

Blessing of the Animals

A Resource Guide For
Unitarian Universalist Congregations

Reverend LoraKim Joyner
Reverend Gary Kowalski



Inherent Worth And Dignity of Every Being

Services that celebrate our animal companions are increasingly popular in UU circles. "Blessing of the animals" ceremonies are traditionally held near October 4 (the Feast Day of St. Francis), but can also be observed on Earth Day, during the first week of May ("Be Kind to Animals Week"), near the birthday of Henry Bergh (August 29), or at other times of year:

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| January 14 | Albert Schweitzer's Birthday |
| March 20 | "Great American Meat Out" |
| April 24 | World Day for Animals in Labs |
| August 22 | Homeless Animals Vigil Day |
| October 1 | World Vegetarian Day |

Animals bless us with their playfulness and affection and simply through their trusting presence. Dogs, cats, hamsters, snakes and earthworms have frequently been included in the services I have conducted and are generally the best behaved members of the congregation. In some other churches, people are asked to bring photos of their pets or stuffed animals, and no living creatures are present. But this diminishes the vitality of the event. Asking people to make sure that their pets are house-trained and under control at all times will almost certainly prevent any "boo-boos" from happening. It is also advisable to bring only healthy animals and those that will enjoy being there.

Dogsology

From all that dwell below the skies
Let songs of hope and faith arise
Let peace, goodwill on earth be sung
Or barked or howled by every tongue!

Rev. LoraKim Joyner



In churches I've served, our services are always intergenerational. Children may introduce their pets and share what gifts their four legged friend bring into their lives. Usually someone from the local animal shelter speaks briefly to the youngsters about properly caring for animals. Co-sponsoring the service with the Humane Society creates additional publicity and outreach, and helps support as worthy cause.

I always include a moment for lighting candles of remembrance for pets who have died. People appreciate the opportunity express their grief and gratitude. For many, this may be the first time they have been able to publicly say farewell to a beloved companion. Be sure to provide enough candles. More people than you realize will want to commemorate a cherished pet.

Animals have a way of helping people break the ice and enjoy each other socially, and our blessing ceremonies are very popular for this reason. Fur poeple bring an uninhibited joyful to otherwise staid experiences of worship. As a past president of the Unitarian Universalist Animal Ministry, I encourage you to make use of the resources in this presentation and to explore your own ways of expressing appreciation for the creatures who do so much to enrich our lives.

Reverend Gary Kowalski

Some Reflections on the Meaning of Blessings

Rev. LoraKim Joyner

According to common myth, Unitarian Universalists are not a people of blessings, as exemplified in this popular story:

There is this guy who saves for years to buy his dream car. He finally shells out a fortune for a brand new Lamborghini. Recognizing the deeply felt significance of attaining his lifelong dream, he drives to a nearby Catholic Church and knocks on the parsonage door. "Father, I was wondering whether you'd be willing to say a blessing on my Lamborghini." "Certainly, my son," replies the priest, "but what's a Lamborghini?" "Sorry to have troubled you, father--I just have a feeling you're not the right person for the job," the man apologizes and drives to a nearby synagogue where he repeats the question. "Rabbi, I was wondering whether you'd be willing to say a blessing on my Lamborghini." "Certainly," replies the rabbi, "But what's a Lamborghini?" "Gosh, rabbi, I guess you're not the right person for the job, either." So he drives to his local UU meetinghouse and finds the minister. "I was wondering whether you'd be willing to say a blessing on my Lamborghini?" "Certainly," replies the UU minister, "I'd love to have one myself. But what's a blessing?"

But if Unitarian Universalists are not known for offering blessings in the past, that is now changing. All over the country, UU congregations re doing Animal Blessings. They are quite the storm and people love them.

But we have to ask ourselves why we are doing them. We aren't known as a tradition where most of us believe in a supernatural force that blesses or where clergy with divine powers confer blessings. Nor do we feel that there is a need to bless a soul for eternal salvation. Are we doing Animal Blessings because of superstition, bad theology, and cheap methods to arrive at a superficial warm fuzzy feeling without contributing to the overall improvement of the human condition? And in the case of nonhuman animals, without contributing to all of life?

This is an important concern. We worship because we wish to understand how to value life and how to improve it for ourselves and for others. Do Animal Blessings do this? I believe that they do and that there is a deep religious and spiritual understanding to blessings that goes beyond the use of "Bless You" in popular culture as a saying of good will.

Take the example of saying a blessing before a meal. The Talmud teaches that a Jew should say 100 blessings a day, many of which are before a meal. The standard formula is "Blessed are You, Yahweh, our God, Source of Life, who creates the food before us." It acknowledges that our food comes from God, or that God, the divine or a connection to the whole is in our food. Our food is therefore sacred, pointing us to a higher level of awareness, and a blessing reminds us in a daily fashion that we can release ourselves from our mundane self-centered isolationism and go beyond our narrow self-awareness to a spirituality that reminds us with each meal that we are connected to the whole. A food blessing also reminds us that many beings are responsible for our food: the lives of plants and animals and the hard labor of humans. Rabbi Hanina bar Pappa states, "whoever has enjoyment from this world without saying a blessing, it is as if she or he has robbed the Holy One and the community of Israel." A blessing reminds us that the beings and objects of the world are not ours to take, but ours only to receive. We become thoughtful of our limits and our necessary interdependence on all life and we seek to balance our consumption in all areas of our life.

Buddhists say the same thing in a somewhat different fashion, such as this blessing from Thich Nhat Hanh:



This food is the gift of the whole universe -- the earth, the sky, and much hard work.
May we live in a way that is worthy of this food.
May we transform our unskillful states of mind, especially that of greed.
May we eat only foods that nourish us and prevent illness.
May we accept this food for the realization of the way of understanding and love.

The depth of this blessing is mirrored in the Christian tradition of blessing as defined by Dr. Elmer Towns. He says "Blessing means making things better, improving your life and services, and does not mean divine intervention." He continues by saying that when we bless others we add value to others, we give them



strength, we promise commitment to others, we purify our emotions, we solidify our relationships, and we increase our potential to minister to others in the world. By being of greater service to others, we are able to bless their lives and our lives with the riches of the community -- connection, belonging, healing and purpose. We are blessed to be a blessing.

We are also blessed when we bless someone we do not get along with or who might have harmed us. Saying a blessing to the person who harms us allows us to be more compassionate with ourselves. Our feelings of anger and victimization can diminish and we can be more at peace with ourselves. Our commitment to bless all of life must include ourselves, for we are all in need of blessing and compassion. Paula Becker uses the Buddhist meditation of metta practice, which is a

process of cultivating a gentle friendship with oneself through loving kindness. Her meditation has this form:

May I be free from danger.
May I have mental happiness.
May I have physical happiness.
May I have ease of well-being.

We also need to include ourselves in asking for blessings to flow into our life, for by saying blessings for ourselves, we recall that we have a responsibility to our own happiness and that what is good for us is good for others.

An even deeper meaning of blessings is the idea that blessings are a challenge. In Genesis Jacob thought to trick his father Isaac into blessing him by posing as his elder brother, Esau. He was successful but had to flee for fear of Esau. In the desert he encountered God posing as a man who wrestled with him. Jacob was injured but held on tight to the man and said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." God did bless him and changed Jacob's name to Israel to indicate how Jacob had been transformed. Jacob sought to earn blessings the easy way, but only by having a true encounter with God which wounds him is he able to receive blessings.

The notion that wounding leads to blessings is not unreasonable, given our own experiences of growth after a difficult time. Also interesting is the mixed up etymology of the word, for in French, the word for blessing, *Blessor*, means to wound. A blessing is a

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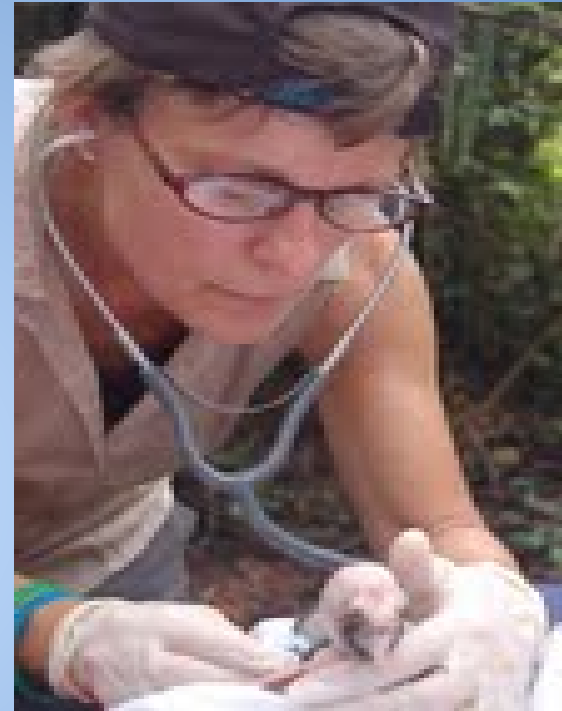
wrestling, wounding, deepening, learning event -- not a blessing to keep us closer held to the status quo, but a blessing to bring us into a deeper understanding of the meaning and hope of life. Many blessings do not come cheap, nor are they conferred cheap. But when they arrive they allow us to continue in the struggle of life, for blessings are something that brings a loving and creative spirit of life that lets us know that we are not alone, and that there is strength abounding in us and in all life.

Each of us names our meanings and way of blessing and being blessed, for we each have different experiences and different gifts. This is a blessing from our Unitarian Universalist tradition: we can use the resources and experiences of all the life and faith traditions to support our principles, which in their very essence are a blessing -- all beings have worth and we are connect to everything. Perhaps a UU blessing would go like this:

May my understanding of the worth and interdependence of all life comfort me and keep all beings from harm.

When we have Animal Blessing services, we are reaching deeply into our Unitarian Universalist

Rev. LoraKim Joyner, D.V.M.



tradition to affirm the worth and interconnection of all life, and hence promote the flourishing of all life. In blessing we are blessed, and hence are healed as we offer healing to all God's creatures.

In the beginning, the old stories say, when the heavens and earth were in formation, before there was anything, a great darkness lay on the deep, and a mighty wind moved across the emptiness. A voice said “Let there be light,” and the incandescence of a billion galaxies fluoresced into existence. The Creator saw that the light was good, shiny, bright, radiating at 186,000 miles per second throughout the entire universe.

So God decided to make some more of this stuff, everything emerging in a blinding flash, with carbon and nitrogen and oxygen (which along with hydrogen from the Big Bang constituted the building blocks of life) all baked in the bellies of exploding stars. From these ingredients the seas were laid down, then the hills and mountains and forests that were filled on each successive day with unimaginable creatures: elephants and tigers in the jungles of Asia, buffalo on the broad plains of the American southwest, and birds in numbers that darkened the skies on their annual migrations. On the continental shelves of the oceans, the coral reefs were formed, home to the sea turtles who fed on the shallow bottom grass.

Each day the Creator labored, the old legends say, and each day the Creator saw that the Earth was good, an excellent habitation. No part of it was superfluous. No species was throwaway or expendable. Every bird and beast and fish added to the Maker’s delight. All was of superior quality, as the old myths tell it.

On the sixth day, God made people, blessed the whole creation, and gave the people the green growing plants to eat because, in the beginning, all beings lived in peace and none preyed on the others. Then God rested and blessed it all again because it was such a fantastic world.

This is what it means to bless and be blessed: to feel an outpouring of wonder and gratitude for life and all existence. *Bless* is related to *bliss*. One dictionary relates both to the word *blithe*, which means merry, upbeat, exuberant. (According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the words had separate origins, but at least by the advent of Middle English, *bless* might be spelled *bliss*, or either one as *blyss*.) The terms became interchangeable. To be blessed, to experience a sense of bliss, means to feel deeply happy just to be alive, just to exist, just to waken one more day and feel ourselves a part of this stupendous creation.

GARY KOWALSKI

Blessings of the Animals



CELEBRATING OUR KINSHIP WITH ALL CREATION

Don't animals teach us about blessing, about joy? They remind us to be satisfied with what we have. Not one of them is worried about the stock market. Not one of them wants to run for Congress or govern the animal kingdom. None brags that their religion is better than their neighbor's. Each is satisfied with just a little: fresh water, healthy food, and enough room to nest or den. None needs a passport or travel documents or immigration papers, because they don't live in a state like Arizona or Texas that cares about such things. They live in a state of bliss.

"The State of Bliss"

excerpted from *Blessings of the Animals:
Celebrating Our Kinship With All Creation*

by Reverend Gary Kowalski

Lantern Books, 2012

(click on book cover for author's website)

An Interspecies Meditation

excerpted from *The Souls of Animals*

by Reverend Gary Kowalski

New World Library, 2006

Look into the eyes of an animal. It might be your dog or cat, or one of the creatures present in this room ...

And as you look into those eyes, reflect that this being is a never-to-be-duplicated expression of the universe.

Pay attention to what you see: the years of living present within those eyes and the vitality that shines through their color and transparency.

Contemplate their shape. Notice the angles and curves of individuality that make the face of this creature a unique work of art, crafted by time and desire.

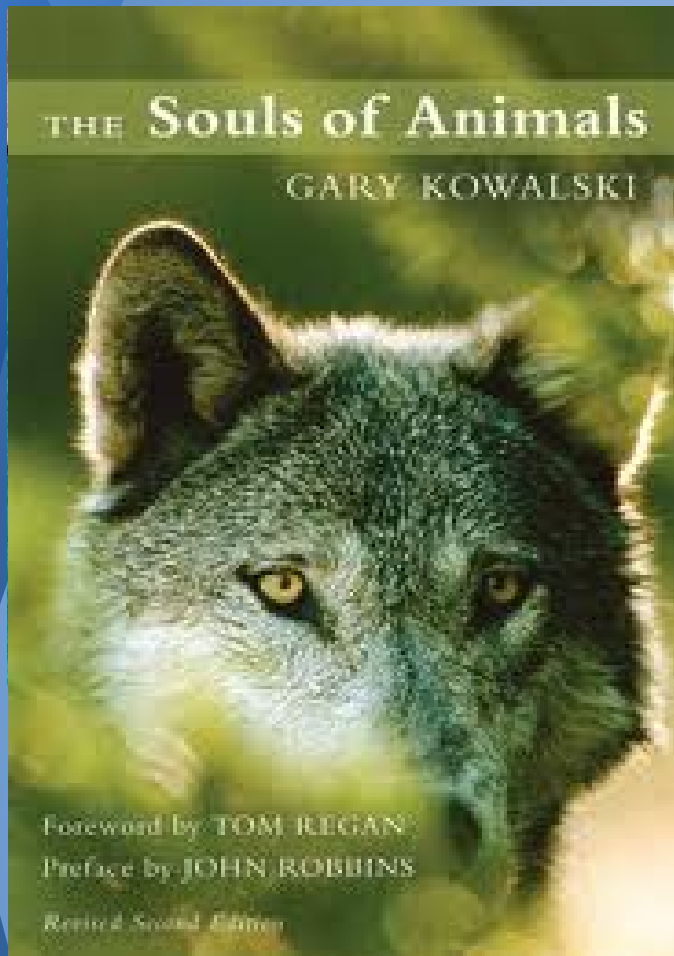
And as you look into this being's eyes, pay attention also to what you cannot see: the inwardness, the selfhood, the "I" that is as singular as its outward expression.

What you look upon is a living spirit. Greet and respect it. Appreciate it for what it is.

As yourself: What does it feel like to be this creature?

What does the world look like through its eyes?

Become aware of the great antiquity within those eyes -- the millenia of evolution they hold within their gaze.



Sense a solitude you can never fully enter into or understand.

Be aware that this is a being who has known hardships and hurts you can never imagine. This is a being who has known moments of wildness and innocence that you can never share.

Yet this is a creature who is alive and has desires like you. It walks the same ground and breathes the same air. It feels pain and enjoys its senses -- the dazzling warmth of the sun, the cooling shade of the forests, the refreshing taste of pure water --as you do. And in this we are all kin.

In that kinship, all life exists. Through that kinship, we can find wholeness. Out of that kinship we can draw wisdom and understanding for the healing of our common home.

(Click on book cover for ordering information)

Ecology's Patron Saint

Some have called Saint Francis of Assisi "the Patron Saint of Ecology." A few have suggested that he may have been mentally disturbed. Of Francis, a medieval biographer named Thomas of Celano wrote, "He overflowed with a spirit of love not only for men and women who suffered but also for dumb animals, reptiles, birds and any other creature with and without consciousness. When the Brothers were cutting wood, he would forbid them to cut down the whole tree so that it might grow up again. He picked up worms so they would not be trampled on and had honey and wine set out for the bees in the winter season. When he would come on a vast field of flowers, he would preach to them and exhort them to praise God as if they could understand his words." If more people were crazy like Francis, this would probably be a better world for us all.

Francis' well-known "Canticle to Brother Sun" makes a beautiful reading for a service dedicated to honoring the kinship of all life:

Most high, all powerful, all good Lord!
All praise is yours, all glory, all honor, and all blessing.
To you, alone, Most High, do they belong.
No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,
especially through my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day; and you give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor!
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars;
in the heavens you have made them bright, precious and beautiful.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
and clouds and storms, and all the weather,
through which you give your creatures sustenance.

Be praised, My Lord, through Sister Water;
she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure.
Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you brighten the night.
He is beautiful and cheerful, and powerful and strong.
Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth,
who feeds us and rules us,
and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Be praised, my Lord, through those who forgive for love of you;
through those who endure sickness and trial.
Happy those who endure in peace,
for by you, Most High, they will be crowned.
Be praised, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whose embrace no living person can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin!
Happy those she finds doing your most holy will.
The second death can do no harm to them.
Praise and bless my Lord, and give thanks,
and serve him with great humility.

The words are even more moving when you realize that Francis wrote this hymn at the end of his life (1181 - 1226), when he was afflicted with total blindness. The medical treatments for such maladies were truly medieval in those times--cauterizing the eyeball with a hot iron--and Francis was in searing pain when he penned his great paean to Creation. But he had learned to see the world with the inner eye, where he could glimpse the divinity within all things.

Rev. Gary Kowalski

Do Good Dogs Go To Heaven?

Will we see our pets again, in the great beyond? As the author of a book on grieving and healing from the loss of a beloved companion, I'm asked this question frequently

One of my own favorite tales comes from India, from the religious epic called the Mahabarata. Yuhisthira, the hero of this saga, is renowned for his love of satya (truth) and dharma (righteousness), but his character is revealed most fully at the conclusion of the drama. Arduously, Yuhsthira and his brothers ascend the peaks of the Himalayas on their final pilgrimage. One by one, the four brothers fall aside, weighted down by their accumulated karma. But Yuhsthira, who is without sin or blemish, achieves the summit and there the King of Gods, Indra, prepares to take the hero to heaven in a golden chariot. But Indra tells Yuhsthira he must leave his dog behind, as a creature not worthy of eternity. "There is no place in Heaven for persons with dogs," the almighty Indra announces.

Yuhisthira responds, "This dog, O Lord of the Past and the Present, is exceedingly devoted to me. He should go with me. My heart is full of compassion for him," and compassion is the great teaching of the Vedas.

But you've renounced everything else, Indra reasons. Why not sacrifice this dog, too? The realm of bliss is waiting.

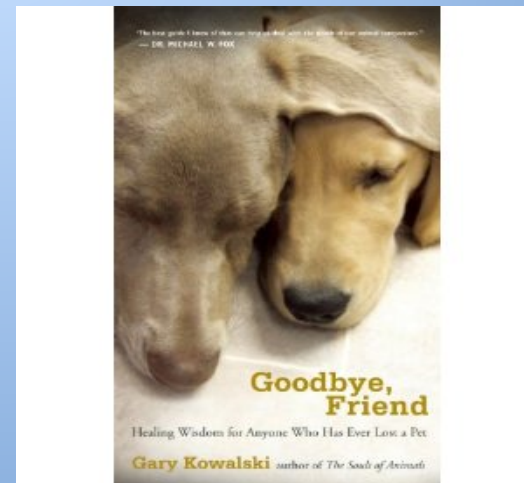
But Yuhisthira won't betray his friend, even if it means forgoing heaven: "It has been said that the abandonment of one that is devoted is infinitely sinful," as bad as slaying a Brahman or holy man.

"Hence, O great Indra, I shall not abandon this dog today from desire of my happiness." That's devotion.

At this moment of supreme self-denial, the dog morphs into a deity, who had just been testing Yuhisthira. The gates of paradise open for man and mutt alike. And the dog Svana—whose name in Sanskrit means "dog"—takes his place in the firmament above as the luminous body we know today as Sirius, the Dog Star—brightest in the entire night sky.

I like these old stories, even if they're myths. They make the night seem a little less lonely, the stars a bit closer and more welcoming. And whatever heaven is out there, up there, or beyond the Milky Way, it's good to think that pets are allowed.

excerpted from *Goodbye Friend: Healing Wisdom for Anyone Who Has Ever Lost A Pet* by Gary Kowalski
New World Library, 2012



All God's Critters Got A Place In The Choir
Words and Music Written and Performed by Bill Staines



An Alphabet of Gratitude

excerpted from *Earth Day: An Alphabet Book*

Skinner House Books, 2009

by Rev. Gary Kowalski

We give thanks for the earth and its creatures, and are grateful from A to Z:

For alligators, apricots, acorns, and apple trees,

For bumblebees, bananas, blueberries, and beagles,

Coconuts, crawdads, cornfields, and coffee,

Daisies, elephants, and flying fish,

For groundhogs, glaciers, and grasslands,

Hippos and hazelnuts, icicles and iguanas,

For juniper, jackrabbits, and junebugs,

Kudzu and kangaroos, lightning bugs and licorice,

For mountains and milkweed and mistletoe,

Norwhals and nasturtiums, otters and ocelots,

For peonies, persimmons, and polar bears,

Quahogs and Queen Anne's Lace,

For raspberries and roses,

Salmon and sassafras, tornadoes and tulipwood,

Urchins and valleys and waterfalls,

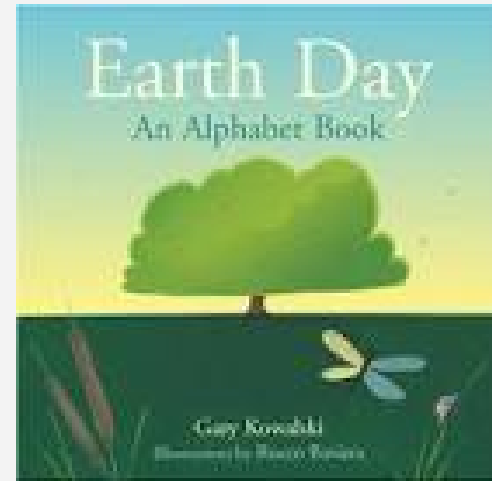
For X (the unknown, the mystery of it all!)

In every yak and yam;

We are grateful, good Earth, not least of all

For zinnias, zucchini, and zebras,

And for the alphabet of wonderful things that are as simple as ABC.



[\(click on book cover for ordering information\)](#)

What the Turtle Taught Theodore: A True Story

In his autobiography, Theodore Parker relates that as a child, four or five years old, living on a farm in Roxbury, he was walking through the fields one day absent-mindedly swinging a stick through the tall grass. This was many years ago, in the days before the Civil War. It was summertime. He stopped to watch the water bubble along a creek. Then he noticed a turtle sunning itself on a rock. He'd seen other boys use their sticks to strike a turtles and other animals. It was part of what children thought was fun, just as some children still like to bully and hit those who are weaker than themselves. Often children and grown-ups too are copycats—mimicking the behavior of others who seem bigger or stronger than themselves. Young Theodore wanted to be like the other, older boys he'd seen, so he raised his stick into the air, taking aim and preparing to knock the turtle into the water.

Then something stopped him. Something seemed wrong about the situation. He looked again at the turtle, quiet, peaceful, enjoying the summer day just as he liked to feel the warmth and light of the sun. Had the turtle ever done him any harm? Was the turtle so different than himself? Slowly he lowered his stick and walked home, thinking about what had happened.

When he arrived home, his mother was there to greet him, and he told her about the incident. She listened carefully to Theodore, and listened especially carefully when he related how some strange force inside had stopped him from hitting the little animal. "Theodore," she said, "that force inside you was the voice of conscience. Always pay attention to it. Always follow what your conscience tells you. It's your moral compass that points you in the right direction. And if you honor your conscience, you'll never go wrong in this world."

Theodore Parker grew up to become a Unitarian minister, in fact one of the greatest leaders our faith has ever known. He became a champion of the defenseless who needed defending. He was a hero in the fight to end slavery in our country. He prayed to "Father and Mother God" and fought for women's equality and their right to vote. He and wife never had children of their own—but he felt a sense of kinship with the whole family of creation, people of all sexes and races who had been made in the image of the holy. And it all started one summer day when he was just a child—a child who saw a turtle and decided to do what was right.

Rev. Gary Kowalski

The Bless You Bunnies: A Tail for All Ages

by Rev. LoraKim Joyner

Once upon a time there was a family of rabbits who lived in hole in the ground near the edge of a Farmer Hernandez's chile pepper field. One day one of the young bunnies stuck his nose out of the hole for the first time and a gust of wind blew right into his face and he sneezed. His parents who were eating clover near by said, well what do you think they said? That's right, *Bless you*. They might have said *Salud* because they were bilingual bunnies. The bunny asked his parents what bless you means and they said, "it means we love you and we wish for you always to be safe." The young bunnies liked this so much that whenever some one sneezed, or had a bee chase them, or got lost and was found, all the baby bunnies would say *Bless you*. They thought this was a great game to do and it made them feel loved.

One day, Farmer Hernandez was out on his tractor plowing under his chiles. He got

closer and closer and the young bunnies hunkered down in their hole, but finally the ground shook so much they jumped out and ran as fast as they could in all directions, zigging and zagging as bunnies do.

One bunny, after stopping, saw that the farmer had a funny look on his face – the kind of look you have when you have been hurt or have been crying. Without thinking the bunny said *Bless you*. Now, I don't know if that farmer heard the little bunny – I mean how could he have heard it over the sound of the tractor engine, but a really good *Bless you* can carry an awful long way. Farmer Hernandez got a puzzled look on his face, as if he had heard the bunny, and stopped the tractor. He looked around the field and he caught site of the bunny.

He went over to the bunny, who was very still and quiet and was trying to not be seen. Quickly he threw his hat over the bunny to catch her, and then he reached down and scooped up the little bunny in his

The Bless You Bunnies (continued)

hat and held her close to his heart. He leaned his face against the soft bunny fur and then the farmer began to cry, and cry, for the last time he had touched another creature was when his wife was alive. Since his wife had died last year he hadn't spoken to anyone, and no one came to see him, and no one had held him and he had held no one, until he had picked up this bunny.

Knowing that where there is one bunny, there are many, the farmer walked all around the field until he had a hat full of baby bunnies and found their old rabbit hole and put the baby bunnies in it. He waited there standing guard over the baby bunnies until the parents came back. And while he sat next to the bunnies, watching their soft ears flop and their little noses twitch, and hearing their soft whispers of *Bless you*, he began to feel less sad, and even a little bit happy.

After he saw the parent rabbits approaching, Farmer Hernandez got up to leave. He looked down on all the bunnies before he left and he said "thank you for blessing my life." As he turned and walked away, the bunny family said to him, *Bless you*. And he heard them, that day and for all the rest of the days of his life and he always felt loved.

You too are like a Bless You Bunny. You can go around blessing people and animals, each in your own way such as thanking them, smiling at them, remembering them, and being with them. In this way, your life is a blessing to them and you help others feel loved, such as you do by being here with all of us today. Bless you for coming and bless you always.

Readings for Blessing of the Animals

“The spirit of God is with animals as it is with us, consciously with us, unconsciously with them. We are not divided, but are one in God’s care and love.”

Frederick Henry Hedge, Harvard
Professor of Divinity, 1805-1890

All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful:
The Lord God made them all.

From *Hymns for Little
Children*, 1848, Cecil
Alexander

If I were alone in a desert and feeling afraid,
I would want a child to be with me.
For then my fear would disappear and I would be
made strong.
This is what life in itself can do because it is so
noble,
so full of pleasure and so powerful.

But if I could not have a child with me
I would like to have at least a living animal at my side
to comfort me.
Therefore, let those who bring about wonderful things
in their big, dark books
take an animal to help them.
The life within the animal will give them strength in
turn.
For equality gives strength, in all things and at all
times.

Meister Eckhart, Medieval
Christian Mystic

Love all God’s creation, the whole universe and each
grain of sand.
Love every leaflet, every ray of God’s light.
Love the beasts, love the plants, love every creature.
When you love every creature, you will understand
the mystery of God
in created things.

Fyodor Dostoevsky,
Russian Novelist

More Readings for Blessing of the Animals

“The Doggies Dirge”

A dog’s life is forlorn, dear God,
Though we may leap and sport;
Our sorrow--and it breaks our hearts--
Is that our lives are short.

“A dog’s best friend is man,” they say,
“Or women--saint or knave.”
So dogs long to escort those lives
From childhood to the grave.

We live too fast! At three months old
We match a child of four.
At one, we’re grown-up as our friend
Who is sixteen or more.
 In just two years we’re as mature
 As humans twenty-five.
 And when we’re ten, we’re getting old
 And lucky to survive.

Please hear our prayer, forgive our need
To leap and bark and snort,
For we must cram a world of love
Into a life so short!

William Cleary

The insect in the plant, the moth which spends its brief hours of existence hovering about the candle’s flame--nay, the life which inhabits a drop of water, is as much an object of God’s special providence as the mightiest monarch on his throne.

Henry Bergh, Founder, ASPCA

Hear our humble prayer, O God, for our friends the animals, especially for animals who are suffering, for any that are hunted or lost, or deserted or frightened or hungry; for all that must be put to death. We entreat for them all thy mercy and pity and for those who deal with them we ask a heart of compassion and gentle hands and kindly words. Make us, ourselves, to be true friends to animals and so to share the blessings of the merciful.

Albert

Schweitzer

Ask now the beasts and they shall teach thee,
And the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee,
Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee,
And the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee.
Who among all these does not know
 that the hand of the Lord has done this?
 In whose hand is the soul of every living
thing.

Job 12:7-10

Further Readings for Blessing of the Animals

We need another and a wiser and perhaps a more mystical concept of animals. Remote from universal nature, and living by complicated artifice, man in civilization surveys the creatures through the glass of his knowledge and sees thereby a feather magnified and the whole image in distortion. We patronise them for their incompleteness, for their tragic fate of having taken form so far below ourselves. And therein we err, we greatly err. For the animals shall not be measured by man. In a world older and more complete than ours, they move finished and complete,, gifted with extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear. They are not brethren, they are not underlings. They are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendor and travail of the earth.

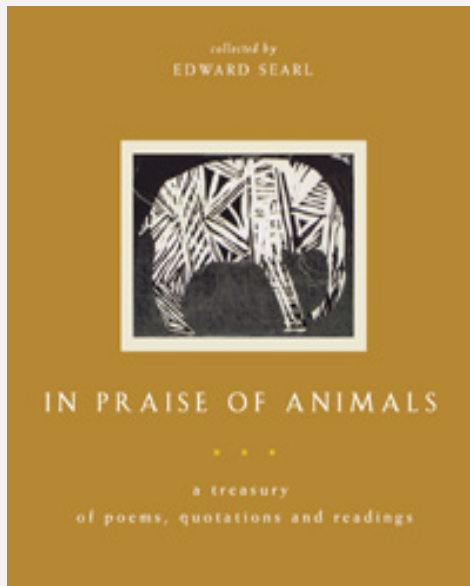
Henry Beston

Additional Resources

In Praise of Animals by Edward Searl Skinner House, 2007

This imaginative collection offers poems, prose, blessings, chants-tributes of all kinds-to the animals in our lives. An ideal gift for welcoming a new pet, sympathizing with the loss of a pet, and for animal-lovers in general. A perfect resource for animal-blessing ceremonies and other rituals honoring the animal kingdom. Searl is the author of *In Memoriam, and other books in this series: Beyond Absence, Bless This Child, Coming of Age and We Pledge Our Hearts.*

(Click on cover for ordering information)



A Child's Book of Animal Poems and Blessings by Eliza Blanchard Skinner House, 2010

These poems, prayers and blessings about our animal brethren are drawn from around the world and throughout history. Speaks to a child's sense of connection with the animal kingdom. By turns amusing and reverential, Blanchard weaves together a collection that inspires gratitude and joy for a world rich in diversity and wonder. Sources include the Bible, African and Native American cultures, Lewis Carroll, William Wordsworth and Christina Rossetti. Full-color illustrations by Joyce Hesselberth. Ages 5-7.

(Click on cover for ordering information.)



Benedictions

Blessed are the faithful, for they shall be called dogs.
Blessed are the playful, for they shall be surrounded with love and laughter.
Blessed are those without worry, for through them,
 we shall know peace.
Blessed are those with no possessions,
 for they shall be rich in spiritual things.
Blessed are the innocent, for theirs is the realm of heaven.
Blessed are the animals, and blessed are we.

Rev. Gary Kowalski

From our hearts and minds into our hands,
 May blessings flow.
Around and around this circle of friends
 May blessings flow.
Around and around our beloved earth
 May blessings flow
For all beings, may blessings flow.

Rev. LoraKim Joyner

For the Earth Forever Turning from "Missa Gaia" by Paul Winter

Soloists: Emily Joy Goldberg, soprano, Beverly Grace-Spencer, alto and animal recordings. Conducted by Mark Daugherty. Audio: Bob Unger and Bob Wilford. Video by Jeff Smith

