

**Wisdom Circles**  
**Wholeness, Healing, and Salvation, April 2013**

What Does It Mean To Be Saved? How Are We Made Whole?

“Have you been saved,” asked the earnest young man with a fist full of comic book tracts. At first, I pretended not to know what he was talking about. “Saved from what?” I replied.

“From eternal hellfire.”

“I’m not worried about eternal hellfire.”

“But have you accepted Jesus as your personal savior?”

I had, at 16, much to the relief of my family and church. But I was starting to feel bad about playing games with the young man. “I’m a Universalist,” I said. “We don’t believe that there is eternal damnation. We are convinced that no one is ever separated from the love of God.”

“But that’s not what the Bible says.”

“There is nothing about eternal damnation in the Bible.” We argued Biblical interpretation for a while.

“Don’t you think you deserve to be punished for your sins?” he asked.

“No. Like everybody, I make mistakes. If I don’t see them and try to correct them and make any amends that I can, then I will be punished by my sins.” He said he would pray for me. I said thank you.

Years and years ago I was like that earnest young man. I took seriously the teachings of the church I grew up in to try to get people to accept Jesus as their personal savior so they would be saved from eternal damnation. But the people who engaged me directly and challenged these notions watered a seed of doubt, which led me to pay attention to the inner knowledge that what I had been taught about salvation and damnation was wrong and twisted. What will happen to the young man? Perhaps he too will be saved—from the fear of an afterlife of eternal torment, because he is human and makes mistakes.

The Universalist part of our name refers to “universal salvation.” In simpler terms, it means that God does not condemn us. We won’t go to hell. Let’s just stipulate that we don’t have to be saved to be acceptable in the eyes of God. Let’s just affirm that we are basically good, that we have a right to be here and live our lives without any ontological fear. And so, let’s ask ourselves is there anything to this idea of being saved? In the *Oxford Companion to the Bible* it says “The primary meanings of the Hebrew and Greek words for salvation are non-religious.” So, let’s look at the origins of the words translated as ‘salvation’ in the languages in which the Old and New testaments were written. In the Old Testament, more properly called the Hebrew Bible, because that is its original language, the word for salvation literally means “to make wide.” The word has a military context and it implies victory over evil or rescue from the dangers of life. The New Testament, or Christian Bible, was written in Greek, and the Greek word for salvation literally means, “To make well.”

Are we all so wonderful and perfect that none of us need to be rescued from spiritual danger? Are we all so spiritually complete that our spirits don’t ever need to be made well? These questions answer themselves. We stand in need of being saved our whole lives. Sometimes we

need to be saved from love-less-ness or meaninglessness. Sometimes we need to be saved from remorse or from addictions. The Buddha taught that we need to be saved from greed, hatred and delusion. An all the world religions say we need to be saved from self-centeredness so that we can realize the larger truth of community and communion.

How are we saved? Not by supernatural intervention. It takes initiative on our part. Wise companions in our lives help a lot. They can, by their actions and examples, show us how we can be better, more loving, and more light-hearted. Providing a place to meet such wise companions is what religious communities are all about and Wisdom Circles are designed intentionally to provide wise companions. We are saved by wise choices, by generosity of spirit, by self-examination and by meditation and spiritual practice.

What are we saved for? Rabbi Salman Schacter teaches that the main task of aging is to be saved, not in the theological sense, but in the computer sense. We need to save the accumulated wisdom of our lifetimes by passing it on into the future so that it will live on after us. We are saved for love, for service, and to feel joy and gratitude.

We are not saved once and for all. We are saved a thousand times in our lifetime.

Love,  
Arvid

### **Spiritual Practice**

The spiritual exercise for this month is a journey of the imagination. It will take approximately 30 minutes to do. Begin by reading over these instructions and then find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed. You might want to have a pen and paper or other means of making notes nearby.

Close your eyes and imagine yourself on a journey. The journey is strenuous. Where do you find yourself walking? You could be walking up a mountain, or through a dense forest or in the streets of a busy city. But you have a goal, a destination. You are headed for the place where the wise person within lives.

Your journey ends. The wise person is in front of you. What does the wise person look like? Male, female, androgynous? Old, young? Let a picture of your wise person come into your mind. The wise person smiles expectantly. And you ask the wise person a question, which could take several forms. What do I need to be saved from or saved for right now in my life? What in my life needs to be healed? What inner or outer danger do I need to be rescued from right now? Listen for the answer of the wise person. Don't strain for the answer, just let it come. If you have received an answer, you can go on to ask another question. It might be something about what you can do to be saved in this situation, or a new way to approach or perceive the situation. If you have not received an answer, that's ok too. You've planted a seed in your unconscious and the answer will come later, perhaps when you are not expecting it.

Now thank the wise person, perhaps bowing deeply to your inner wisdom. Leave the journey of your imagination and come to the present moment. Write enough about your experience so that you can share it with the group, should you so choose.

### Questions to Wrestle With

1. Talk about an experience in your life where you were saved, healed or made whole. What were the circumstances? Did others help?
2. What do you need to be rescued from? What needs healing in your life?
3. How do you need to be saved in the computer sense? What parts of the harvest of your life experience need to be given away so they will live on after you? How are you doing that or how do you intent to do that?

### Words of Wisdom

I firmly believe that our salvation depends on the poor.

- Dorothy Day

The salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness, and in human responsibility.

- Vaclav Havel

A man's ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education, and social ties; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death.

- Albert Einstein

Unitarian Universalism affirms:

That Creation is too grand, complex, and mysterious to be captured in a narrow creed. That is why we cherish individual freedom of belief. At the same time our convictions lead us to other affirmations . . .

That the blessings of life are available to everyone, not just the Chosen or the Saved;

That Creation itself is Holy -- the earth and all its creatures, the stars in all their glory;

That the Sacred or Divine, the Precious and Profound, are made evident not in the miraculous or supernatural but in the simple and the everyday;

That human beings, joined in collaboration with the gifts of grace, are responsible for the planet and its future;

That every one of us is held in Creation's hand -- a part of the interdependent cosmic web -- and hence strangers need not be enemies;

That no one is saved until we All are saved, where All means the whole of Creation;

That the paradox of life is to love it all the more even though we ultimately lose it.

- William Schulz

Work, alternated with needful rest, is the salvation of man or woman.

- Antoinette Brown Blackwell)

Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime,

Therefore, we are saved by hope.

Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history;

Therefore, we are saved by faith.

Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone.

Therefore, we are saved by love.

No virtuous act is quite a virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as from our own;

Therefore, we are saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.

- Reinhold Niebuhr

You know quite well, deep within you, that there is only a single magic, a single power, a single salvation...and that is called loving. Well, then, love your suffering. Do not resist it, do not flee from it. It is your aversion that hurts, nothing else.

- Hermann Hesse

“EVANGELIST, n. A bearer of good tidings, particularly (in a religious sense) such as assure us of our own salvation and the damnation of our neighbors.”

- From The Devil's Dictionary by Ambrose Bierce

## Resources

This is a wonderful TED talk by Brene Brown on the power of vulnerability.

[http://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_on\\_vulnerability.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.html)

And if you like sermons here's one by Marlin Lavenhar from Tulsa.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NeXDuzB-xoA&playnext=1&list=PL9E09719D45B06B1F&feature=results\\_main](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NeXDuzB-xoA&playnext=1&list=PL9E09719D45B06B1F&feature=results_main)

I love Krista Tippett's NPR show On Being. Here theologian Harvey Cox debunks the common belief that "the market" is our salvation.

<http://www.onbeing.org/program/beyond-atheism-religion-divide/feature/market-god/633>