



# Spiritual Practice Packet

April 2023

*Sacrifice*



Borodyanka, Ukraine

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Unity Church-Unitarian, St. Paul, Minnesota

[Unityunitarian.org](http://Unityunitarian.org)

# *Sacrifice*

“You know what a sacrifice fly is, right?” I must confess, despite having a sermon in the Baseball Hall of Fame, I never did learn the nuances which make baseball, for some, a deeply spiritual and theological game. So, Drew Danielson, Coordinator of Youth Ministries, explained, “A sacrifice fly means that a batter chooses to hit a fly ball to advance another runner who is on the field. It’s a sacrifice because the batter doesn’t get to advance themselves. They sacrifice their opportunity to make a run and to advance their own batting score. It has a personal cost to the one who hits the fly ball, but it’s the thing the team needs.”

The theme of sacrifice is a richly complex one. We often look at the root of a word to understand its origin, and in our case, sacrifice is derived from the Latin root word *sacere* or, to make sacred. I wondered then, does hitting a fly ball really rise to the level of sacrifice? How is this effort sacred? (For true baseball fans, the answer is obvious.)

The sacred part of sacrifice means that it costs us something. In ancient Israel, the greater the sacrifice, the greater the hoped-for reward. By giving up something that you think you need, or something you cherish dearly, you would “get” something in return. Sacrifice in Hebrew Scriptures was a devotional practice which could be interpreted as a *quid pro quo* relationship with Yahweh | God: “I give up something — and I get something in return...” Later on, the prophet Amos challenges the centuries old practice of sacrifice. Channeling Yahweh | God, he writes, “Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them...” Amos then proposes an alternative to the grain, flesh and blood sacrifices. He continues, “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” What these scriptures suggest is that not all sacrifices are the equivalent. These scriptures ask their reader (and us) to dig deeper into the practice of sacrifice.

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.

Within this definition, we are encouraged to think of sacrifice not as a duty that changes our circumstances or others — but more importantly us. One of the indicators of something becoming sacred is that it enacts a kind of moral transformation in the way we regard one another. Am I willing to sacrifice the benefits of white privilege so that all may live with greater equity and justice? Am I willing to give up the ease of using plastic with the hope of reducing the trillions of microplastics found in our water? Am I willing to give up my cherished individualism for a greater, more wholistic and resounding “we?” When we start asking ourselves these questions, the idea of sacrifice is not a far away or long-ago discipline. It’s a practice of the here and now.

We can’t explore this theme of sacrifice without acknowledging that dominant and capitalist culture has demanded the sacrifices of those from historically marginalized communities. Women, people of color, poor people, LGBTIQ+ communities have all received messages that their

identities, needs, ambitions and desires should be sacrificed on the altar of efficiency and conformity. In an article on this theme, authored by Rev. Karen Hering, she quotes Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association Co-Executive Director Darrick Jackson. Reflecting on this reality, Jackson 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?

As we consider this month’s theme of sacrifice, think of the many ways in which you sacrifice your own needs for the good of another. Then consider the ways in which you have been asked to let go of something that’s important to you. How do you feel about both of these opportunities? Jot those thoughts down in a journal and revisit them at month’s end.

*By Rev. Kathleen Rolenz on behalf of this month’s theme team: Rev. Andrea Anastos, Drew Danielson, Rev. KP Hong; and referencing Rev. Karen Hering’s reflection on sacrifice.*

# ***Spiritual Practices***

## ***Option A:***

### ***Sacrifice***

The word 'sacrifice' comes from old Latin roots that mean 'to make sacred.' If we honor the interdependent web of the universe, it seems we would want to ensure its wholeness and beauty, its well-being, and its sacredness in all its diverse aspects. Therefore, we could consider acting in ways that empower thriving throughout the web to be 'sacrifice' in its purest sense.

Below is a litany of sanctifying. You are invited to read it and to pause between the lines to consider how you might enact that form of sacredness today. You may want to read the whole litany each day of this month. (If you do this in the evening, you might consider how you will live into the sacrifice when you awaken in the morning.) An alternative would be to read one of the seven lines each day and concentrate on that single focus, moving four times through the entire litany over the course of a month.

- This day I sacrifice my time, bringing my full attention to the moment, blessing its arrival and its passage. [Pause]
- This day I sacrifice my agenda, allowing it to respond to the needs of the whole, appreciating and enacting flexibility, compassion, and vision. [Pause]
- This day I sacrifice my pride, enfolding myself in the refreshment of humility, so that I may be blessed by the wisdom of others. [Pause]
- This day I sacrifice my wealth, stewarding all that is, apportioning carefully to insure that each part receives what is necessary for thriving. [Pause]
- This day I sacrifice my privilege, using it to nurture and sustain the circles of relationship that hold all creation in beloved community. [Pause]
- This day I sacrifice my success, accepting that it is not mine alone, but the work of the generations on whose shoulders I stand, and bequeathing it to those who stand on mine. [Pause]
- This day I sacrifice my love, offering it with open heart to each being who crosses my path today, especially to those who spurn it, trusting that its seeds will flourish even in rocky soil. [Pause]

## ***Option B: 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. This month, our Muslim neighbors are observing Ramadan, which is their month of fasting from sunrise to sunset. We might choose to join them in this practice as a way of tapping into the wisdom of an important spiritual practice.

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; or 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.

If you are a member of a Chalice Circle or similar group, review your notes before your group meets. 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.

## ***Questions to Ponder***

Read through the questions below and notice which ones 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. A form of sacrifice is creating space for others to thrive. Can you name some things you have sacrificed and then name how your sacrifices helped others to thrive?
2. If sacrifice is a form of sacred (holy) giving, what do you find easiest to sacrifice (for instance: time, money, possessions, plans, etc)? What do you find hardest to sacrifice?
3. Who determines what is a 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?
4. What is the most life-changing sacrifice you have made? What inspired you? How has it changed your vision of yourself?
5. 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?
6. What are you willing to sacrifice (for instance: success, lifestyle, security, comfort, etc.) to realize your highest value? What have you already sacrificed for that value?
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. 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?
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. **What is your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don’t name what life is asking of you now, spend the month listening to your heart to hear what your question is.

# *Inspiration*

## **Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection**

These resources are not required reading. They may not be analyzed in our sermons, newsletter, Chalice Circles, Wellspring, or other programs. 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 sacrifice. The hope is not that you will engage them all or even most of them; rather, the variety here will offer you at least several access points to the theme that invite you to consider it thoughtfully and with new insights.

### ***Word Definitions***

#### ***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.

### ***Wise Words***

Life's most persistent and urgent question is, "What are you doing for others?"

~Martin Luther King, Jr.

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

~Charles Du Bos

If you really love one another, you will not be able to avoid making sacrifices.

~Mother Teresa

Abundance consists not in a wealth of stuff, but in a wealth of relationships, solidarity, exchange, and trust.

~Liuana Huska

We can always be sure of one thing — that the messengers of discomfort and sacrifice will be stoned and pelted by those who wish to preserve at all costs their own contentment. This is not a lesson that is confined to the Testaments.

~Christopher Hitchens

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.

~Jim Clarke

When you make the sacrifice in marriage, you're sacrificing not to each other but to unity in a relationship.

~Joseph Campbell

### ***Poetry***

#### ***Questionnaire***

by Wendell Berry

How much poison are you willing to eat for the success of the free market and global trade? Please name your preferred poisons.

For the sake of goodness, how much evil are you willing to do? Fill in the following blanks with the names of your favorite evils and acts of hatred.

What sacrifices are you prepared to make for culture and civilization? Please list the monuments, shrines, and works of art you would most willingly destroy.

In the name of patriotism and the flag, how much of our beloved land are you willing to desecrate? List in the following spaces the mountains, rivers, towns, farms you could most readily do without.

State briefly the ideas, ideals, or hopes, the energy sources, the kinds of security; for which you would kill a child.

Name, please, the children whom you would be willing to kill.

<https://bit.ly/3FOjxOQ>

### ***The Lanyard***

by Billy Collins

The other day I was ricocheting slowly off the blue walls of this room, moving as if underwater from typewriter to piano, from bookshelf to an envelope lying on the floor, when I found myself in the L section of the dictionary where my eyes fell upon the word lanyard.

No cookie nibbled by a French novelist could send one into the past more suddenly—a past where I sat at a workbench at a camp by a deep Adirondack lake learning how to braid long thin plastic strips into a lanyard, a gift for my mother.

I had never seen anyone use a lanyard or wear one, if that's what you did with them, but that did not keep me from crossing strand over strand again and again until I had made a boxy red and white lanyard for my mother.

She gave me life and milk from her breasts, and I gave her a lanyard.

She nursed me in many a sick room, lifted spoons of medicine to my lips,

laid cold face-cloths on my forehead, and then led me out into the airy light

and taught me to walk and swim, and I, in turn, presented her with a lanyard. Here are thousands of meals, she said, and here is clothing and a good education. And here is your lanyard, I replied, which I made with a little help from a counselor.

Here is a breathing body and a beating heart, strong legs, bones and teeth, and two clear eyes to read the world, she whispered,

and here, I said, is the lanyard I made at camp. And here, I wish to say to her now, is a smaller gift—not the worn truth

that you can never repay your mother, but the rueful admission that when she took the two-tone lanyard from my hand, I was as sure as a boy could be that this useless, worthless thing I wove out of boredom would be enough to make us even.

### **38**

by Layli Long Soldier

*Excerpt:*

You may or may not have heard about the Dakota 38.

If this is the first time you've heard of it, you might wonder, "What is the Dakota 38?"

The Dakota 38 refers to thirty-eight Dakota men who were executed by hanging, under orders from President Abraham Lincoln.

To date, this is the largest "legal" mass execution in US history.

The hanging took place on December 26, 1862—the day after Christmas.

This was the same week that President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

Read and listen to the poem being read at *On Being*: <https://onbeing.org/poetry/38/>



## **Prayer**

### **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.

## **Articles/Online Resources**

### **Parenting – sacrificial, symbiotic or parasitical**

by Meena Iyer

*Excerpt*

What makes parenting such a must do? By around 30 years, most of us have decided and embarked on our chosen career paths and we have found the one we want to spend the rest of our lives with in a significant partnership. The what next question comes up and we decide to do what our parents did. Have a child. He or she will bring joy and purpose to our life. The real experience of parenting is not all joy or always joy as we know and yet having taken the plunge we soldier on, waiting for it to get better and definitely easier. We imagine, when the sleepless nights are done, when

the child is toilet trained, travel worthy, movie hall / restaurant friendly, day-care / sleep-over amenable, homework, tuitions, tests and exam savvy and on.... We capture our memories, share them with friends and family, write birthday posts lauding our offspring on their academic, sport and artistic achievements, take holidays with them, plan their college paths, then weddings????? Pause.

How did this happen? Joy is all fine. When did the child/children become the purpose of our existence and how healthy is it?

[Parenting – sacrificial, symbiotic or parasitical \(indiatimes.com\)](http://indiatimes.com)

### **How Does a Sacrificial Moral Ethic (#losing) Help Parents Navigate Youth Sports (#winning)?**

by Margot Starbuck

Along with another dad, Ed coached the soccer team his five-year-old son, Justin, played on through the town's parks and recreation department. The team practiced Tuesday nights at six o'clock and played a game every Saturday morning. Both coaches believed that, win or lose, their aim was to give the kids some exercise, teach them a few skills, and set them free to have fun

One Saturday, Justin's mother, Jennifer, began to hear anxious conversations between the families who were seated in the bleachers with her. Tryouts were coming up for a local elite soccer club. Although Jennifer wasn't convinced that elite was a good descriptor for a class of humans who still couldn't get all their urine in the toilet, she listened in.

"I don't really want to pay four hundred and fifty dollars or drive to practices three nights a week or travel to tournaments on weekends," Jennifer's friend Amy moaned. "But I feel like I owe it to her."

And there it was. Amy had spoken aloud what the niggling little voice had whispered in Jennifer's ear: *You owe it to him. He deserves it. All the other kids are doing it. Other parents are willing to sacrifice for their children to play. Don't be selfish. If you care about him . . .* <https://bit.ly/40nJ6hY>

## ***On Self-Sacrifice***

by Alex Anderson

*Excerpt:*

While individual acts of selflessness might be costly, making a habit of acting selflessly yields cumulative rewards. American journalist and writer Joan Didion hints at this in a thoughtful description of self-sacrifice, which, she says, “is the sense that one lives by doing things one does not particularly want to do, by putting fears and doubts to one side, by weighing immediate comforts against the possibility of larger, even intangible, comforts.” She suggests that the daily succession of simple, inconvenient choices—to work a little harder, to take small risks, to help out despite the hassle—is likely to lead toward better things.

<https://www.kinfolk.com/on-self-sacrifice/>

## ***Living a Life of Abundance Starts with Community***

by Liuan Huska

*Excerpt:*

Abundance is less about how much we have and more about how much we share.

In a world rapidly running out of arable land, fossil fuels, and healthy soil and water, how do we rightly interpret a theology of abundance?

Under a malformed capitalist mindset, we’ve confused God’s abundance with an illusion of prosperity as unlimited resources and growth. Advertising tells us that we’ll be happy when we have more stuff, so we mistake abundance to mean material wealth. This logic gets truly obscene among the piles of buffet food, closets of barely worn fast fashion, McMansions, and other ways our sick society defines plenty.

## ***Centering Theology: A Conversation About Faith, Race, and Liberation***

by Dr. Elias Ortega

*Excerpt:*

If we believe in collective salvation, we must also believe in collective sacrifice. It is powerful that our faith community is working to reclaim this sacred practice... and claiming what is meant to be sacred

in personal sacrifice without the power of we is the very thing that desecrates the practice.

That belief in collective salvation means there cannot be small groups of UUs whose personal sacrifice we depend on every time to move us forward as a collective whole. That kind of hierarchical membership undermines the very inherent worth and dignity that we lift in our first Principle. Living into the Power of We [the theme of the 2019 General Assembly] holds us accountable to repairing the legacy of theological harm we have perpetrated against some in our community.... Even in the face of oppression, suffering, and the legacy of white supremacy culture in the world, we believe that there is a way forward. We aspire to transform and be transformed by love and justice, and to take a cue from disability justice activist Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, who details how often we draw resources for resistance from systemic oppression. To affirm the Power of We as a faith community, we need to strengthen ways for our people to draw nourishment and strength from this faith. We must fashion ourselves into a faithful people who draw wisdom from our inherited tradition. This is not an individual task but a collective practice.

Excerpted from a theological presentation at the 2018 UUA General Assembly

<https://bit.ly/3TrWyhU>

## ***Does “Abundant Life” Include a Living Wage?***

by Edith Rasell

*Excerpt:*

In a just economy, everyone who wants a job has one, and it pays a living wage, sufficient for workers and their families to thrive. Everyone’s material needs — for nutritious food, safe and secure housing, transportation, clothing, utilities, education, health care, and economic security — are met. Economists call this full employment in living wage jobs, and it is a goal of many justice advocates. It is also God’s vision for society. Jesus told the disciples that he came so all may have abundant life (John 10:10). As Jesus showed,

God's vision encompasses more than abundant spiritual life. Jesus understood that God's vision of abundance encompasses material needs as well as spiritual ones. Jesus healed broken bodies. He fed hungry people and encouraged others to do so as well. In God's reign, everyone's material needs are filled. But how does God envision this to happen?

### ***Social investing: Putting your money where your values are***

by Andy Loving

*Excerpt:*

If we are fortunate enough to have savings, an IRA, or a pension, could those assets be invested in vehicles that directly benefit the whole of God's creation? Fortunately, the answer is "yes." Our savings can actively benefit God's wider community and be there when we need it. Our investments can support our faith values and grow for retirement. By thoughtfully choosing where we bank and invest, we can make a significant difference in the world.

This article includes suggestions for Socially Responsible Investing, including Screened Investing, Shareholder activism, and Community investing.

<https://bit.ly/40XgA6L>

### ***The Meaning of Sacrifice***

by Sue Browning

This article summarizes the meaning of sacrifice, as well as the uses and misuses of sacrifice. Ideally, sacrifices are made in service to something more important or valuable than that being sacrificed. But, in some cases, what we are sacrificing is more important than the outcome, with the case in point being the sacrifice of children for the right to own assault weapons. How long are we as a society, in which we are all complicit, going to tolerate this great sacrifice for what many of us do not agree should be a right at all?

*Excerpt:*

In ancient times, rituals offering sacrifice to the gods were a part of worship. In Mesopotamian thought, sacrifice was to provide the gods with the necessities of life. For the Israelites, they were in this same geographic region and had their own emerging sense of sacrifice. Their worship was closely tied to making sacrificial offerings and priests implemented the sacrificial rituals using only certain animals and vegetables. The animals needed to be unblemished; sacrifice was about giving your best as an offering. Sacrifices showed honor to God, and, most importantly, sacrifices were a path to encounter God. Sacrifices helped align the people with the will of God. For them an external showing of ritual sacrifice was not enough; sacrifice was to change the internal commitment of those partaking in the ritual. Sacrifice was seen as necessary and of high value.

This is sacrifice in a religious context. A common definition of sacrifice is 'an act of giving up something valued for the sake of something else regarded as more important or worthy.' It is about difficult choices in secular as well as in religious contexts. Sacrifice is often about the path not taken and what was given up in order to pursue another direction. And with deep sacrifice, there is often grief and pain which comes with loss.

<http://uufeaston.org/sunday-services/sermons/the-meaning-of-sacrifice/>

## ***Books***

### ***The Way of Abundance: Economic Justice in Scripture and Society***

by Edith Rasell



In *The Way of Abundance*, economist and minister Edith Rasell examines Old and New Testament teachings on economic justice in the context of the ancient economic systems and circumstances they addressed. Drawing on the biblical narrative and on research from the social sciences, Rasell examines three eras--the ancient Israelites' settlements in Canaan, the time of the monarchies,

and first-century Palestine--and describes the transition from a non-monetized, subsistence-based economy to a commercial one with wage labor, product markets, and a surplus that benefited a tiny elite. But across this vast expanse of time and economic transition, the Bible called for a just economy. And its vision of economic justice can be a vision for justice seekers today. The book concludes with specific public policy proposals and personal practices that would move contemporary society closer to the Bible's economic vision.

Goodreads: <https://bit.ly/3Zgqfnl>

## Movies

### **Casablanca**

Directed by Michael Curtiz, 1942

A cynical expatriate American cafe owner struggles to decide whether or not to help his former lover and her fugitive husband escape the Nazis in French Morocco.

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0034583/>

### **Amour**

Directed by Michael Haneke, 2012

Georges and Anne are an octogenarian couple. They are cultivated, retired music teachers. Their daughter, also a musician, lives in Britain with her family. One day, Anne has a stroke, and the couple's bond of love is severely tested.

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1602620/>

## Cover Photo

Borodyanka, Ukraine



Borodyanka, Ukraine

Алесь Усцінаў

[Exploded House in Borodyanka. Free Stock Photo \(pexels.com\)](https://www.pexels.com/photo/exploded-house-in-borodyanka-ukraine/)

## Art

### **Silk Road**

by Mary Young



*Silk Road* speaks to those who have given up everything to launch a journey.

Located in the Gannett Room, *Silk Road* is part of Unity's permanent art collection.

**Contributors:** *the Spiritual Practice packet team – Merrill Aldrich, Andrea La Sonde Anastos, Shelley Butler, Mike Funck, and Lia Rivamonte; with ministerial support from Rev. Karen Gustafson and Rev. Kathleen Rolenz. Additional support was provided by Susan Macpherson and Paul Rogne of the Unity Art Team.*