

Theme for November – Sacrifice:

The Practice of Surrender

Introduction:

Etymologically, the term sacrifice comes from the root word *sacra* from which the word sacred is also drawn. In this sense, to sacrifice is to make sacred or to make holy. To make a sacrifice is to make an offering—to surrender something or some part of ourselves as part of a process of honoring something larger.

For many of us, the term sacrifice may instead connote images of animals slaughtered by priests or even of symbolic representations of Jesus' death on a cross. These Judeo-Christian roots of Unitarian Universalism have often left our faith critical or silent about notions of sacrifice. Sacrifice seems like a bloody word that justifies suffering, violence, and an unwilling surrender of will. Surrender can seem to mean simply giving up, giving in, or quitting.

As Unitarian Universalists, must we surrender any notion of sacrifice? How might sacrifice be understood in a way that leads us to new truths about what is sacred in our lives? Or, as poet Muriel Rukeyser cautions, must we “beware of those who talk about sacrifice”?

Likewise, must surrender only signal a difficult loss of control or defeat? How might surrender be received as a very important part of spiritual practice? Would it make a difference if we perceived surrendering as the humbling recognition of our limits, of the reality of impermanence and non-separateness, or of “wisely accommodating ourselves to that which we can't control”? (Sylvia Boorstein). In these ways, surrender is seen not as giving up, but as a giving over to another way of seeing the path to happiness and peace, to a holy life.

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

Does sacrifice require suffering? Does surrender require giving up?

Do you find in your day-to-day life feeling as if you are sacrificing something you really want to do or have, for the sake of something else? Are such sacrifices worth it to you? Why or why not?

Is surrender a concept that even crosses your mind on a regular basis? Or, in exceptional circumstances? Or, ever?

Is there really such a thing as sacrifice in life or are we simply making choices? Do we surrender or do we simply accept?

In a month that celebrates Veteran's Day, what does it mean to make sacrifices for the nation?

What sacrifices have you made as parents/friends/employees that have brought you spiritual growth and/or insight?

How have sacrifices that you have made brought you closer to a sense of the holy?

Reading and Quotations:

From the poet Muriel Rukeyser—

"I think there is a choice possible to us at any moment, as long as we live. But there is no sacrifice. There is a choice and the rest falls away. Second choice does not exist. Beware of those who talk about sacrifice."

From Wildmind (a blog on Buddhist meditation) -

Surrender is an important part of all spiritual practice. Ultimately it's what we're aiming to accomplish in practice.

What we're surrendering to is the reality of impermanence and non-separateness. In reality, everything changes and nothing (including ourselves) is separate or self-contained. But we have deep-rooted assumptions that we exist separately from the rest of the world, that there is something in us (and others) that is permanent and static, and that happiness can be found outside of ourselves. We believe that happiness is to be found in external conditions, rather than in changing our relation to the external conditions in which we live — which is why two people can be in the same situation, with one of them happy and the other miserable. So our view of ourselves and of where happiness comes from is at odds with how things really are.

We're left with the task of realigning our views with reality, and to do that we have to surrender those views, surrender the desires that those views give rise to, and surrender the actions to which those desires give birth. And we need to accept the reality of change, non-separateness, and that things "out there" can't bring us lasting happiness.

In letting go there's usually a sense of entering a much more profoundly satisfying way of being. We've laid down a burden that sometimes we didn't even realize we were carrying. We've broken fetters that were holding us back in ways we couldn't have known until we were free of them. And there's a sense of joy and fascination with the new way of seeing things.

From A Course in Miracles -

"Surrender" in our world sometimes has a negative connotation of giving up or admitting defeat, being beaten. Surrender often implies a loss of freedom, yet in the spiritual sense, surrender IS freedom. It is simply a release from all of the bondage and baggage that our human earthbound ways have taken on in error, a remembrance that sacrifice and struggle are entirely unnecessary. We have concocted illusions that have made us feel unworthy, and have assumed that sacrifice would be required in order to clear ourselves, in order to earn back our worthiness. So we punish ourselves with pain, thinking that it will serve as penance. In Christianity, for example, the cross represents sacrifice by Jesus. We are told that Jesus had to sacrifice for our wrongdoing, yet the message of Jesus was that sacrifice was all in our minds - that we could heal ourselves by simply remembering that we had that ability - that our pain was all in our minds.

The sacrifice idea becomes a very powerful tool to control us - to keep us feeling badly or that we have a debt to pay, to hold us down from true freedom and our Highest Selves. When we surrender to God, we are not bowing down in weakness as has often been portrayed; rather, we are lifting up into our strength and greatness, showing faith that we can move mountains, as we were told we could do, but seldom remember or believe. People and organizations that gain their power through fear and control do become vicious at times when we begin understand that sacrifice is unnecessary, when we circumvent them to surrender to our Higher Power. They can attack or heavily criticize in their fear, trying to whip us back into submission to their ideas, but others will know there is truth in our thoughts and actions, so we must hold fast and bringing others along in love and peace.

The Story of King Sibi, from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

King [Sibi](#) ruled over the kingdom of [Sibi](#) and was known for his [philanthropy](#). One day, [Indra](#) and [Agni](#) came to test the limits of the king's generosity. The two gods disguised themselves as a

hawk and a dove. The hawk started chasing the dove and the dove fell on King Sibi's lap trembling with fear. The hawk demanded the king to surrender the dove as its prey. The king refused saying that the dove had sought his protection.

After much argument the hawk agreed to leave the dove alone if the king would offer a piece of flesh from his own body which was equivalent to the weight of the dove. The king was more than happy to make such a sacrifice. Strangely, after endless slicing off his flesh and placing it on the scale, the king found that he could not equal the weight of the dove. The king threw his entire body on the scale and even then the scales tipped in favor of the dove. At this point the hawk and the dove revealed their true identity and praised the king for his unbounded charitable spirit.