

Gathering for Universalism, Goodness, Salvation

Words of the Day

A part of the Universalist message that resonates with me is ...

Chalice Lighting

We light this chalice to shine on our time together. In its light we celebrate the relationships and understanding we are creating in this place and time. May our sharing be deep. (*Light chalice*)

The Basket

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support

Shared Readings

There is no hell for any of us to fear outside of ourselves. *Quillen Hamilton Shinn*

The dominant motive ... is no longer to escape from earthly existence, but to make earthly existence as abundant and happy as it can be made. Modern religion ... must glorify, spiritualize, sanctify the world. *Clarence Russell Skinner, Universalist minister*

You may possess only a small light, but uncover it, let it shine, use it in order to bring more light and understanding to the hearts and minds of men and women. Give them not Hell, but hope and courage. Do not push them deeper into their theological despair, but preach the kindness and everlasting love of God. *John Murray, founder of Universalism in the United States*

The mission of the Universalist church has been a double one, first to contravert the one-time prevalent idea of an endless hell. This part of the mission has practically been accomplished ... But the second and more important one awaits fulfillment ... a fight which shall continue until the real, actual hells, before our very eyes, are destroyed. *Henry Clay Ledyard*

I come back to my fairly reluctant conclusion that Unitarians need Universalism a lot more than Universalists need Unitarianism. Religion is heart, essentially affection and love. It taps into deep emotions, or it doesn't work at all. *Rev. Stephen Kendrick, Universalist Church of West Hartford*

Do good under all circumstances, but with no care for any profit, or any blessedness, or any damnation, or any salvation, or any martyrdom; but all you do or omit should be for the honor of Love. *Hadewijch*

It may be thought that in our church we sometimes spoke lightly of what other churches held dear. We were not irreverent in our hearts, and we never meant to sin against the holy spirit. The mission of the Universalist church was to free the minds of [people] from the cruel prisons of dread and fear, and to help them to understand that God and life are kinder than they supposed. *Gertrude Anne Sneller*

A candle must give itself away. In the giving, the spending, the spreading, the sending, it finds itself. *John Wood*

Universalism promises us that we are forgiven, whether or not we want to be, whether or not we can forgive ourselves. *Rev. Michael Tino*

It is love that universalism promises.

Love that brings people together and opens their mind and hearts to new possibilities of understanding religion and faith.

So, when someone ... asks you what is Universalism?

Don't confuse them with complicated theological reasoning tell them with honesty and truth that *Universalism is LOVE.*

Love beyond colour.

Love beyond gender.

Love beyond culture.

Love beyond belief.

In the name and nature of LOVE.

Amen. *Nadir Zaman*, London,UK

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round 1: Share your reflections on and responses to Universalism and the preparation materials.

Round 2: Share additional thoughts or reflect on what others have shared.

Closing Circle

Extinguishing the Chalice

We extinguish this flame and we remember the warmth of our community, the light of our wisdom, the generosity of our sharing. We keep these in our heart until we meet again.

(Extinguish the chalice.)

Song/Chime

Announcements

The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to let the facilitator know if I will be absent or need to quit
- to share with the facilitator the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to do the reading and thinking about the topic ahead of time
- 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, giving advice, or advocating a specific view
- to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn and to stay on the "I-message."

Preparation for Universalism, Goodness, Salvation

This is a tale paraphrased from the Universalist tradition:

A distraught father in a small town approached a Universalist circuit rider. He said, “My son is a terrible person. He lies and cheats and steals. He is unfaithful to his wife and cruel to his children. He listens to no one. I am afraid he will be damned for all eternity.” The circuit rider answered, “He sounds like a terrible person who causes no end of trouble for those around him. Tonight we must build a bonfire and ambush him and throw him into it. It is truly what he deserves.” The father exclaimed, “I cannot do that. No matter how bad he is, he is still my son and I love him.” The circuit rider responded, “If you cannot do that to your son because of your human love which is imperfect, why do you think that God with his infinite and perfect love could condemn any of his children, no matter how bad, to an eternity of suffering?”

The Universalist idea that all people were good enough to be saved in God’s love was revolutionary in the decades when most churches preached about avoiding hell and earning a place in heaven. Thomas Starr King (1824-1864), who was both a Unitarian and a Universalist minister long before the two denominations joined in 1961, humorously described their different views on human goodness: “The Universalists believe that God is too good to damn people, while the Unitarians believe that people are too good to be damned by God.” While many of us now do not fear eternal damnation, we do deal with goodness and badness within ourselves and the people we encounter.

As children, many of us learned concepts of sin and salvation from church or from what the adults in our lives taught us. We also drew our own conclusions as we interacted with nice kids and mean kids and observed how society dealt with both. As adults, we still ponder the questions of good, evil, and salvation. We grapple with the question of whether it is nature or nurture that makes people behave the way they do. We question the difference, if any, between evil and mental illness. Although we seldom classify ourselves as evil, we deal continually with our own imperfections. We wonder how good is good enough. Although we may not use traditional religious terms such as salvation, sin, penitence, atonement, forgiveness, redemption, and grace, we experience them as we work through our way through life. There is a lot to think about.

Below are a variety of thoughts for you to consider as you ponder aspects of Universalism.

There is not eternal damnation, the only rewards and punishments are right here in this world.
Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz

On days where I feel the karma is in balance I’m not afraid of death. And when I feel it’s weighing heavily on the negative side, then I get very scared and just think about eternal damnation and how unpleasant that would be. *Will Oldham*

I do not believe you can threaten people into goodness. *Cassandra Clare*

Clarence Skinner pushed to expand the notion of Universalism that his spiritual ancestors had developed. He called us to a “cosmic mind-set” in which we all realized our connection with – indeed our unity with – everything that is, everything that has been, and everything that ever will be. *Rev. Michael Tino*

Speaking of salvation, Jesus and a host of other spiritual luminaries have weighed in on the subject with some counterintuitive and paradoxical wisdom. In a nutshell, it is this: “Don’t focus on saving yourself . . . Focus on serving, saving, helping others. For if you try to save yourself, you lose yourself, yet if you seek to save others, you save both the other and yourself.”

Richard R. Davis, Unitarian minister

Always do good to others. Be selfless. Mentally remove everything and be free. This is divine life. This is the direct way to Moksha or salvation. *Swami Sivananda*

The upright, honest-hearted man Who strives to do the best he can, Need never fear the church's ban Or hell's damnation. *Robert Burns*

Questions to Ponder

1. What childhood teachings did you receive about the innate goodness or evil of humankind? How have your views changed as an adult?
2. How would you describe a truly bad person? Is redemption possible for such a person? If so, what does the redemption look like?
3. Do you know any truly good people? How would you describe them?
4. If you think people are a mix of goodness and imperfection, how good is good enough?
5. Many of us were raised in the Christian church, where concepts of salvation, sin, penitence, atonement, redemption were pivotal to the Christian faith. What, if anything, do these terms mean to you now?
6. If a person does not believe in hellfire and damnation or karma or a god who can love us, does goodness have any importance? Explain.
7. If we believe that all or most people are basically good, but might not believe in a supreme being as the source of goodness, what is the origin of this basic goodness?
8. “I believe in people’s essential goodness.” – “I believe in the worth and dignity of every person” (the UU First Principle). How are these phrases the same for you? How are they different?

Words of the Day

Before coming to the gathering, think of a few words, phrases, or metaphors that describe ways that the Universalist message resonates with you. The prompt for the Words of the Day activity will be to complete this sentence:

“A part of the Universalist message that resonates with me is . . .”