

## The Bahá'ís of Florence Inter-Faith Devotional Service



# Sacrifice

## Hinduism

Man, in truth, is himself a sacrifice.

*Chandogya Upanishad 3.16.1*

Whatever I am offered in devotion with a pure heart--a leaf, a flower, fruit, or water--I partake of that love offering. Whatever you do, make it an offering to me--the food that you eat, the sacrifices that you make, the help you give, even your suffering. In this way you will be freed from the bondage of karma, and from its results both pleasant and painful. Then, firm in renunciation and yoga, with your heart free, you will come to me.

*Bhagavad Gita 9.26~28*

The dedication of the offering is God; that which is offered is God; God offers it on God's fire. God is attained by those who concentrate on God's work. Some aspirants offer material sacrifices; others offer selfless service upon the altar of God. Some renounce all enjoyment of the senses, sacrificing them in the fire of asceticism. Others partake of sense objects but offer them in service through the fire of the senses. Some offer the workings of the senses and the vital forces through the fire of self-control, kindled in the path of knowledge. Some offer wealth; others offer asceticism and suffering. Some take vows and offer knowledge and study of the scriptures; and some make

the offering of meditation. Some offer the forces of vitality, regulating their inhalation and exhalation, offering their life-breath as they breathe in and breathe out. Others offer the forces of vitality by fasting. All these understand the meaning of sacrifice and will be cleansed of their impurities. In the offering is true sustenance, and through it a man or woman reaches the eternal Reality.

But those who do not seek to serve are without a home in this world. Arjuna<sup>1</sup>, how can they be at home in any world to come? Thus many kinds of offerings are made, and each guides mankind along a path to God. Know that they are born of action, and understanding this, you will attain liberation.

*Bhagavad Gita 4.24~32*

So great is the power of sacrifice that it is the Self of the gods. When, out of the essence of sacrifice, the gods had made their own Self, they took their seat in the world of heaven. Similarly, the one who sacrifices now, when out of the essence of sacrifice he has made his own Self, takes his seat in the world of heaven.

*Satapatha Brahmana 6.1.10*

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<sup>1</sup> one of five brothers, noted for his pure character

## Judaism

Isaac willingly and gladly went with his father to Mount Moriah, to offer up his young life to the God whom he adored. As they were wending their way to perform the will of God, Isaac said to his father, "O father, I am yet young, and I am fearful lest my body tremble at the sight of the knife, causing you grief; I am fearful lest the offering shall not be a perfect one, perfect as I should like it to be."

*Midrash, Genesis Rabbah 56.11*

Let all your deeds be done for the sake of Heaven.

*Mishnah, Abot 2.17*

A man should share in the distress of the community, for so we find that Moses, our teacher, shared in the distress of the community.

*Talmud, Taanit 11a*

Whether we bring much or little, it matters not, if only we fix our heart upon our Father in heaven.

*Talmud, Berakot 17a*

Rabbi Meir was once asked, "Why do the scriptures tell us in some passages that sacrifice is very pleasant unto the Lord, while in others it is said that God dislikes sacrifices?" He answered, "It depends whether a man's heart is sacrificed at the time he brings the sacrifice."

*Midrash, Baraita Kallah 8*

The essence of the offering is that it be analogous to the sin, and that a man offer to God his desires and passions, for this is more acceptable than all. Blessed are the righteous, that they bring this offering every day.

*Zohar, Leviticus 9b*

## Zoroastrianism

To Thee as a sacrifice Zarathustra<sup>2</sup> offers the very life and being of his self; he dedicates the first fruits of his loving thoughts to Ahura Mazda<sup>3</sup>; He offers the best of his words and deeds and willing obedience to the Divine Law.

*Avesta, Yasna 33.14*

## Buddhism

In accepting the true Dharma<sup>4</sup>, may I abandon body, life, and property, and uphold the true Dharma.

*Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala 3*

A bodhisattva<sup>5</sup> resolves, "I take upon myself the burden of all suffering; I am resolved to do so; I will endure it. I do not turn or run away, do not tremble, am not terrified, nor afraid, do not turn back or despond.

"And why? At all costs I must bear the burdens of all beings. In that, I do not follow my own inclinations. I have made the vow to save all beings. All beings I must set free. The whole world of living beings I must rescue from the terrors of birth, of old age, of sickness, of death and rebirth, of all kinds of moral offense, of all states of woe.... My endeavors do not merely aim at my own deliverance. For with the help of the boat of the thought of all-knowledge, I must rescue all these beings from the stream of Samsara<sup>6</sup>, which is so difficult to cross.... I myself must grapple with the

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<sup>2</sup> Zoroaster

<sup>3</sup> Supreme Creative deity

<sup>4</sup> righteousness or duty; "law" in its broadest sense

<sup>5</sup> one who seeks enlightenment

<sup>6</sup> result or state of affairs whose cause and explanation is Karma

whole mass of suffering of all beings. To the limit of my endurance I will experience in all the states of woe, found in any world system, all the abodes of suffering. And I must not cheat all beings out of my store of merit. I am resolved to abide in each single state of woe for numberless aeons; and so I will help all beings to freedom, in all states of woe that may be found in any world system whatsoever.

"And why? Because it is surely better that I alone should be in pain than that all these beings should fall into the states of woe. Therefore I must give myself away as a pawn through which the whole world is redeemed from the terrors of hells, of animal birth, of the world of Death, and with this my own body I must experience, for the sake of all beings, the whole mass of painful feelings. And on behalf of all beings I give surety for all beings, and in doing so I speak truthfully, am trustworthy, do not go back on my word. I must not abandon all beings."

*Sikshasamuccaya 280-81, Vajradhvaja Sutra*

## **Christianity**

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it."

*Matthew 16.24-25*

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

*Romans 12.1*

For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.

*1 Peter 3.17*

Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

*John 15.13*

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification.

For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, "The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me."

*Romans 15.1-3*

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

*I Corinthians 10.31*

Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

*II Corinthians 9.7*

## **Islam**

The believer who participates in human life, exposing himself to its torments and suffering, is worth more than the one who distances himself from its suffering.

*Hadiith of Ibn Mahjah*

By the declining day, Lo! man is in a state of loss, save those who believe and do good works, and exhort one another to truth and exhort one another to endurance.

*Qur'án 103.1-3*

Whoso bringeth a good deed will receive tenfold the like thereof, while whoso bringeth an ill deed will be awarded but the like thereof; and they will not be wronged.

Say: Lo! As for me, my Lord hath guided me unto a straight path, a right religion, the community of Abraham, the upright, who was no idolater.

Say: Lo! my worship and my sacrifice and my living and my dying are for Alláh, Lord of the Worlds.

*Qur'án 7.161~63*

O ye who believe! Let not your wealth nor your children distract you from remembrance of Alláh. Those who do so, they are the losers.

And spend of that wherewith We have provided you before death cometh unto one of you and he saith: My Lord! If only thou wouldst relieve me for a little while, then I would give alms and be among the righteous.

But Alláh relieveth no soul when its term cometh, and Allah is aware of what ye do.

*Qur'án 64.9~11*

### **Bábí Faith**

O My servants! Seek ye earnestly this highest reward, as I have indeed created for the Remembrance of God gardens which remain inscrutable to anyone save Myself, and naught therein hath been made lawful unto anyone except those whose lives have been sacrificed in His Path. Hence beseech ye God, the Most Exalted, that He may grant you this meritorious reward, and He is in truth the Most High, the Most

Great. Had it been Our wish, We would have brought all men into one fold round Our Remembrance, yet they will not cease to differ, unless God accomplish what He willeth through the power of truth. In the estimation of the Remembrance this commandment hath, in very truth, been irrevocably ordained...

God hath indeed chosen Thee to warn the people, to guide the believers aright and to elucidate the secrets of the Book.

*Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 67*

### **Bahá'í Faith**

That which thou hast heard concerning Abraham, the Friend of the All-Merciful, is the truth, and no doubt is there about it. The Voice of God commanded Him to offer up Ishmael as a sacrifice, so that His steadfastness in the Faith of God and His detachment from all else but Him may be demonstrated unto men. The purpose of God, moreover, was to sacrifice him as a ransom for the sins and iniquities of all the peoples of the earth. This same honor, Jesus, the Son of Mary, besought the one true God, exalted be His name and glory, to confer upon Him. For the same reason was Husayn offered up a sacrifice by Muhammad, the Apostle of God.

No man can ever claim to have comprehended the nature of the hidden and manifold grace of God; none can fathom His all-embracing mercy. Such hath been the perversity of men and their transgressions, so grievous have been the trials that have afflicted the Prophets of God and their chosen ones, that all mankind deserveth to be tormented and to perish. God's hidden and most loving providence, however,

hath through both visible and invisible agencies, protected and will continue to protect it from the penalty of its wickedness. Ponder this in thine heart, that the truth may be revealed unto thee, and be thou steadfast in His path.

*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 75-6*

My God, my God! If none be found to stray from Thy path, how, then, can the ensign of Thy mercy be unfurled, or the banner of Thy bountiful favor be hoisted? And if iniquity be not committed, what is it that can proclaim Thee to be the Concealer of men's sins, the Ever-Forgiving, the Omniscient, the All-Wise? May my soul be a sacrifice to the trespasses of them that trespass against Thee, for upon such trespasses are wafted the sweet savors of the tender mercies of Thy Name, the Compassionate, the All-Merciful. May my life be laid down for the transgressions of such as transgress against Thee, for through them the breath of Thy grace and the fragrance of Thy loving-kindness are made known and diffused amongst men. May my inmost being be offered up for the sins of them that have sinned against Thee, for it is as a result of such sins that the Day Star of Thy manifold favors revealeth itself above the horizon of Thy bounty, and the clouds of Thy never-failing providence rain down their gifts upon the realities of all created things.

I am he, O my Lord, that hath confessed to Thee the multitude of his evil doings, that hath acknowledged what no man hath acknowledged. I have made haste to attain unto the ocean of Thy forgiveness, and have sought shelter beneath the shadow of Thy most gracious favor. Grant, I beseech Thee, O Thou Who art the Everlasting King and the Sovereign Protector of all men,

that I may be enabled to manifest that which shall cause the hearts and souls of men to soar in the limitless immensity of Thy love, and to commune with Thy Spirit. Strengthen me through the power of Thy sovereignty, that I may turn all created things towards the Day Spring of Thy Manifestation and the Source of Thy Revelation. Aid me, O my Lord, to surrender myself wholly to Thy Will, and to arise and serve Thee, for I cherish this earthly life for no other purpose than to compass the Tabernacle of Thy Revelation and the Seat of Thy Glory. Thou seest me, O my God, detached from all else but Thee, and humble and subservient to Thy Will. Deal with me as it beseemeth Thee, and as it befitteth Thy highness and great glory.

*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 310-12*

### **Prayer**

Praise be to Thee, O Lord my God! I am the one who hath sought the good pleasure of Thy will, and directed his steps towards the seat of Thy gracious favors. I am he who hath forsaken his all, who hath fled to Thee for shelter, who hath set his face towards the tabernacle of Thy revelation and the adored sanctuary of Thy glory. I beseech Thee, O my Lord, by Thy call whereby they who recognized Thy unity have sought the shadow of Thy most gracious providence, and the sincere have fled far from themselves unto Thy name, the Most Exalted, the All-Glorious, through which Thy verses were sent down, and Thy word fulfilled, and Thy proof manifested, and the sun of Thy beauty risen, and Thy testimony established, and Thy signs uncovered, - I beseech Thee to grant that I may be numbered with them that have quaffed the wine that is life indeed from the

hands of Thy gracious providence, and have rid themselves, in Thy path, of all attachment to Thy creatures, and been so inebriated with Thy manifold wisdom that they hastened to the field of sacrifice with Thy praise on their lips and Thy remembrance in their hearts. Send down, also, upon me, O my God, that which will wash me from anything that is not of Thee, and deliver me from

Thine enemies who have disbelieved in Thy signs.

Potent art Thou to do what Thou wilt. No God is there beside Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

☞ Bahá'u'lláh

## PRAYER FOR AMERICA

O Thou kind Lord! This gathering is turning to Thee. These hearts are radiant with Thy love. These minds and spirits are exhilarated by the message of Thy glad-tidings. O God! Let this American democracy become glorious in spiritual degrees even as it has aspired to material degrees, and render this just government victorious. Confirm this revered nation to upraise the standard of the oneness of humanity, to promulgate the Most Great Peace, to become thereby most glorious and praiseworthy among all the nations of the world. O God! This American nation is worthy of Thy favors and is deserving of Thy mercy. Make it precious and near to Thee through Thy bounty and bestowal.



'Abdu'l-Bahá

