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Service and Justice

This Week's Common Theme Across Religions

Mother Theresa, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, the Dalai Lama...At different points, across different faiths, they have all stood for one thing—serving humanity.



They remain abiding role models not just in their communities, but for the world. "The beauty of Sacred Activism is that it brings together what is best in both the mystic and the activist: the mystic's fiery passion for God, and the activist's fiery passion for justice," writes Andrew Harvey, a scholar of religion. "What is born from the fusion of those two great ennobling fires is a third fire that is love and wisdom in action."



Service is one of the main tenets in all religions. But it does not mean just material giving – it can involve giving your time, or a skill, or fighting for the greater good and for justice. Prophets like Jesus, Muhammad, and the Buddha were great exemplars of social justice, civil rights, and community service. Whether we abide by specific guidelines for charity or simply look for opportunities to give as they arise, this practice is one of the best ways to show others we care about them and see the common humanity and unconditional value in them. That is why Hindus use the greeting "namaste," which means "I bow to the God in you."

Christianity

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."

—The New Testament (Peter 4:10), Christian text

Islam

"Refrain from following your own desire, so that you can act justly—if you distort or neglect justice, God is fully aware of what you do."

—Qur'an (4:135), Islamic text

Judaism

"Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

—Hebrew Bible (Psalm 82:3-4), Jewish text

Baha'i

"Service in love for mankind is unity with God."

—'Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i leader

Hinduism

"Strive constantly to serve the welfare of the world; by devotion to selfless work, one attains the supreme goal of life. Do your work with the welfare of others always in mind."

—The Bhagavad Gita (3:19-20), Hindu text

Buddhism

"Those who are selfish suffer in this life and in the next. They suffer seeing the results of the evil they have done, and more suffering awaits them in the next life. But those who are selfless rejoice in this life and in the next."

—The Dhammapada (17-18), Buddhist text

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