

**Promises Made, Promises Frayed**

1 Those that are most slow in making a promise are the most faithful in the performance of it.

**Jean-Jacques Rousseau**

2 Broken vows are like broken mirrors. They leave those who held to them bleeding and staring at fractured images of themselves. **Richard Paul Evans**

3 I know it is a bad thing to break a promise, but I think now that it is a worse thing to let a promise break you. **Jennifer Donnelly.**

4 A leader leads by example whether he intends to or not. Author Unknown

5 You have to decide what your highest priorities are and have the courage – pleasantly, smilingly, unapologetically – to say “no” to other things. And the way to do that is by having a bigger “yes” burning inside. The enemy of the “best” is often the good. **Stephen Covey**

6 It makes my heart sick when I remember all the good words and the broken promises. **Chief Joseph**

7 Promises are the uniquely human way of ordering the future, making it predictable and reliable to the extent that this is humanly possible. **Hannah Arendt**

8 Don't be afraid to celebrate a promise when kept. In doing so, you're embracing the potential for a better world. Author Unknown

9 Love is not a feeling of happiness, love is a willingness to sacrifice. **Michael Novak**

10 I would end up having to go to the back of the bus with my body, but every time I got on that bus I left my mind up on the front seat. And I said to myself, “One of these days, I'm going to put my body where my mind is. **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

11 Don't make a commitment unless you know you can carry it out, and then let nothing stand in the way of that promise.

12 Be radical about this. Feel what it's like to know that you have chosen to commit yourself and that you will not let anything deter you. Be on time for meetings and appointments. If you tell your son you will set up trains with him in five minutes, don't take fifteen minutes and pretend you never said five.

Avoid telling people maybe. Maybe is a way of putting things off, and that may be the right thing to do at times, but all too often people use it as an excuse for being indecisive. In fact, when you decide to settle an issue and make a small commitment, it gives you practice and enables you eventually to make greater commitments, like the one to love and honor someone "till death do us part.

— Alan Epstein, **How to Have More Love in Your Life**

13 Some Angels Grumble

Every time a man upon the path  
Does not keep his  
Word,

Some angels grumble  
And have to remove a few of  
The bets

They had place upon  
His heart  
To win.

— Hafiz , The Subject Tonight Is Love by Daniel Ladinsky

14 Broken Promises

I have met them in dark alleys, limping and one-armed;  
I have seen them playing cards under a single light-bulb  
and tried to join in, but they refused me rudely,  
knowing I would only let them win.  
I have seen them in the foyers of theaters,  
coming back late from the interval

long after the others have taken their seats,  
and in deserted shopping malls late at night,  
peering at things they can never buy,  
and I have found them wandering  
in a wood where I too have wandered.

This morning I caught one;  
small and stupid, too slow to get away,  
it was only a promise I had made to myself once  
and then forgot, but it screamed and kicked at me  
and ran to join the others, who looked at me with reproach  
in their long, sad faces.

When I drew near them, they scurried away,  
even though they will sleep in my yard tonight.

I hate them for their ingratitude,  
I who have kept countless promises,  
as dead now as Shakespeare's children.

"You bastards," I scream,  
"you have to love me—I gave you life!"

**—David Kirby**

### **For Reflection and Discussion**

A How do you define "a promise"? How do you declare or announce a promise you make to yourself?

B Is there some language that you use that signals a promise as opposed to an intention?

C Is there one or are there particular promises that you are especially proud to have kept?

D Have you made promises or vows as a part of your spiritual life?

E How does your engagement with All Souls relate to your ability to keep promises? Is a pledge to All Souls a promise?

—Mary Beth Hatem for covenant groups at All Souls Church, Unitarian (DC)

In the foreword to Mahatma Gandhi's Vows and Observances, his grandson Arun writes of how he learned the importance of adhering to the right vow at a very young age. His experience also shows why the taking of precepts is the first step on a very personal journey:

"One day during my early teen years, I got into a playful argument with my sister, Sita. For six months, she said, she would eat just one meal a day. I made light of the vow.

" 'That is easy. Anybody can do that.' " Sita caught the bait and retorted, 'Well, why don't you take a vow and show us what you can do?'

" 'Sure,' I boasted. 'I can live for a whole week on bananas and milk.' It was an idle boast. I had no intention of carrying it out. Our parents, who were watching the repartee, were curious to see where it would end, and the moment I made my remark Mother decided to teach me a lesson.

" 'I take it that is your vow?' she said, 'You will now have to undertake it.' I was trapped.

"In the Hindu tradition of our family, a vow is sacred. Once you utter it, you have to go through with it. There was no escape. So the following week I lived on nothing but bananas and milk, and for several months thereafter, I couldn't stand the sight of bananas and milk.

"The taking of vows is a part of Hindu practice, but it is also a universal form of personal discipline. It prepares one for adversity. So one takes a vow to give up something that is very precious. It also teaches one to value one's word, because once you have taken a vow, there is no one watching to see whether you observe it diligently or not except your own conscience."