not free in the true and necessary sense of freedom.
~ *Kahlil Gibran*

Sometimes when you sacrifice something precious, you're not really losing it. You're just passing it on to someone else.
~ *Mitch Albom*

The value of sacrifice is to advance a cause greater than ourselves. If we are unclear of the cause we are to advance, our sacrifice will become suffering.
~ *Simon Sinek*

Sacrifice that causes pain is no sacrifice at all. True sacrifice is joy - giving and uplifting.
~ *Mahatma Gandhi*

You were born as a sacrifice. And you can either participate in the sacrifice, dissolving in the giving of your gift, or you can resist it, which is your suffering.”
~ *David Deida*

Mental toughness is Spartanism with qualities of sacrifice, self-denial, dedication. It is fearlessness, and it is love.
~ *Vince Lombardi*

The important thing is this: to be able at any moment to sacrifice what we are for what we could become.
~ *Charles Du Bos (Approximations, 1922-37)*

Each player must accept the cards life deals him or her: but once they are in hand, he or she alone must decide how to play the cards in order to win the game.
~ *Voltaire*

Skillful attitudes of mind are the key to facing potentially explosive situations and the ongoing highs and lows of life and practice. In fact, recognizing these attitudes and cultivating their

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antidotes is the foundation for all spiritual growth. By cultivating skillful attitudes of mind, we will respond to more and more of life with awareness and wisdom. With steady awareness of the way things are, the perseverance to stay with that awareness, and the willingness to learn from it, we maximize our sense of well-being.

~ *Steve Armstrong, Got Attitude?*

A life well lived isn't party time with the airheads at the McClubs in Ibiza. And here's the inconvenient truth: it's going to take more than the tired old refrains of hard work, dedication, commitment, and perseverance. It's going to take very real heartbreak, sorrow, grief, and disappointment. Only you can decide how much is too much.

~ *Umair Haque*

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