

**All Souls Church Unitarian**  
**March 2015 Covenant Group Guide**

## **Sacrifice**

A noble purpose inspires sacrifice, stimulates innovation and encourages perseverance.

Gary Hamel

You don't drink the water if you don't dig the well.

Dolly Parton

Prayer is not a substitute for sacrifice. Prayer is sacrifice. What has changed is the substance of the sacrifice: the self took the place of the thing. The spirit is the same.

Abraham Joshua Heschel

The important thing is this: to be ready at any moment to sacrifice what you are for what you could become.

Charles Dickens

The things that will destroy us are: politics without principle; pleasure without conscience; wealth without work; knowledge without character; business without morality; science without humanity; and worship without sacrifice.

Mahatma Gandhi

[*Also recommended:* Stephen Covey's short commentary on each of Gandhi's points in the context of the work culture of this country, which you'll find excerpted at [www.mkgandhi.org/mgmnt.htm](http://www.mkgandhi.org/mgmnt.htm).]

### **Lenten Sacrifice and the Awareness of God**

In this holy season, we commemorate the forty days of fasting and prayer that Jesus experienced in the desert before he began his public ministry. Those days of temptations and self-denial reveal to us the resolve and the conviction of the Lord who leads us through the desert of our own adversity. Even though tempted to betray his mission and his heavenly Father's plan by succumbing to the devil's requests, Christ was always aware of his Father's sustaining presence. And it was precisely this awareness that consoled and strengthened him throughout his trials.

As we approach Lent, we must try to see that we are asked to bear incredible burdens and temptations in our lives, yet often without any real awareness of the presence of God. What we try to do in Lent is change our behavior and our vision, so that we can recognize the presence of the Lord. This isn't by any means easy to accomplish. Most of us find it hard enough to accomplish our Lenten promises without attaching this spiritual dimension to their completion. But it is in understanding and giving meaning to our sacrifices that they become for us a source of strength and an exercise of devotion

Lent isn't about senseless sacrifices; it's about meaningful ones. It's not a season for offering endless prayers, it's a time for offering honest ones. It's a season to come back to the Lord who calls us to return to him, and to avail ourselves of that great bounty which God has spread before us. Whether it be through fasting, prayer, almsgiving, penance, self-denial or whatever – give up what you will, but try to see the Lord in the sacrifices you make. However you get from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday is up to you. But above all, make this Lent a time when you learn to recognize Jesus Christ and the thanksgiving that we owe him for everything that we tend to think of as our own.

Rev. Nicholas Cirilloame, in *Spirituality for Today*

### **Sacrifice and the Alleviation of Poverty**

Can we conquer poverty? Yes and no. We can help individuals and groups find their way out of poverty, although development experts emphasize that the process must be collaborative.

But the bigger picture is more challenging. How much are those of us who are relatively rich willing to sacrifice to help those who are extremely poor? How unselfish can we really be as societies? Are we willing to be less rich and perhaps less powerful in order to help people we don't know become less poor and less powerless?

Poverty is not only an economic problem, but also a cultural and spiritual challenge. It takes not just money to defeat poverty, it takes moral will and personal sacrifice.

Dale Hanson Rourke, *The Skeptic's Guide to Global Poverty*

### **Sacrifice and Joy**

When we are lost in our self-preoccupation, we focus on what gives us an advantage over others, not realizing that self-preoccupation creates a momentum that can lead to unpleasant consequences in the future. Even a little self-sacrifice enables us to do much good for others. We need to develop the evolutionary perspective that the biological theory of karma encourages a long view that extends beyond this moment or even this lifetime. While we should take care not to deprive ourselves to the point of risking our own or our dependents' survival, we can also recognize that a little self-sacrifice in the service of others

moves us toward the supreme benefit of becoming enlightened, of awakening to true happiness and universal love.

When you live an evolutionary life, you understand causality in a way that is very different from how it is seen by someone who has only this lifetime in mind. You no longer grab what you can get right now, heedless of the consequences. If you manipulate others, using them for your own purposes, the karmic worldview implies that in your evolutionary future you will end up as a slave to others. But when you serve others, using yourself for their benefit, you become the master of the universe.

Sharon Salzberg, *How to Love Your Enemies*. . .

### **Sacrifices Can Look like Giving**

Sacrifice keeping a chocolate bar all to yourself and share it around. Now that's what I would call a love offering. Sacrifice some time that is precious to you, and give it away to someone who needs it. It seems that sacrifice can look a lot like giving. Sacrifice the safety of avoiding a difficult conversation, and find out if you can build new respect for someone. Rearrange your financial priorities and sacrifice, giving a gift of money that will bring change. Love offerings like this change how we understand ourselves. Cook something delicious, and give it to your neighbors. Sacrifice every crumb.

Rev. Beth Banks, *RevBanks@uudavis.org*

### **Sacrifice Can Be Healthy or Unhealthy**

There are two types of sacrifice: unhealthy sacrifice and healthy sacrifice. In my work, I have seen people try to use unhealthy sacrifice to save a marriage. It appeared to work at first, but love and dishonesty are not good bedfellows. I have seen lovers try to play small in a relationship so as to heal power struggles and avoid rejection. I have seen children get ill in an attempt to heal their parents' relationship. I have seen business leaders nearly kill themselves for their cause. Unhealthy sacrifice is often well-intentioned, but it never really works.

Healthy sacrifice is a different story. To be happy in a relationship, for instance, you have to be willing to sacrifice fear for love, independence for intimacy, defenses for joy and resentment for forgiveness. To be successful at work, you have to be willing to sacrifice being in control to allow for innovation and sacrifice chronic busyness for genuine success, for instance. . .

So, how much unhealthy sacrifice are you in right now? Sometimes the habit of unhealthy sacrifice is so unconscious we are the last to recognize it in ourselves. Would you be willing to sacrifice unhealthy sacrifice so as to shift your life and experience greater joy, love and abundance?

Robert Holden, *10 Steps to Letting Go*

## **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

1. What comes to mind when you hear or read the word “sacrifice”?
2. Did sacrifice play an important role in your religious upbringing? Is it an important concept in your current spiritual life?
3. Do you observe the Lenten season? If so, what is the relationship between sacrifice and Lent?
4. When have you made a sacrifice? How did you feel about the outcome?
5. Has attending All Souls changed your understanding of sacrifice? Do you think of your contributions to All Souls as sacrifices? What are you sacrificing and why?
6. Have you been inspired by someone’s sacrifice? If so, why?
7. Have you ever benefitted from someone else’s sacrifice?

Prepared for All Souls Covenant Groups by Mary Beth Hatem

**April’s theme: God**