

# Resources for Communities of Ongoing Religious Exploration

V. 2 Unit 7

Liberation

## Suggested Chalice Lighting

All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree. All these aspirations are directed toward ennobling man's life, lifting it from the sphere of mere physical existence and leading the individual towards freedom. ~ Albert Einstein

## Introduction

Literally, the word liberation means the act of making (something/someone) free. In common usage, freedom and liberation usually point toward breaking free of oppression or external constraint. Many doctrinal religious traditions identify the idea of freedom or liberation more closely with breaking individual bondage to a human condition of frailty or sin. Liberal religious movements, including Unitarianism and Universalism, have associated themselves with wider liberation movements throughout modern history. Often described as “free faith,” Unitarian Universalism sets itself apart from other religious traditions by asserting the necessity of religious freedom. Still, the only specific mention of freedom or liberty in our common principles is in the fourth principle: a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. The connection of liberal religion with liberation is not explicitly stated, but grows out of our commitment to ideals of world community, individual liberty, and universal justice.

## Readings

If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come here because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

Lilla Watson

No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption.

Paulo Freire

We currently live in a reality of scarce justice, scarce attention, scarce liberation. It makes us believe that we must pit ourselves against each other with our harm, with the worst things that have happened with our lives. Where we're like, my worst thing is worse than your worst thing. That scarcity is the lie. Actually the society we want to build, the society we want to structure and move toward is one in which there's abundant justice, abundant attention, abundant liberation, where there is enough for all of us to feel attended to.

adrienne maree brown

The struggle to end sexist oppression that focuses on destroying the cultural basis for such domination strengthens other liberation struggles. Individuals who fight for the eradication of sexism without struggles to end racism or classism undermine their own efforts. Individuals who fight for the eradication of racism or classism while supporting sexist oppression are helping to maintain the cultural basis of all forms of group oppression.

bell hooks

All great spirituality teaches about letting go of what you don't need and who you are not. Then, when you can get little enough and naked enough and poor enough, you'll find that the little place where you really are is ironically more than enough and is all that you need. At that place, you will have nothing to prove to anybody and nothing to protect. That place is called freedom.

Richard Rohr

Our discomfort arises from all of our efforts to put ground under our feet, to realize our dream of constant okayness. When we resist change, it's called suffering. But when we can completely let go and not struggle against it, when we can embrace the groundlessness of our situation and relax into its dynamic quality, that's called enlightenment, or awakening to our true nature, to our fundamental goodness. Another word for that is freedom.

Pema Chodron

The scandal is that the gospel means liberation, that this liberation comes to the poor, and that it gives them the strength and the courage to break the conditions of servitude. The Gospel of liberation is bad news to all oppressors because they have defined their freedom in terms of slavery of others.

James H. Cone

### **Questions for Consideration and Discussion**

1. What does the word *liberation* mean to you? What is the first image or association that comes to mind when you hear it? Is it synonymous with *freedom*? If not, how are they different?
2. The readings cover a range of perspectives on the meaning of liberation. For Watson and Freire, it is a process rooted in solidarity. For Brown and hooks, intersectionality of oppression, and mutuality of liberation, is central. For Chodron and Rohr, freedom is a spiritual matter and arises from detachment. Are they talking about the same thing in different frameworks, or different things called by the same name?
3. Have you had an experience in your life, whether a single event or a process, that that would describe as liberation?

4. Cone suggests a reason that liberation for all people is so elusive, claiming that those in power view their own freedom as contingent on the oppression of others. Do you think Cone is right? If so, how do we move forward?

### **Taking It Home**

Notice the freedoms you enjoy in daily life, that you may take for granted. If you are able to move about your space as you choose, to enter any room in your home, to leave your home at will, notice this. If you have the freedom to eat and drink as your physical need dictates, and to rest when you are tired, recognize these freedoms as you exercise them. Consider how life might be different without such basic freedoms. If you are free to return home to a safe and stable refuge, knowing that there will be food enough and running water in the morning, take a moment to acknowledge that many do not enjoy this opportunity. As you speak freely about your views on political, social, and religious matters, remember that this is not a safe practice for many people even in their own homes.

### **Conclusion**

Was the discussion interesting? Did it feel fresh, or did it just rehash familiar topics? Was it relevant to your life and religious journey? How might you have approached the topic differently? Did any of the readings evoke particular feelings that you were not expecting? Was there enough variety in the viewpoints of the group to create interesting discussion? Were there moments in which you felt uncomfortable? Confused? Anxious? Affirmed? Eager? Hopeful? Surprised? What other feelings did you encounter?

If people in the group would like, allow them to share these things, without interrogation or challenge.

### **Suggested Closing Words**

The true value of a human being is determined primarily by the measure and the sense in which he has attained liberation from the self. ~ Albert Einstein