

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Thursday Small Group (via ZOOM!) July 2021

Blessed or Cursed?

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CHALICE LIGHTING / PRELUDE

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)

OPENING WORDS

Life can be overwhelming—Life can be overwhelmingly wonderful; life can be overwhelmingly horrible.

At times we've feel so blessed, so powerful, so happy, as if all the forces of the universe were on your side.

Other times we've barely survived, times when we've felt utterly cursed, completely cut-off from all sources of good, abandoned by the universe, impotent, confused.

Oh how convenient it would be to be able to assign supernatural causes when "everything that can go wrong does go wrong"—or "when everything that can go right does go right"—how easy blame Karma, the Stars, the Gods, evil spirits, fate.

How are we as UU supposed to cope without scapegoats? How are we supposed to help ourselves and others though these moments without the crutch of the supernatural?

Other religions can offer: "Thoughts and Prayers"? I would like to quote from a wonderful article by Patricia Montley available at

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/humanist-guide-prayer>

"To a family member who was ill, to a colleague who was anxious or depressed, to a friend who was grieving a great loss, I could say: "I'll pray for you." And it meant I cared. It meant I would intercede with God on their behalf. And they took comfort in that. Perhaps that is the true power of prayer—that exchange of comfort. You are comforted by my gift of praying for you, and I am comforted that I can give you that gift. What comfort? What blessing does our religion offers us?"

My answer to Patricia Montley's question is:

UUs offer a community. On a weekly basis we are offered the opportunity to share our "joys and sorrows" with our chosen community. The act of sharing joys and sorrows with our, community, in our sacred space, transforms our private "joys and sorrows". Our blessing and curses are no longer just our own to bear—our blessing and curses are now part of our community's consciousness and that changes everything.

(Very short group discussion of what solace we find in being a UU in time of great joy and great sorrow)

MEDITATION / CENTERING (ring gong)

I am willing to bet that everyone in this group experienced moments of pure beauty, moments of pain and despair, moments of confusion and moments of bliss this week—moments you might not consider worth sharing with the greater community, but moment you might consider sharing in our small group as we check-in.

CHECK-IN (2 ROUNDS)

(please try to keep check ins succinct, I would like to provide more time for discussion of topics)

1st round: Please share 1 "blessing" in your life since last we met.

2nd round: Please share 1 "curse" you experienced since last we met

CURSED:

"Every blessing ignored becomes a curse." *Paulo Coelho*

(As we read the following quotes, I ask you to recall times you felt "cursed". Is it something you might feel comfortable sharing with our group?)

"Sometimes...you can cry until there's nothing wet in you. You can scream and curse to where your throat rebels and ruptures. You can pray, all you want, to whatever god you think will listen. And, still it makes no difference. It goes on, with no sign as to when it might release you. And you know that if it ever did relent.. .it would not be because it cared:— *Jhonen Vasquez*

"Knowing can be a curse on a person's life. I'd traded in a pack of lies for a pack of truth, and I didn't know which one was heavier. Which one took the most strength to carry around? It was a ridiculous question, though, because once you know the truth, you can't ever go back and pick up your suitcase of lies. Heavier or not, the truth is yours now:— *Sue Monk Kidd*

"For him that stealeth, or borroweth and returneth not, this book from its owner, let it change into a serpent in his hand and rend him.

Let him be struck with palsy, and all his members blasted.

Let him languish in pain, crying aloud for mercy, and let there be no surcease to this agony till he sing in dissolution. Let bookworms gnaw his entrails in token of the worm that dieth not, and when at last he goeth to his last punishment, let the flames of hell consume him for ever.

Curse on book thieves, from the monastery of San Pedro, Barcelona, Spain

"The curse of mortality. You spend the first portion of your life learning, growing stronger, more capable. And then, through no fault of your own, your body begins to fail. You regress. Strong limbs become feeble, keen senses grow dull, hardy constitutions deteriorate. Beauty withers. Organs quit. You remember yourself in your prime, and wonder where that person went. As your wisdom and experience are peaking, your traitorous body becomes a prison."— *Brandon Mull*

"I can't trust the people I care about not to hurt me. And I'm not sure I can trust myself not to hurt them, either:— *Holly Black*

"Curse this world for what it does to the mothers, for what it does to the daughters. Curse it for making us strong through loss and pain, our hearts torn from our chests again and again.

Curse it for forcing us to endure:— *Sabaa Tahir*,

"The worst curse to befall anyone is stagnation, a banal existence, the quiet desperation that comes out of a need for conformity."— *Deepak Chopra*

"You just do it. You force yourself to get up. You force yourself to put one foot before the other, and God damn it, you refuse to let it get to you. You fight. You cry. You curse. Then you go about the business of living. That's how I've done it. There's no other way."— *Elizabeth Taylor*

(Discuss feeling cursed, cursing others)

BREAK

6 min

Zoom tech music for break if you wish to play-Billie Holiday 'God Bless the Child'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9m7WAQEISOs>

BLESSED

"Sometimes I need**only to stand**wherever I am**to be blessed.— *Mary Oliver*

"It is one of the blessings of old friends that you can afford to be stupid with them."
— *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

"More smiling, less worrying. More compassion, less judgment. More blessed, less stressed. More love, less hate:— *Roy T. Bennett*

"Happiness is the consequence of personal effort. You fight for it, strive for it, insist upon it, and sometimes even travel around the world looking for it. You have to participate relentlessly in the manifestations of your own blessings. And once you have achieved a state of happiness, you must never become lax about maintaining it. You must make a mighty effort to keep swimming upward into that happiness forever, to stay afloat on top of it:— *Elizabeth Gilbert*

"Blessed are the hearts that can bend; they shall never be broken:— *Albert Camus*

"Never to suffer would never to have been blessed."— *Edgar Allan Poe*

"Everyone you meet is a part of your journey, but not all of them are meant to stay in your life. Some people are just passing through to bring you gifts; either they're blessings or lessons." — *Roy T. Bennet*

"When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed."— *Maya Angelou*

"The madness of love is the greatest of heaven's blessings:— *Plato*

"The most significant gifts are the ones most easily overlooked. Small, everyday blessings: woods, health, music, laughter, memories, books, family, friends, second chances, warm fireplaces, and all the footprints scattered throughout our days:— *Sue Monk Kidd*

"Bless you prison, bless you for being in my life. For there, lying upon the rotting prison straw, I came to realize that the object of life is not prosperity as we are made to believe, but the maturity of the human soul."— *Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn*,

"It is very important that you only do what you love to do. you may be poor, you may go hungry, you may lose your car, you may have to move into a shabby place to live, but you will totally live. And at the end of your days you will bless your life because you have done what you came here to do. Otherwise, you will live your life as a prostitute, you will do things only for a reason, to please other people, and you will never have lived, and you will not have a pleasant death:— *Elisabeth Koblner-Ross*

"May the sun bring you new energy by day, may the moon softly restore you by night, may the rain wash away your worries, may the breeze blow new strength into your being, may you walk gently through the world and know it's beauty all the days of your life."— *Apache Blessing*

(Discuss our moments of feeling blessed or being blessed by others.)

SESSION FEEDBACK AND FUTURE PLANS

- How did today's session go for you?
- Clarify who will lead the next session and provide tech (Zoom) support
- Summer sessions—How often, when, time, topics?

EXTINGUISH CHALICE / CLOSING WORDS

May the nourishment of the earth be yours,
may the clarity of light be yours,
may the fluency of the ocean be yours,
may the protection of the ancestors be yours.
And so may a slow
wind work these words
of love around you,
an invisible cloak
to mind your life."
— John O'Donohue