

What do we really have to offer? Everything.

UUCR Chalice Circle Program - Late November 2012

Chalice Lighting:

We are Unitarian Universalists.
We are the church of the open mind,
The loving heart,
And the helping hands.
Together we care for our earth
And work for friendship and peace in our world

- *Gaia Brown*

Opening Words:

Caring for one another, we sometimes glimpse an essential quality of our being. We may be sitting alone, lost in self-doubt or self-pity, when the phone rings with a call from a friend who's really depressed. Instinctively, we come out of ourselves, just to be there with her and say a few reassuring words. When we're done, and a little comfort's been shared, we put down the phone and feel a little more at home with ourselves. We're reminded of who we really are and what we have to offer one another.

- *Ram Dass*

Check-in:

1. Please share your name.
2. Please share an experience from the last week or two where you were especially helpful or someone was especially helpful to you.
3. What are you feeling in your heart in this moment?

Reading:

"What do we really have to offer? Everything"

Conceptually, six of our faith's seven principles can be fully satisfied within the context of one's own personal conduct. To a great extent, they are a matter of how we interact with others, and with the earth: Treat people well; don't do things that promote misery and suffering of others; and tread lightly upon the earth. This one principle, though, practically demands that we extend ourselves: Service to others - the outward aspect of compassion in human relations - is unique in that way.

The magic of this place, for me, is when we touch others, when we support others, when we capitalize on the bless'ed opportunity to enjoy the rewards of service, whether that means putting ourselves forward to try to make things better for people in a country halfway around the world, or helping a member of our own congregation who has suffered a loss.

Albert Schweitzer said, "The only ones among you who will be truly happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve." So I ask myself: How can I make a difference? What gifts do I have that I can offer that will make things better for others?

I'm coming to realize that I'm overcomplicating it for myself. This mania probably doesn't have much impact on the appreciation of the service we offer by those who benefit from receiving it. Perhaps I can learn a bit from Ram Dass. He wrote:

"What of those moments when we question whether we have anything useful for others? What do we really have to offer, what do we really have to give? Everything, it turns out. *Everything*. If within each of

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us is that essence of Being which is in all things - call it God, Life, Energy, Consciousness - as open to all that, as we are in ourselves, so we have it to share with one another."

Ram Dass continues:

"What could that mean practically, as more than a lofty abstraction? It could mean that when we're holding a frightened, battered child ... or hearing the grief of a total stranger ... or bandaging the wound of an enemy soldier ... or sitting with a dying friend ... they can feel in *who we are* the reassurance that they are not simply isolated entities, separate selves, lonely beings, cut off from everything and everyone else. They can feel us *in there* with them."

Within our own lives, within our own families, within our own homes - and yes, in our neighborhoods and in our church community, there are many opportunities to serve. We can make the decision to view such efforts as a spiritual expression of compassion in human relations, whether it is as substantial as caring for a dying friend, keeping an eye on a neighbor's home while they're on vacation, or just making a point of making breakfast a little more special for family. When done in love, as a spiritual expression of compassion, the gift goes both ways.

Even if the work is unpleasant; even if we discount the satisfaction of a job well-done; even if we ignore the potential for happiness stemming from service to others; even if we eliminate all the potential positive aspects of service: It is still a worthy endeavor because service is an expression of being human.

Read twice. Then please share your reactions, reflections and responses to the reading, allowing each participant who wishes to share to have an opportunity before entering into a more open discussion. Later, the facilitator may offer specific questions or other thoughts for you to consider, if you feel comfortable.

Check-out:

1. Please share your name.
2. What, if anything, are you inspired to do this week to be more helpful.
3. What are you feeling in your heart in this moment?

Closing Words:

It is necessary to help others, not only in our prayers, but in our daily lives.

- Dalai Lama

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Facilitator Guide

The following questions can, but don't have to be used to facilitate the discussion:

1. Beyond what you shared during the Check-in, please share more about the experience of being helpful to others and being helped by others. How does being on the giving side make you feel? How does being on the receiving side make you feel?
2. What expectations do you have regarding being helped, from loved ones, and from the communities you're a part of (including the church community)? What obligations do you feel you have regarding being helpful, to loved ones, and to the communities you're a part of?
3. The reading includes the claim by Albert Schweitzer said, "The only ones among you who will be truly happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve." Why do you feel that helping others does or does not affect your own happiness?
4. How do you view being helpful, in terms of your spiritual experience?