



Chalice Circle Packet

October 2021

Sacrifice



Photo by [Martin Zaenkert](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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Unity Church-Unitarian, St. Paul, Minnesota

Unityunitarian.org

Sacrifice

To understand sacrifice today, in the third decade of the 21st century, let us begin not on the altars of ancient stories where living beings were given to flames; but rather in the repeated stories, then and now, demanding that old ways, cherished and familiar, be given up to the fires of our greater hopes, intentions and commitments. Let us pick up the biblical charge in which God says, “Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them,” and then continues, “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

Sacrifice, in one definition from the dictionary, is about “giving up something valued for the sake of something else regarded as more important or worthy.” In this understanding, it is an act motivated from within – an offering of something cherished made willingly because we’ve named something or someone else as claiming our hearts more fully. It gives up something to make way for the currents of a greater river, for the ever-flowing stream of life and justice.

My colleague Darrick Jackson recently wrote, “As a person of color who grew up working-class, sacrifice has had different ramifications for me than for someone white and middle-class. Often I was starting from a place of sacrifice, so adding another ranged from a deeper burden to ‘what’s one more thing.’” Then he added, “Now, I’m beginning to understand sacrifice differently. It does not have to be grounded in pain and suffering. What we are asked to do is create space for others to thrive. In our interconnected world, the ‘I’ needs to be in balance with ‘We.’”

What are we each asked to do to create space for others’ thriving – and for our own? What must we give up to support the earth’s thriving – and the wellbeing of all who depend on it?

These questions of sacrifice will lead us quickly to a wide range of answers such as: giving up a good night’s sleep to care for a loved one in pain; getting vaccinated or wearing masks; saving up or even leaving our homeland for our child’s needs, education or opportunity; sharing resources with those in the paths of fires or floods, hurricanes or drought; opening our homes to those in need of belonging, of relationship or shelter; cutting back on our consumption to address climate change; volunteering to lead a program at church; stepping up by voice or vote or protest to end racism’s oppressive force; offering our time, resources or talents to anything that creates space for thriving.

In this interim year of our congregational life, we are asked to give up the familiarity of some (not all!) of our old ways and identities to make room for the thriving of new ways and the possibility of growing into the congregation we aspire to become. We are asked to collectively answer the questions: who are we now and who do we wish to become? And what are we willing to give up in how we are now to make way for the future we desire?

In Anne Lamott's treasured instructions to writers, she describes the willing sacrifices required of true writers with words that equally apply to all of us committed to living and loving and creating the justice we long for. She writes, "You are going to have to give and give and give.... You have to give from the deepest part of yourself, and you are going to have to go on giving, and the giving is going to have to be its own reward."¹

Are we willing to sacrifice in that spirit? Are we able to commit our full lives to the fires of our own passions? To give ourselves to love? To let go, not only of the way things are that we no longer value, but also to willingly give up ways of being we might still cherish, openly or secretly, even though we know they contribute to the suffering or exclusion of others, of the earth, or of our own true selves?

What are we willing to do, to offer, to sacrifice to create space for the thriving of all, to truly give ourselves to love? In his poem, "let it go," e.e. cummings closes with this charge:

*let all go - the
big small middling
tall bigger really
the biggest and all
things - let all go
dear*

so comes love²

By Karen Hering on behalf of this month's theme team: Ahmed Anzaldua, Drew Danielson, Tom Duke, Ray Hommeyer, KP Hong, Kathy Hurt, and Laura Park.

¹ Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, NY: Anchor Books, 1995.

² *Complete Poems, 1904-1962*, e.e. cummings, NY: Liveright, revised edition, 2016.

Spiritual Practices

Option A

Fasting of food or other pleasures or activities

Religious observances of many traditions involve the practice of fasting—giving up food and/or drink for a set amount of time. In many religious teachings, fasting is about more than the discipline of giving up something desirable or needed; it is an expression of devotion and redirection of one’s attention to God, or what one names as holy. For instance, in some teachings, the time opened up by fasting is to be dedicated to prayer.

For this practice, choose something you will give up long enough to notice missing it (food, beverage, habits, conveniences, pleasures or activities). It can be a particular food or drink that you habitually enjoy; it might be all food or drink for a short time, or it might not be food at all. It might be social media or the internet; your cell phone; television; driving your car; using air conditioning or heat. You get the idea. Depending on what it is, you might give it up for a set amount of time each day for a week or more, or you might give it up entirely for a week or more. Whatever you choose to give up and for whatever amount of time, you’ll want it to be something you will miss intensely enough and for long enough that you will begin to notice choices that arise in its absence.

Pause each day, while you are fasting or giving this thing up, to record briefly (a sentence or paragraph is plenty) how you feel about doing without whatever you’re giving up. Then devote a longer amount of time to turn your attention toward the holy, whatever your definition of it. You might use the time freed up by your “fasting” to pray or meditate, to create art or music or poems, to put your hands in the dirt, to handwrite letters to a loved one, or any number of other ways of giving your attention to the sacred.

Before your circle meets, review your notes from day to day and your experience. Come to your group ready to share how your observations changed from day to day, what you discovered, and how you turned your attention toward the holy.

Option B

Sacrificing Voice or Silence

Many of us have a habit of regularly speaking up quickly or at length, or holding back and saying nothing. Each of these is an important gift to others around us, but sometimes our habitual ways keep us from noticing what a particular moment most needs. Giving up our habitual response can invite us to notice what is needed and whether it is ours to offer.

If you are a person who quickly or frequently speaks up in a group, this practice will be one of stepping back to listen instead. Sacrificing your need to be first to speak, or to say the most. This is not just about keeping silent, but as you do, actively listening with curiosity and without judgment, noticing and learning without adding your two cents until you've heard others speak first and processed what they've said.

If you are a person who most often remains silent, rarely speaking up or only speaking up after everyone else has before you, this practice will be one of stepping up to speak before others do. It might be hard to jump in. But notice both what you have to say and how others receive it, or how it might shape the conversation that follows.

In either of these practices, you might feel uncomfortable. It is a practice of giving up a habit, which then makes room for our attention to be more sharply attuned to ourselves and others. If you aren't sure whether you more frequently step up or step back, try both practices and notice how each feels. Many of us will speak up readily in one context while stepping back in another. Challenge yourself to give up the way that comes most easily. Notice what occurs—in yourself, in the responses of others, and in your conversations.

After a week or more of this practice, what have you learned about your habits of speaking or holding back, and how it impacts you and others and the conversations you have? More generally speaking, what do you notice about giving up the ease of a habit and doing something uncomfortable? How does this inform your understanding of sacrifice—its fruits, its challenges and your relationship to it?

Questions to Ponder

Read through the questions below and notice which one(s) resonate with you. One or more of the questions might seem particularly compelling – or some might stir resistance in you. Either of these reactions might make the question fruitful to consider. Choose just one and take time to consider it, over several days if possible. Write it down on a piece of paper you carry in your pocket. Or take a picture of that paper with your phone. Or record it in your journal—and spend some time, each day if you can, reflecting on it in writing or otherwise, noticing where it leads you and what you learn from it and your response to it.

1. When have you knowingly sacrificed something for someone you love? What did that mean to you? What did it mean to them? What did it mean for your relationship?
2. What makes something a sacrifice, in your understanding of the word? Does it matter what kind of cost it incurs—material or spiritual, in comfort or freedom, in opportunity or options? Does it need to be painful to be a sacrifice?
3. How do you know when to sacrifice something and when to say no? What will you *NOT* sacrifice or give up? Why?
4. Who determines what a is sacrifice? Is it in the “eye of the beholder” – named so by either the one sacrificing or the one witnessing it? Or can it only be known as a sacrifice in the heart of the one doing it?
5. Is it a sacrifice to give up something we have in plentitude? Is it a sacrifice if we haven’t given it up freely? Is it a sacrifice if we don’t need or miss what we’ve given up? Is it a sacrifice to give up something that came to us by chance, misappropriation or dishonesty? Why or why not?
6. How is sacrifice related to identity? How is your identity shaped or revealed by what you let go of and what you hold on to? How does your identity determine what you are willing or able to give up and what you will not give up?
7. How does privilege or power (in any of their forms)—or the lack of privilege or power— affect the demands and ethics of sacrifice?
8. Is sacrifice necessary to get from “I” to “we”? (See Darrick Jackson’s quote in the opening reflection.) Why or why not? What do the issues of our times teach us about this?
9. What is the relationship between sacrificing and thriving?
10. Think of a difficult sacrifice you have made. What did you learn from it that you would not have learned without making that sacrifice? How does that learning influence your response to the “Sacrifice” theme or to someone asking you to make a sacrifice today?
11. Is there a sacrifice you believe you should be making today but you’re not? What stands in the way of you making it? What would help you make that sacrifice?
12. **What is your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't name what life is asking from you now, spend the month listening to your heart to hear what your question is.

Resources

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. They will not be analyzed in our circles. Instead, they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get your thinking started and open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to develop a spiritual practice of curiosity.

Word Definitions & Roots

Sacrifice

(verb): To offer as a (religious) sacrifice; to suffer loss, give up, renounce, injure or destroy especially for an ideal, belief or end.

Word Origin:

Latin *sacrificium* : sacer, sacred; see sacred + facere, to make.³

Wise Words

“The law of every living thing is growth, through love, through willing sacrifice, or both.”

~Susan Griffin

“To love is to know the sacrifices which eternity exacts from life.”

~John Oliver Hobbes, AKA Pearl Mary Teresa Craigie

“An eight-year-old boy had a younger sister who was dying of leukemia, and he was told that without a blood transfusion she would die. His parents explained to him that his blood was probably compatible with hers, and if so, he could be the blood donor. They asked him if they could test his blood. He

said sure. So they did and it was a good match. Then they asked if he would give his sister a pint of blood, that it could be her only chance of living. He said he would have to think about it overnight.

“The next day he went to his parents and said he was willing to donate the blood. So they took him to the hospital where he was put on a gurney beside his six-year-old sister. Both of them were hooked up to IVs. A nurse withdrew a pint of blood from the boy, which was then put in the girl’s IV. The boy lay on his gurney in silence while the blood dripped into his sister, until the doctor came over to see how he was doing. Then the boy opened his eyes and asked, “How soon until I start to die?”

~Story told by Jack Kornfield and reported by Anne Lamott

“The important thing is to be able at any moment to sacrifice what you are for what you can become.”

~Charles Du Bos

“...to sacrifice means to let go of one's attachment to comfort and reach out to help another person or improve a situation, thus viewing life from a different perspective.... This is the disciplined work of

³ *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition* Copyright © 2009 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

attention to one's interior life and to the needs of others. This is the antithesis of laziness or a self-centered approach to reality."

"Sacrificing is a means of cutting back the weeds of our interior garden in order that we might more clearly see the real beauty of life.

Soul-Centered Spirituality for People on the Go
by Jim Clarke

<https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/view/28025/soul-centered>

Poetry

"Instructions," poem by Sheri Hostetler

Give up the world; give up self; finally give up God...

Full poem available at:

<http://www.ayearofbeinghere.com/2013/07/sheri-hostetler-instructions.html>

A Prayer for Sacrificing Ego, by Andrea La Sonde Anastos

In this time of re-alignment, may all that is holy
inspire me to resist the nine temptations of broken ego:
refusing to admit my mistakes,
claiming wisdom I do not have,
blaming others for my choices,
demonizing those who disagree with me,
threatening those who hold me accountable,
abandoning those who depend on me,
denying help to those who cannot return it,
shattering the hope of those who are vulnerable,
substituting easy lies for difficult truth.
From these nine may I be protected and defended
so that I may grow steadily toward
a generous heart,

a courageous vision,
and a transformed soul.

Excerpt from "Toad," poem by Kathryn Nuernberger

Somewhere in the mess of that morning
she'd become person enough to, in the
space between us,
create force of momentum, and then I did
not set her down,
but pushed her and she fell away from it
against the wall
and was crying because I, her mommy,
pushed her. And I know
this should be the poem about how I'm
horrified at myself,
the poem about what in ourselves we have
to live with,
but in that moment which followed two
years of breastfeeding
and baby-wearing and sixty-nine hours of
natural childbirth
and the hemorrhaging and the uncertain
operation, after which
I pumped every two hours, careful not to let
the cord tangle
in the IV. Even then when she cried and no
matter what
and no matter and no matter and no matter
and no matter what,
I held her all night if she cried so she would
not ever know
someday you'll cry alone, but I held her and
ached and leaked
and bled too as long as it took."

Full poem at:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/147047/toad-5b194b48a2505>

"Questionnaire," poem by Wendell Berry

How much poison are you willing to eat for the success of the free market and global trade?...

Full poem available at:

<https://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/index.php%3Fdate=2014%252F03%252F22.html>

"Kindness," by Naomi Shihab Nye

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBYzMsUVvtQ>

.... What you held in your hand, what you counted and carefully saved, all this must go so you know how desolate the landscape can be between the regions of kindness....

The above link is to a reading and commentary on the poem's origin by Naomi Shihab Nye. For the full text of the poem, visit:

<https://poets.org/poem/kindness>

Articles/Podcasts/Stories

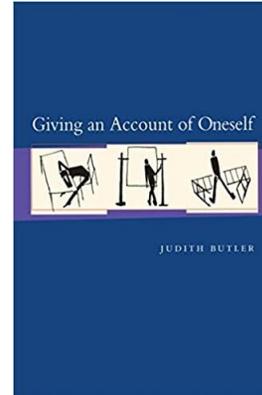
"My Immigration Story," Ted Talk by Tan Le

In 2010, technologist Tan Le took the TEDGlobal stage to demo a powerful new interface. But now, at TEDxWomen, she tells a very personal story: the story of her family -- mother, grandmother and sister -- fleeing Vietnam and building a new life.

https://www.ted.com/talks/tan_le_my_immigration_story?language=en

Books

Giving An Account of Oneself, by Judith Butler, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005.



From Goodreads: What does it mean to lead a moral life? In her first extended study of moral philosophy, Judith Butler offers a provocative outline for a new ethical practice--one responsive to the

need for critical autonomy and grounded in a new sense of the human subject....

In this invaluable book, by recasting ethics as a project in which being ethical means becoming critical of norms under which we are asked to act, but which we can never fully choose, Butler illuminates what it means for us as "fallible creatures" to create and share an ethics of vulnerability, humility, and ethical responsiveness.

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/171254.Giving_an_Account_of_Oneself

Kindred, by Octavia Butler, Boston: Beacon Press, 2004 (first published in 1979)



From Goodreads: The first science fiction written by a black woman, *Kindred* has become a cornerstone of black American literature. This combination of slave memoir, fantasy, and

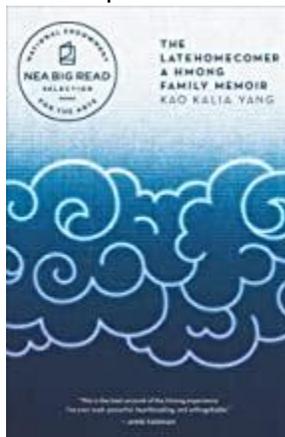
historical fiction is a novel of rich literary complexity. Having just celebrated her 26th birthday in 1976 California, Dana, an

African-American woman, is suddenly and inexplicably wrenched through time into antebellum Maryland. After saving a drowning white boy there, she finds herself staring into the barrel of a shotgun and is transported back to the present just in time to save her life. During numerous such time-defying episodes with the same young man, she realizes the challenge she's been given...

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/60931.Kindred>

[The Latecomer, by Kao Kalia Yang,](#)

Minneapolis: Coffeehouse Press, 2017



An inspiring and eye-opening memoir about the sacrifices made by Kao Kalia Yang's parents.

Publisher's description: Yang's award-winning memoir of her family's harrowing escape from war in

Laos is a love letter to her grandmother, a troubling portrait of the consequences of U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia, and a glimpse into the little-seen exodus of the Hmong people, first to refugee camps in Thailand and then, for many, to new homes in Minnesota.

<https://coffeehousepress.org/products/latehomecomer>

Movies

[CODA.](#)

The film title is an acronym for Child of Deaf Adult. The story centers around a family of four who all work together in the family fishing business, but the daughter, in senior

high, is the only hearing member of the family. How much of your own life, hopes and dreams are you willing to sacrifice for your family, and how much is your family willing to sacrifice so you can fulfill them? Winner of the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance Film Festival.

View the trailer here:

<https://youtu.be/0pmfrE1YL4I> More

information about the film is available here:

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10366460/>

Music

For a playlist inspired by the opening reflection on this month's theme and prepared by a Unity member, visit this Spotify link. (Note: you may have to register for a free Spotify account to listen to more than 30 seconds of each song.)

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/30wUSKUyOYogEMqTyOEdvA?si=7e07594de8c748c3>

Notes on performers featured in the Spotify music playlist

Yola – “Diamond Studded Shoes”

Yolanda Claire Quartey (born 31 July 1983), known professionally as Yola or Yola Carter, is an English musician, singer and songwriter. Yola received four nominations at the 62nd Grammy Awards, including the all-genre Best New Artist category.

New Basement Tapes - “Lost on the River #20”

The New Basement Tapes is a British-American musical supergroup made up of members Jim James, Elvis Costello, Marcus Mumford, Taylor Goldsmith, and Rhiannon Giddens. The group is best known for *Lost on the River: The New Basement Tapes*, their 2014 album which consists of tracks

based on newly uncovered lyrics handwritten by Bob Dylan in 1967 during the recording of his 1975 album with The Band, *The Basement Tapes*. The group is also featured in the 2014 Showtime documentary *Lost Songs: The Basement Tapes Continued*.

Depeche Mode - "Get the Balance Right!"

Depeche Mode are an English electronic music band formed in Basildon in 1980. The group consists of a trio of Dave Gahan (lead vocals and co-songwriting), Martin Gore (keyboards, guitar, co-lead vocals and main songwriting) and Andy Fletcher (keyboards).

Derek and the Dominos - "Keep on Growing"

Derek and the Dominos was an English-American blues-rock band formed in the spring of 1970 by guitarist and singer Eric Clapton, keyboardist and singer Bobby Whitlock, bassist Carl Radle and drummer Jim Gordon. All four members had previously played together in Delaney & Bonnie and Friends, during and after Clapton's brief tenure with Blind Faith. Dave Mason supplied additional lead guitar on early studio sessions and played at their first live gig. Another participant at their first session as a band was George Harrison, the recording for whose album *All Things Must Pass* marked the formation of Derek and the Dominos.

Moana Soundtrack - "Know Who You Are"

Moana: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack is the soundtrack to the 2016 Disney animated film *Moana*. The soundtrack was released by Walt Disney Records on November 19, 2016. It features songs written by Lin-Manuel Miranda, Mark Mancina and Opetia Foa'i, with lyrics in English, Samoan, Tokelauan, and Tuvalu.

The two-disc deluxe edition includes the score, which was composed by Mancina, as well as demos, outtakes and instrumental karaoke tracks. The record also produced two singles.

U2 - "With or Without You"

U2 are an Irish rock band from Dublin, formed in 1976. The group consists of Bono (lead vocals and rhythm guitar), the Edge (lead guitar, keyboards, and backing vocals), Adam Clayton (bass guitar), and Larry Mullen Jr. (drums and percussion). Initially rooted in post-punk, U2's musical style has evolved throughout their career, yet has maintained an anthemic quality built on Bono's expressive vocals and the Edge's chiming, effects-based guitar sounds. Their lyrics, often embellished with spiritual imagery, focus on personal and sociopolitical themes. Popular for their live performances, the group have staged several ambitious and elaborate tours over their career.

Tom Petty - "Time to Move On"

Thomas Earl Petty (October 20, 1950 - October 2, 2017) was an American singer, songwriter, musician, record producer, and actor. He was the lead vocalist and guitarist of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, formed in 1976. He previously led the band Mudcrutch, and was also a member of the late 1980s supergroup the Traveling Wilburys.

Birdy + Rhodes - "Let It All Go"

"*Let It All Go*" is a song by British musician, singer and songwriter Rhodes and English musician Birdy. It was released as a digital download on 11 September 2015 in the United Kingdom, as the second single from Rhodes' debut studio album, *Wishes* (2015). The song was written and produced by Rhodes and Birdy.

All information is taken from Wikipedia.