

# ALL SOULS CHURCH, UNITARIAN

Covenant Group Guide

October, 2015

## “Blessing”

### About the Word “Bless”

The English words blessing and blood are closely related. The Old English *blod* came from Proto-Germanic *\*blodam*, a word that in a still earlier form may have meant “to swell, gush, spurt,” or “that which bursts out.”

Old English *bletsia*, *bledsian*, *bloedsian*, meant “to consecrate, make holy, give thanks.” Originally used for the act of sprinkling a pagan altar with blood, the word was adopted by Christian translators to render into English the Latin *benedicere* and Greek *eulogein*, which had been used to translate Hebrew *brk*, “to bend (the knee) in the act of worship.”

Towards the end of the Old English period, *bledsian* took on the meaning “make happy” because of the word’s resemblance to Old English *bliðs*, “bliss, merriment, happiness, grace, favor.”

Excerpted from Maeve Maddox for the blog, *Daily Writing Tips*

### Blessings Received

Much though he recites the sacred texts, but acts not accordingly, that heedless man is like a cowherd who only counts the cows of others — he does not partake of the blessings of the holy life.

Buddha (563–483 BCE)

When God increases our blessings, it is not meant to be our reward, it’s a call to do greater things as worthy tenants of His vineyard...

Mark 12:1-12

If one should give a neighbor a dish of sand and tell him there were particles of iron in it, he might feel for them with his finger in vain. But let the neighbor take a magnet and sweep through the sand, and the iron would be attracted to that magnet - particles, invisible to the eye a moment before, would be gathered by the magnet. The unthankful heart, like a finger in the sand, discovers no mercies. But let the thankful heart sweep through the day, and as the magnet finds the iron, so finds it every moment some blessings-only the iron in God's sand is more precious than anything on the earth.

Unknown

## God Moves in Mysterious Ways

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs,  
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan his work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.

William Cowper

On a gloomy, rainy morning, it came little eight-year-old Tommy's turn to say the blessing at breakfast. "We thank Thee for this beautiful day," he prayed. His mother asked him why he said that when the day was anything but beautiful. "Mother," said he, with rare wisdom, "never judge a day by its weather."

Unknown

## Blessings to Offer

The phrase "Blessed Be," which is pronounced with an emphasis on the final syllable of "blessed" (bless-ed), is nearly ubiquitous among Wiccans and many other neo-pagans. It is typically used as either a greeting or a farewell, much like the Christian "God bless you," Islam's "*salaam*," or the Jewish "*shalom*." In context, it is often understood as shorthand for "may you be blessed by the Goddess, . . ."

It ["Blessed Be"] has become an idiom and, as such, is linguistic shorthand not just for the blessing from which it came but for the act of blessing, itself. Its use as a greeting and farewell communicates two things. First of all, it confers a blessing upon the hearer but it also implies that the person who utters it is blessed as well. They're more than simply glad you're here. They're actually better for it—blessed, in fact.

Excerpted from Aaron Thorpe's answer to the question,  
"What Does the Wiccan Phrase, 'Blessed Be' Mean?" in the online publication, *Opposing Views*

“May the sun bring you new energy by day, may the moon softly restore you by night, may the rain wash away your worries, may the breeze blow new strength into your being, may you walk gently through the world and know its beauty all the days of your life.”

Apache blessing

### **For the Artist at the Start of Day**

May morning be astir with the harvest of night;  
Your mind quickening to the eros of a new question,  
Your eyes seduced by some unintended glimpse  
That cut right through the surface to a source.

From John O'Donohue's book of blessings, *To Bless the Space Between Us*  
(titled *Benedictus* in Europe, Ireland, and UK).

### **For Reflection and Discussion**

1. What does blessing mean to you? Is it a prayer? How is it different from saying a prayer? Is acknowledging a blessing different from feeling gratitude?
2. Is a blessing something we create or something we do? Do you say grace? Do you think of it as a blessing? If you say grace regularly, are you able to say your grace with presence?
3. Do you consciously create blessings? Why don't you give it a try and share your experience of the practice? What blessing would you create for yourself at the start of a day?
4. How does your experience of All Souls relate to your understanding of and experience of blessing and blessings?