

What Does it Mean to Be a People of Blessing?

UU Community Church of Santa Monica
Heart to Heart Circles, June 2018

Definitions

Blessing. A thing conducive to happiness or welfare – *Merriam Webster*

A blessing is a good and perfect gift from God. When you receive something that is undeserved. A blessing can also be a gift that is received at the right moment in your life. Favor from Heaven.

– *Urban Dictionary*

The Hebrew word most often translated “bless” is barak, which can mean to praise, congratulate, or salute. Barakah or Baraka, in Islam, is the beneficent force from God that flows through the physical and spiritual spheres. Baraka is not a state, it is a flow of blessings and grace.

- *Wikipedia*

Chalice Lighting

Blessed is the fire that burns deep in the soul. It is the flame of the human spirit touched into being by the mystery of life. It is the fire of reason; the fire of compassion; the fire of community; the fire of justice; the fire of faith. It is the fire of love burning deep in the human heart; the divine glow in every life.

- *Eric A Heller-Wagner*

May the blessings of love be upon you

May its peace abide with you

May its essence illuminate your heart

Now and forever more...

- *from Sufi Blessing of Love and Peace*

Sharing Silence (3 Minutes)

You may wish to bring your attention to your breath, or move a bit until you have found a comfortable seat. If silence is not a familiar experience to you, three minutes may seem long. If you are accustomed to silence, it may seem short.

On Our Hearts

On Our Hearts is a practice of sharing and listening that invites us into connection with one another by sharing what is really going on for us as we come into the circle. Some months you will come to the group with wonderful news or a heavy heart, and it will be important for the group to know what's going on with you. Please share the major highs and lows, the things you'd like everyone to keep in their hearts or in their prayers for you.

Covenant and Ground Rules

Our covenant includes a description of how we want to be with each other, ground rules for our time together, and our expectations for members of the group. Adapted from *Heart to Heart* by Christine Robinson and Alicia Hawkins

I commit myself:

- to give attendance at meetings a real priority knowing that my presence is important to the group;
- to let the leader know if I will be absent or need to quit
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others;
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and tell only my own story to others;
- to honor the safety of the group by listening to what others share with an open heart;
- to refrain from cross-talk, judging, problem solving, or giving advice;
- and to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn.

Readings

We bless the life around us far more than we realize... the unexpected phone call, the brief touch, the willingness to listen generously, the warm smile or wink of recognition. Big messages come in small packages. All it may take to restore someone's trust in life may be returning a lost earring or a dropped glove. A woman once told me that she did not feel the need to reach out to those around her because she prayed every day... But a prayer is about our relationship to Spirit; a blessing is about our relationship to the spark of Spirit in one another. Spirit may not need our attention as badly as the person next to us on the bus or behind us on line in the supermarket.

- Rachel Naomi Remen, *My Grandfather's Blessings*

When the world seems stingy to us, we are stingy to others. Those who feel blessed have little trouble passing blessings on. Our tradition takes this calculus seriously. As UU minister, Rev. Don Wheat, puts it "The religious person is a grateful person, and the grateful person is the generous person." In short, by noticing our blessings, we become a blessing.

- *Excerpt from Soul Matters curriculum.*

Consider the exercise called Three Blessings. It is already one of the classics in the field. This amazingly simple technique has been shown to have a powerful, positive effect on reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety, while simultaneously increasing a sense of joy and well-being. The task is simple enough. As your day comes to a close, allow yourself to think about three things that happened during the day that you are most happy about, and why you believe they happened. The simple elegance of this exercise is part of the appeal, and in some ways the stumbling block people may find difficulty overcoming. Could it really be that something so easy could have such profound results? The unequivocal answer is yes! The outcome from doing this exercise is astonishing. Participants doing this exercise for one week increased happiness and decreased depressive symptoms for six months. This is not a misprint. One week of doing this had a lasting effect for six months.

- Dr. Martin Seligman, *University of Pennsylvania*, "*The Father of Positive Psychology.*"

It's hardest to love the ordinary things, she said, but you get lots of opportunities to practice.
- *Brian Andreas*

Questions for consideration:

1. Is it time to embrace yourself as a blessing once again? We all forget sometimes. We all let others' definitions of worth determine how we feel about our own. The work of seeing ourselves as a blessing is ongoing. How do you need to re-claim or re-name your blessing to the world?
2. Did your words bless or curse others this past week? A Soul Matters facilitator writes, "My Mom often told us to consider our words before offering an opinion. Her mantra was: "Are your words kind and helpful? If both adjectives do not apply, keep the thought to yourself!" What words have fallen from your lips lately that you need to go back and turn into a blessing?
3. Has age helped or hurt? At what age were you best at noticing the blessings around you? Have you gotten better as time has gone on? Or worse? What would improve your gaze?
4. What practices have you read about or that you do to help with blessing yourself and blessing others?
5. What thoughts and actions are conducive to the flow of blessings and what actions stand in the way of this flow?
6. In what way is being a part of the UU Santa Monica community a blessing? How do these blessings translate into actions in the larger community?

Sharing 60 minutes

Reflecting On Our Time Together

Please share anything that would otherwise be unsaid as you leave our time together. Do you wish you had shared something more, less, different? How are you feeling as you leave? Feeling words are ok, such as sad, mad, glad, peaceful, powerful, joyful.

Closing Words

May the road rise with you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
May the rain fall softly on your fields,
Until we meet again, may Spirit hold you, In the hollow of Her hands.

- Traditional Irish Blessing