

Blessing

1 The purpose of life... is to discover the joy or well-being that simultaneously pleases us and blesses our neighbor. Every act we commit is a contribution to the world; the question is whether our actions will be a blessing or a curse. The basic question of life is not, "What do I want?" but rather, "What do I want to give?" **Rev. Rebecca Parker**

2 Wherever one person takes another into the care of their heart, they have the power to bless. **John O'Donohue**

3 The word blessing takes its root in the latin verb: *benedicere*, to speak well of (*bene* well, *dicere* to speak). Therefore to bless someone is to speak well of him or her. But this implies a special form of "speaking well." To bless someone is, through some word, gesture, or ritual, to make him or her aware of three things: i) the goodness of the original creation where, after making the earth and humans, God said that it was "good, very good"; ii) that God experiences the same delight and pleasure in him or her that he experienced with Jesus at his baptism when he said: "This is my beloved child in whom I take delight"; and iii) that we, who are giving the blessing, recognize that goodness and take that delight in him or her.

— **Ronald Rolheiser**, Against an Infinite Horizon

4 A blessing can be anytime we wish to make a deeper connection with the life (and lives) around us. As much as it is an invocation, it's also an act of discovering the part of us that moves in harmony on the dance floor of creation. In fact, the art of blessing is not only about the act of blessing but about an attitude towards the world, a way of seeing things that goes beyond our ordinary perceptions. **David Spangler**, Blessing: The Art and the Practice

5 There are many ways to offer your blessing. You may bless your children, your lover, your friend, by placing your hand on their head, and offering a prayer for their healing, their well-being, their happiness. Let them feel the truth of your prayer in their bodies. When this happens, many report feeling the physical blessing actually enter their body. It is as precious as it is free — completely gratuitous.

Another practice invites us to bless strangers quietly, secretly. Offer it to people you notice on the street, in the market, on the bus. "May you be happy. May you be at peace." Feel the blessing move through your body as you offer it. Notice how you both receive some benefit from the blessing.

— **Wayne Muller** in Sabbath

6 My analytical side would love to give you a clear, unambiguous definition [of the word “blessing”], and I tried, really I did! But the more I tried to determine what makes something a blessing, the more slippery the definition became. Unfortunately, religious words are like that sometimes.

I’d like to say that a blessing is in the eye of the beholder, but even that’s problematic. So many blessings slide by without our noticing. Others come in disguise. Who knew, for example, that a rare infection that landed me in the hospital for a week back in 1997 would become a blessing in retrospect? Without that experience, I’d have no idea what it’s like to be a hospital patient – the lack of control, the boredom, the fear, the endless waiting. In fact, many of the hardest times in my life have become blessings to my ministry since they’ve given me compassion and insight as to what might help others. Blessings come in so many forms.

--**Rev. Sue Magidson**, “To Be a Blessing,” UU Church of Berkeley podcast

7 Nourish beginnings, let us nourish beginnings. Not all things are blest, but the seeds of all things are blest. The blessing is in the seed. **Muriel Rukeyser**

8 The thing to do, it seems to me, is to prepare yourself so you can be a rainbow in somebody else's cloud. Somebody who may not look like you, may not call God the same name you call God - if they call God at all. **Maya Angelou**

9 The mind of blessing is wise, and it knows that whatever torments or diminishes a person cannot be healed simply from within that diminishment; consequently it addresses the wholeness and draws that light and healing into the diminished area.

— **John O’Donohue**, *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Invocations and Blessings*

10 Hopeful people are a blessing to us, to others, and to the world. They are not always happy; they hurt with others who are hurting; they see clearly the problems that exist. But they are not defeated. **Jane Vennard**, *Embracing the World*

11. . . .God gives life, and light, and sustenance and hope, and so must we give these blessings to others as well.

Kabbalistic wisdom, while describing the mystical process that brought into existence both the tools for fashioning the world as well as the world itself, talks of two different types of vessels for God’s creative energy. Some were containers open at the top and closed at the bottom. They allowed the life force to flow in but did not let it flow out of the other end. The other type served as conduits for divinity; they were not stopped up at the bottom. The spirit flowed in on one side and out from the other side. Those that received but did not give ultimately self-destructed; they shattered from the abundance of good that they tried to contain within themselves. Only those that passed on what they received, that were part of an interconnective network on both ends, fulfilled their function and were able to serve God’s creative purpose.

This goes for us as well — we must take a cue from the vessels of creation. No true good can be enjoyed without passing it on. We too must be open-ended vessels. Blessings are not meant to flow into us, but rather to flow through us.

How do you be a blessing? With a smile, or with a hug. By always thinking of giving, of helping, of lending a hand. By offering an invitation instead of waiting to receive one. By opening up to a stranger, by making someone feel at home. By teaching, and helping others to learn. By offering insight and inspiration. By encouragement or a kind word. It is not hard to find ways to be a blessing – you just have to constantly be aware of it.

One should always ask . . . Has my existence added anything to the sum total of blessing in the world? We compute our carbon imprint, and our ecological footprint gives us pause, and that is as it should be. But those concerns are only a matter of doing as little harm as possible. We must go beyond that and strive not only to refrain from damaging but to repair as well.

Let us ponder our blessing input, and then strive, always strive, to be a living blessing.

--**Hanan Schlesinger**, excerpted from What Does It Mean To Be a Blessing? at myjewishlearning.com

12 Blessing

The skin cracks like a pod.
There never is enough water.

Imagine the drip of it,
the small splash, echo
in a tin mug,
the voice of a kindly god.

Sometimes, the sudden rush
of fortune. The municipal pipe bursts,
silver crashes to the ground
and the flow has found
a roar of tongues. From the huts,
a congregation : every man woman
child for streets around
butts in, with pots,
brass, copper, aluminium,
plastic buckets,
frantic hands,

and naked children

screaming in the liquid sun,
their highlights polished to perfection,
flashing light,
as the blessing sings
over their small bones.

--Imtiaz Dharker, from her 1989 collection, Purdah

A Is “blessing” a word that you use often? If so, in what context?

B What are some of the blessings in your life? What are the sources of these blessings?

C How have you been a blessing to those you know, to loved ones, to family and friends, to those you don’t know?

D How has your work been a blessing – both what you do and how you do it?

E What would it be like to walk through your day asking yourself, “How can I be a blessing today?”

F Are there ways in which your experience of All Souls is a blessing in your life? How so? Consider also the ways in which you are a blessing for All Souls and your All Souls community or communities.

--Mary Beth Hatem, for covenant groups at All Souls Church, Unitarian