

Duty

Red Haines, Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship of La Crosse, Wisconsin, March 2012

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting: Duty conveys a sense of moral commitment to someone or something. The moral commitment is the sort that results in action and it is not a matter of passive feeling or mere recognition. When someone recognizes a duty, that person commits himself/herself to the cause involved without considering the self-interested courses of actions that may have been relevant previously. This is not to suggest that living a life of duty precludes one of the best sorts of lives but duty does involve some sacrifice of immediate self-interest. From Encyclopedia Britannica, 1911 edition.

Check In: What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health, cares or concerns for loved ones, or issues you are facing. Each person in the group speaks uninterrupted. If time remains, general response and conversation is welcome. Confidentiality is expected.

Focus: “Duty is the most sublime word in our language. Do your duty in all things. You cannot do more. You should never wish to do less.” Robert E. Lee

“Make it a point to do something every day that you don’t want to do. This is the golden rule for acquiring the habit of doing your duty without pain.” Mark Twain

“When will our consciences grow so tender that we will act to prevent human misery rather than avenge it?” Eleanor Roosevelt (Might this be a universal moral duty to others? R. Haines)

Discussion: Some examples or thoughts about duty are presented at the end. You may comment on those or share other stories with the group, along with your thoughts and examples. You may philosophize. For example, are duty and self interest related and are they always in conflict?

What thoughts might you wish to convey to a grandchild about duty?

Closing Words: His (John Beargrease’s) fame came not by doing some specific heroic act, but rather, when he had work to do or a job to perform, however humble or big, he did so, and did it dependably, cooperatively, and conscientiously. He did his best. Can anything be more praiseworthy than that? Judge William E. Scott, Two Harbors, MN

I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.- Helen Keller

QUOTES ABOUT DUTY

“I have heard John Beargrease (i) spoken of many times, but what important event or episode was he ever connected with?”

“None. His fame came not by doing some specific heroic act, but rather, when he had work to do or a job to perform, however humble or big, he did so, and did it dependably, cooperatively, and conscientiously.” “He did his best. Can anything be more praiseworthy than that?” (ii)

Wrote the postmaster at Two Harbors, “He was sure to arrive with the mail intact.” (iii)

The generation that went to war in 1942 is referred to as, among other things, “the duty generation.” Men and women, including native Americans, African Americans, Japanese Americans and others who did not even enjoy all the benefits of citizenship, supported the war, interrupted their lives, sometimes gave their lives, then returned to their lives with little complaint, to earn that label. Robert B. Greene, Sr., 1915 – 1998, interrupted the beginning of his career, left his family, and served as a private and as an infantry officer from 1940 to 1945, and fought in campaigns in Africa and Italy. He returned home, resumed his career, and spoke little of his sacrifice, even to his family. His son’s love for him combined with the father’s many expressions of respect for General Paul Tibbets, another man who did his duty, motivated Bob Greene Jr. to persist (over 20 years) in penetrating the General’s privacy and to write the book, *Duty* about both Greene Sr. and Tibbets

General Tibbets entered the US Army Air Corps in 1938. He shouldered many duties, including the lonely duty of command and the extremely lonely duty of maintaining absolute secrecy regarding one very special assignment, to form and train the 1800 man 509th Composite Group in a remote base in Utah. He could not share what he knew (atomic bomb) even with close associates or with his wife and he needed to maintain strict surveillance over all 1800 personnel to assure that no information leaked. He briefed the crew (some of whom had served with him for years prior to that mission) of *Enola Gay* enroute to Hiroshima. He endured divorce and estrangement from his children. He rarely showed emotion during the remainder of his life.

Endnotes for the quotes:

(i) John Beargrease. Ojibwe, Chippewa Tribe. Born 1858, died 1910. Carried mail between Two Harbors and Grand Marias, 90 miles in three days in winter. Used dog teams, usually three dogs, requiring that he run or walk the distance. Weathered many a blizzard. Annual salary, \$728.

(ii). From Judge William E. Scott, Two Harbors, MN, a manuscript written about 1950 about John Beargrease, Photos and article published in *Minnesota Conservation Volunteer*, January-February 2012..

(iii) For more, read Daniel Lancaster, *John Beargrease : Legend of Minnesota's North Shore*.

(iv) Bob Greene, Jr.: *Duty, a Man, his Son, and the Man Who Won the War.*”