



TOUCHSTONES

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

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Freedom & Responsibility

Wisdom Story



can too easily become anarchy, while responsibility without freedom can become a mindless, numbing duty in service of the wrong things for the wrong reasons. This idea of freedom of belief is liberating, unless we get stuck in “freedom from” and never move to “freedom for.” It is easy to recite a litany of all the things that we have rejected, all of the things that we no longer believe. It is quite another thing to do the hard work of constructing a philosophy, a theology, a set of beliefs that give direction and meaning to our life.

Introduction to the Theme

It has been said that our seven principles expand in a series of ever-widening circles, beginning with the individual and moving outward to encompass the interdependent web of all existence. As our fourth principle, we affirm and promote a *free and responsible search for truth and meaning*. This is the center-point or fulcrum of the seven principles. This principle refutes the charge that the principles are a creed by placing at the center of all of our religious activity a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

Freedom and responsibility must go together. Freedom without responsibility

One of the invitations of Unitarian Universalism is the ongoing search for truth. We are even called to take seriously that which we do not believe to be true, for the truth may lie where we least expect to find it. We pursue the truth with the understanding that revelation is not sealed, but continuous, and that meaning has not been captured in any final or finite way. The German poet Goethe wrote, “A tradi-

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Freedom, Responsibility & Letting Your Life Speak

Without freedom, our life can barely speak. Without responsibility, freedom is either wanton license or impotent. Freedom is not cheap. It must be won anew in each generation if our life is to have meaningful possibility. How do you, will you use your freedom? Responsibility requires extending freedom to others, rather than allowing others to be enslaved by poverty, the abuse of power, and the other weapons against humanity wielded by privilege, prejudice, ignorance, greed, and so many other foibles. With freedom, our life speaks, sings, dances, invents, loves, and more. With freedom, our life can speak for us and on behalf of others. With responsibility, our life achieves gravitas, illuminating our inherent worth and dignity. With freedom and responsibility we have the opportunity to help bend the moral arc of the universe toward justice. As Linda Hirschhorn’s song instructs, “Circle ‘round for freedom, circle ‘round for peace, for all of us imprisoned, circle for release, circle for the planet, circle for the soul, for the children of our children, keep the circle whole.”

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Harriet’s Freedom Journeys

from *Tapestry of Faith, Love Will Guide Us*

Harriet Tubman did not want to be a slave. She knew it was wrong for one person to own another person as if they were a cow or a horse or a wagon. ...



Often Harriet thought about freedom. Sometimes at night she would dream that she was flying. In her dream she would come to a big wall that she couldn’t pass. On the other side of the wall there were women wearing white, reaching up their arms to help pull her to freedom.

When Harriet was a young woman she learned that she and three of her brothers were about to be sold to a plantation owner in the deep South, where she would never see her family or her husband again. It was time for Harriet to escape from slavery. ...Harriet ...made an escape plan with her brothers. She did not even tell her husband, John Tubman, a freed slave who did not want to leave their home. Harriet thought he might try to stop her. While he was sleeping, she slipped out of their home at night and met her brothers. As they walked through the woods her brothers became very afraid. ...Finally her brothers insisted they all go back. Harriet tried to encourage them to keep going, but they refused and brought Harriet back home with them.

Harriet knew now she had to escape by herself. She could not wait any longer or she would be sold. Harriet’s father,

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Let Your Life Speak

Railroad Conductor

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story**

Ben, had taught her all about the woods. ...Most of all, she knew how to find the Big Dipper, and the North Star so she could follow it north to freedom.

Walking through the woods at night, Harriet only knew one place to go for help: to the home of a white woman who was an abolitionist—someone who believed slavery was terribly wrong and who worked to end slavery. This woman was part of the Underground Railroad—a group of people working together to help slaves escape to freedom. Men and women, both black and white, created “stations” on the Underground Railroad, safe places where slaves would be hidden as they travelled north. Harriet travelled from station to station, walking for hundreds of miles until she finally reached freedom.

Harriet was free! ...She knew she had to go back and help lead other slaves to freedom—no matter how dangerous it was. Harriet became a conductor on the Underground Railroad.

For the next eight years, Harriet Tubman went back to the South again and again, leading more than 300 slaves to freedom by following the North Star and walking to safe stations on the Underground Railroad. ...

The journey to freedom was very difficult. Slaves would get scared along the way and wonder if they should turn back. They were exhausted and often near starvation. Tubman encouraged them by telling stories about the glories awaiting them as free men and women in the North. ...

Then the Civil War came and when it had ended, slavery was over in the United States. ...No longer could any person ever own another person. Harriet lived for many years after that.... Once, she gave a speech, where she said, “I was a conductor of the Underground Railroad for eight years, and I can say what most conductors can’t say. I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger.”

(Excerpt, complete story at <http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/loveguide/>

Keep On Walking

Long Walk to Freedom

Nelson Mandela

It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black. I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man’s freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else’s freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity.

When I walked out of prison, that was my mission, to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both. Some say that has now been achieved. But I know that that is not the case. The truth is that we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed. We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road. For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. The true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning.

I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities,

and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended. Source: *Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela, January 1, 1994



The Price & Promise

A New Era of Responsibility

President Barack Obama

We honor [those who] ...embody the spirit of service—a willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves.

And ...at this moment, a moment that will define a generation, it is precisely this spirit that must inhabit us all. For as much as government can do, and must do, it is ultimately the faith and determination of the American people upon which this nation relies. It is the kindness to take in a stranger when the levees break, the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job which sees us through our darkest hours. It is the firefighter’s courage to storm a stairway filled with smoke, but also a parent’s willingness to nurture a child that finally decides our fate.

Our challenges may be new. The instruments with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends—honesty and hard work, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism—these things are old. These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history.

What is demanded, then, is a return to these truths. What is required of us now is a *new era of responsibility*—a recognition on the part of every American that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world; duties that we ...seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character than giving our all to a difficult task.

This is the price and the promise of citizenship. This is the source of our confidence—the knowledge that ... calls ...us to shape an uncertain destiny. This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed, why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration across this magnificent mall; and why a man whose father ...might not have been served in a local restaurant can now ...take a most sacred oath. Source: *2008 Inaugural Address* by President Barack Obama

Readings from the Common Bowl



Day 1: “The privilege of freedom is precious, the responsibilities of freedom are serious, and we can’t have one without the other.”

Warren W. Wiersbe

Day 2: “...When the freedom they wished for most was freedom from responsibility, then Athens ceased to be free and was never free again.” Edward Gibbon

Day 3: “In the end, they will say this of the human race: they had the freedom to go anywhere, but sat in front of the television. They were each responsible for saving the world, but they turned ...the channel.” Craig Stone

Day 4: “The fewer responsibilities we have, the less free we are. Communism and democracy differ in this only by a matter of degree. We can vote away freedom as easily as it can be taken away.” David Miller

Day 5: “Freedom is a responsibility to be earned, not a license for recklessness and anarchy. If someday, despite our strongest efforts and our deepest determination, we finally fall, let it be because our enemies finally beat us, not because we beat ourselves.” Dan Wells

Day 6: “The function of freedom is to free someone else.” Toni Morrison

Day 7: “Freedom makes a huge requirement of every human being. With freedom comes responsibility. For the person who is unwilling to grow up, the person who does not want to carry his own weight, this is a frightening prospect.” Eleanor Roosevelt

Day 8: “Nobody’s free until everybody’s free.” Fannie Lou Hamer

Day 9: “Freedom is in danger of degenerating into mere arbitrariness unless it is lived in terms of responsibility. That is why I recommend that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast.” Viktor E. Frankl

Day 10: “Freedom is the will to be responsible for ourselves.” Friedrich Nietzsche

Day 11: “Total freedom is never what one imagines and, in fact, hardly exists. It

comes as a shock in life to learn that we usually only exchange one set of restrictions for another. The second set, however, is self-chosen, and therefore easier to accept.” Anne Morrow Lindbergh

Day 12: “Perhaps the final freedom will be a recognition that everything in every moment is ‘essential’ and that nothing at all is ‘important!’” Helen M. Luke

Day 13: “Freedom is necessary for choice, and choice is necessary for wisdom and growth... the sacred world of love and wisdom, fiery intelligence and passionate will, imagination and delight—is a world of freedom. It is liberating. But it is also binding and connecting.” David Spangler

Day 14: “I think of a hero as someone who understands the degree of responsibility that comes with ...freedom.” Bob Dylan

Day 15: “If you want to be free, there is but one way; it is to guarantee an equally full measure of liberty to all your neighbors. There is no other.” Carl Schurz

Day 16: “We tend to seek captivity because we are used to seeing freedom as something that has neither frontiers nor responsibilities.” Paulo Coelho

Day 17: “None who have always been free can understand the terrible fascinating power of the hope of freedom to those who are not free.” Pearl S. Buck

Day 18: “With great freedom comes great responsibility, someone said once, well, it doesn’t work the other way around.” Antoine Wilson

Day 19: “Better to die fighting for freedom than be a prisoner all the days of your life.” Bob Marley

Day 20: “It is in this sense that responsibility is liberty; the more decisions that you are forced to make alone, the more you are aware of your freedom to choose.” Thornton Wilder

Day 21: “Freedom without responsibility? What freedom is that? None at all.” David Clement-Davies

Day 22: “Dreams and freedom are the same. In order for them to be, they come with a price.” Criss Jami

Day 23: “We cannot secure our own freedom while we challenge the freedom of another. ...Freedom is not just a right, it is a responsibility.” Ethan Wethington

Day 24: “Now if you want to be free, then get this: freedom is not about being comfortable. It’s about seizing and using opportunities, and using them responsibly. Freedom is not comfort. It’s commitment. Commitment is the willingness to be uncomfortable.” David Gerrold

Day 25: “Many in our society want the benefits of freedom without its responsibilities and boundaries.” Tony Evans

Day 26: “Freedom requires responsibility to choose who we are above and beyond our immediate impulses, needs, and social pressures, so that we can genuinely express the type of person we want to be, live the life we truly want to live, leave the legacy we desire.” Brendon Burchard

Day 27: “We, the People, recognize that we have responsibilities as well as rights; that our destinies are bound together; that a freedom which only asks what’s in it for me, a freedom without a commitment to others, a freedom without love or charity or duty or patriotism, is unworthy of our founding ideals, and those who died in their defense.” Barack Obama

Day 28: “Be intelligent. Be responsible.



The religious freedom practiced today is unparalleled. You must practice it yourself if you want others to practice it with respect to your own beliefs. The richness of diversity is a wealth we all share.” Stan Koehler

Day 29: “Freedom comes with responsibility; it comes with privilege and a conscience. It comes with difficult choices.” Sarah Hall

Day 30: “Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside people; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion.” Paulo Freire

Day 31: “For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.” Nelson Mandela



Faith and Theology

The Four Freedoms

Rev. Gary Kowalski

In his State of the Union Address on January 6, 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivered a speech designed to rally Americans in defense of liberty, which was desperately threatened at that time. The country had barely emerged from a Great Depression that left millions unemployed. Factories were idle, banks closed, farms abandoned. Across the seas, the Nazis had invaded Czechoslovakia and Poland and then occupied France. Japan had overrun Manchuria and China. Bullies and dictators were preaching world domination, and in this climate of uncertainty and fear, the President sought to remind his countrymen



and women of the fundamental truths on which America had been founded—truths which would have to become more widespread and eventually universal if the

world were to have a future beyond the prospect of chaos and war.

It became known as the *Four Freedoms* speech, for in it, Roosevelt asserted that “in the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.”

The first is freedom of speech and expression—everywhere in the world.

The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his or her own way—everywhere in the world.

The third is freedom from want, which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants—everywhere in the world.

The fourth is freedom from fear, which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduc-

tion of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor—anywhere in the world.

“That is no vision of a distant millennium,” Roosevelt told his listeners. “It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation.

That kind of world is the very antithesis of the so-called new order or tyranny which the dictators seek to create...”, a world based on human rights and respect for the individual within an international framework of cooperation and peace.

The Freedoms that Roosevelt enunciated in 1941 were turned into a living image two years later when the illustrator Norman Rockwell made them into a series of iconic paintings, putting flesh and blood on the President’s rhetoric to depict what these values meant in the lives of ordinary Americans. Call the paintings corny if you like. But after they appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*, Rockwell’s *Four Freedoms* were put to work selling war bonds, raising over \$130,000,000 to fight the Axis and substantially contributing to victory over the fascists in World War Two. The artist later said the works were among the most difficult he ever executed, “serious paintings which sucked the energy right out of me, leaving me dazed and thor-



oughly weary.”

...The *Four Freedoms*, at least as delineated by Franklin Roosevelt and depicted by Norman Rockwell, are close to being the touchstones of our spiritual tradition. Freedom from Fear—a renunciation of force

as the ultimate arbiter of right and wrong. Freedom from Want—envisioning a world where everyone has a seat at the table. Along with Freedom to Worship and Freedom of Speech, all are social forms of being, interconnected expressions of our humanity. For there is no Thanksgiving meal without the family there to share the bounty. There is no Freedom to Speak apart from a responsibility to join with others in conversation and debate about matters of mutual interest. And perhaps hardest for Unitarian Universalists to admit or understand, there is no Freedom of Worship apart from the demands and disciplines of congregational life. ...

The world has changed dramatically since 1941, and yet much remains the same.

The road ahead is difficult. The country at times seems to have lost the compass that guided figures like Roosevelt and Rockwell through times of national trial. But for that very reason, ...what we do here matters. Community matters.

Congregations matter. People assembled to discuss

the issues of the day, to pool their resources for the common good and to vote on how their money gets spent, to elect their own ...[public officials] and



church boards, to form the intermediary institutions of civil society, between the isolated individual and the overarching power of the state, to exercise the faculty of dissent, to learn how to disagree with their neighbors without attacking them, to build a culture of transparency where meetings are open and records are available for public inspection, to engage in parliamentary process—all of this matters enormously if the *Four Freedoms* are to be kept alive. ...

This is our democratic heritage. And this is our faith’s promise to the future.

Source: <http://www.uuchelmsford.org/worship.html?catid=0&id=1114>

Freedom & Responsibility

Maren Schmidt

Freedom and responsibility are linked together. We are free to act when we have the right and also take responsibility. In mathematical terms:

Rights + Responsibilities = Freedoms.

As parents..., we fail our children when we allow them freedoms without requiring the necessary responsibilities to obtain that freedom. ...

As effective parents, we limit the freedoms we give our children, enlarging them as our children develop more responsibility. If a freedom is extended before the corresponding responsibility has been established within the life of a child, we place the child at high risk for failure.

...We want to assure success.... To be responsible we need to help our children learn to "respond with ability." As we observe our children developing abilities, we can offer corresponding freedoms.

...As the child over the age of six begins to explore the world..., the issues of freedom and responsibility are many times at the core of power struggles; the child desires a freedom, but lacks the responsible skills to be able to have the freedom. By teaching the skills necessary for

the freedom, we can help the child. ...

Conflict is created by not allowing responsibility and freedom to follow each other.

Freedom is limited by the ability to respond to a right or privilege. Wise parents limit and give freedom based on the observable abilities of their children. When we understand rights, responsibilities and freedoms, our children will learn to respond with ability, earning freedoms that lead to independence. Source: <https://marenschmidt.com/2015/10/freedom-with-limits-of-responsibility/>

Family Activity: *The Four Freedoms*

Look at the four pictures on page four. They represent four freedoms: Freedom of Speech, Freedom to Worship, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear. With your children, make up a story about each picture. Who is in the picture? What is happening? Where is it happening? Why is it happening? Do the pictures represent things that happen in your family? Then discuss, why these freedoms are important, and what life would be like if we didn't have these freedoms.



right; it's yours as part of your birthright.

A warrior's courage is your lifeline to freedom. Can you imagine being so confident that you feel free to just be who you are? Free to be authentic and straight and to show yourself completely in every moment? Free to be bold? Free to expose all aspects of yourself, even the not-so-charming parts? Freedom reigns when you don't have to put on airs or hide your true thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Freedom reigns when you can speak your gifts out loud and stand up for your greatness and your greatest truth. Freedom reigns when you embrace the courageous warrior that lives inside of you. Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/22716>

Responsibility

Rev. Ken Phifer

Responsibility is one of the defining characteristics of liberal religious understanding. The heroes and heroines of our tradition have ever and again recognized that the freedom, the tolerance, the reason on which they have insisted in religious and other dimensions of human existence are not possible without responsibility. Freedom without responsibility degenerates into license of mere indulgence or personal whim. It is a stupid and often cruel way to live. Tolerance untouched by responsibility easily drifts into moral sloth and intellectual laziness. Some things should not be tolerated; some notions should not go on unchallenged. Irresponsible tolerance is a dangerous way to live. Reason unconnected to responsibility reveals an intellect amoral in its keen analyses and immoral in its endless rationalizations. Reason devoid of responsibility is detached from human concern. It is a cold and uncaring way to live.

Responsibility is the partner of freedom and tolerance and reason. It is and has been the liberal conviction and the liberal practice that we are each responsible for our own lives and for the wise and moral use of them in ways that will enable us to grow and also help others in need.

...Our faith in the reality of freedom and responsibility is not a blind faith. We have not abandoned reason to cling to it.

...Responsibility cannot stop with ourselves. It is also a response, an answering, a way of addressing a situation outside ourselves in order to preserve or improve it when we have received a call for such help.

...Responsible action is governed mostly by love and reason, by the love that brings us to answer the call for help and by the rational appreciation of what might ...be best ...in this place, in this moment, with these people, in this situation.

Source: *Becoming at Home in the World* by Ken Phifer, 1992.

Courageous Warrior

The Freedom in Courage

Debbie Ford

Courage is a holy gift that exists within you. It's yours when you are ready to reunite with it. When you awaken to courage, it becomes an exciting, life-enhancing force that will lift you back into your power and guide you home to your authentic nature. The greatest act of courage is to be and to own all of who you are—without apology, without excuses, without masks to cover the truth of who you are. True courage comes not just from feeling confident and strong, but from being the honest, authentic expression of yourself. Think about how audacious it is to really believe in yourself. It takes a warrior's courage to acknowledge that your point of view matters, that your truth matters, that your gifts matter, and that your presence on this earth matters. You don't have to earn this

(Continued from page 1) **Intro to Theme**

tion cannot be inherited, it must be earned." It is, in part, through a free and responsible search for truth and meaning that we earn this tradition. Rev. Frederic Muir suggests that this search should be characterized by humility, awareness, balance, learning, engagement, and focus. It is truth with a small "t," and it is never final, which is why the search will take us our entire lives.

This commitment to freedom of belief has long been a part of our religious tradition. Unitarian historian Earl Morse Wilbur (1866-1956) asserted that Unitarianism was not fundamentally a movement that was doctrinally driven since its adherents varied significantly in their opinion on a wide range of doctrines. Instead, from the Reformation forward, Unitarianism he wrote, was characterized by three leading principles: "first, complete mental freedom in religion rather than bondage to creeds or confessions; second, the unrestricted use of reason in religion, rather than reliance upon external authority of past tradition; third, generous tolerance of differing religious views and usages rather than insistence upon uniformity in doctrine, worship, or polity. Freedom, reason, and tolerance...."

Rev. Frederick May Eliot, in a radio talk in 1939 when he was president of the American Unitarian Association, explained that freedom is "no mere absence of fetters.... There is nothing static about it. Rather, it is by its very nature active, involving a hard and continuous discipline, always outreaching its power... enlarging the operations of the mind and the inner life of the soul.... If anyone supposes that the Unitarian faith in freedom is an easy faith, he shows a complete misunderstanding of the fundamental nature of this universe. Freedom is something that must be won, and preserved, by the most strenuous effort."

Liberal religion and conservative religion divide over their orientation to freedom. As R. Joseph Hoffmann writes, "The division in human religion has always been between those who see the fall of man as a fall into freedom and those who see it as an act of defiance against the tyranny of an all-

powerful father. But Adam and Eve were never in heaven; they were in the mud, and had to leave the only home they had ever known behind. And why? For choosing love and freedom over perpetual infancy and slavery of the will. Their sin was moral responsibility. Their reward is clear: 'They have become gods—knowing good and evil.' And for that, they were condemned to live in a world of discovery and choices."

Unitarian Universalist theologian James



Luther Adams said that we are "fated to be free." Freedom is our fate. We are faced with endless choices, decisions large and small. How we use our freedom determines the quality of our life and the world around us. Adams reminded us that, "We cannot escape from freedom and its responsibilities. Every attempt to do so is an act of freedom, an act that must be implicitly repeated at every moment. Freedom is our fate as well as our birthright, and we cannot, even if we wish to, slide back into vegetability. Even the abuse of freedom is a use of freedom. Hence in our kind of world *every* faith is, in a certain sense, a faith of the free, whether it is a faith that takes us with the prodigal son to eat with swine, or a faith that shackles us to a political or an ecclesiastical Führer, or a faith that generates freedom. *We have no choice but to be free in the choice of our faith.*"

The question is, "What will you use your freedom for?"

The Fourth of July

Pauline Maier

John Adams thought Americans would commemorate their Independence Day on the second of July. Future generations, he confidently predicted, would remember July 2, 1776, as "the most memorable Epoch, in the History of America" and celebrate it as their "Day of Deliverance by solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and

Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more."

His proposal ...was made ...in a letter to his wife.... On the previous day, July 2, 1776, the Second Continental Congress had finally resolved, "That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and

that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved." The thought that Americans might instead commemorate July 4, the day Congress adopted a "declaration on Independency" that he had helped prepare, did not apparently occur to Adams in 1776. The *Declaration of Independence* ...he later described as "dress and ornament rather than Body, Soul, or Substance," a way of announcing to the world the fact of American independence, which was for Adams the thing worth celebrating.

In fact, holding our great national festival on the Fourth makes no sense at all—unless we are actually celebrating not just independence but the Declaration of Independence.

...The adoption of independence was, however, from the beginning confused with its declaration. Differences in the meaning of the word "declare" contributed to the confusion.

Source: <https://www.americanheritage.com/making-sense-fourth-july>

Seeking Morning

The Glare of our Freedom

Rev. Victoria Safford

You know, we do it every day. Every morning we go out blinking into the glare of our freedom, into the wilderness of our work and the world, making maps as we go, looking for signs that we're on the right path. And on some good days we walk right out of our oppressions, those things that press us down from the outside or (as often) from the inside; we shake off the shackles of fear, prejudice, timidity, closed-mindedness, selfishness, self-righteousness, and claim our freedom outright, terrifying as it is—our freedom to be human and humane.

Every morning, every day, we leave our houses, not knowing if it will be for



the last time, and we decide what we'll take with us, what we'll carry: how much integrity, how much truth-telling, how much compassion (in case somebody along the way may need some), how much arrogance, how much anger, how much humor, how much willingness to change or be changed, to grow and to be grown. How much faith and hope, how much love and gratitude—you pack these with your lunch and medications, your date book and your papers. Every day, we gather what we think we'll need, pick up what we love and all that we so far believe, put on our history, shoulder our experience and memory, take inventory of our blessings, and we start walking toward morning.

Source: *Walking Toward Morning: Meditations* by Victoria Safford, 2008

Reuniting the Separated

A Parable about Freedom

Rev. John Buehrens

...In taking pride in ...non-creedal freedom ...we can easily forget the deep responsibilities that ...freedom—if it is truly covenantal freedom—necessarily entails.

Martin Buber once told a parable to illustrate this point. In the beginning of the



modern world, he said, around the time of the American and French Revolutions, three ideals were said to walk hand in hand: liberty, equality, and what was then named fraternity, which we might today better called human kinship. Then something happened. In the turmoil of revolutions and time, the three became separated. Liberty went west—to America first of all. But alone it changed its character, said Buber, becoming mere freedom without responsibility—freedom to exploit the land, to exploit other human beings, and freedom from community and from obligation rather than the freedom to fulfill an inherent purpose or promise. Equality went east, and it also changed. It became the equality of the gulag, the equality of the masses all waving the same "Little Red Book." Meanwhile, the sense of authentic human kinship went into hiding. As the most religious of the three ideals, kinship became disparaged by the secular elites. So it hid in the religious lives of people suffering oppression. But when there were efforts to restore some equality of opportunity to America's vaunted freedoms, as in the civil rights movement, it reemerged. When there were efforts to restore some authentic covenantal freedom—of worship, of conscience, of speech, of association—to socialist equality, as in the Solidarity movement of Poland, there it was again, reuniting the separated.

Source: *House for Hope: The Promise of Progressive Religion in the Twenty-first Century*, Rebecca Parker & John Buehrens, 2010.

With & Without

Freedom as a Treasure

Richelle E. Goodrich

Some say freedom is a **gift** placed in our hands by our forefathers.

Some say freedom is a human **right** that none should be denied.

Some say freedom is a **privilege** that can and will be seized if taken for granted. Some say freedom is the **key** that opens doors otherwise meant to imprison. Some say freedom is **power** to do, to be, to say, and to accomplish what the oppressed cannot.

Some say freedom is a **responsibility**—a weight to be carried and shared by those willing to protect it.

Perhaps freedom is all these things.

But in my eyes, I see freedom as a **treasure**. It is a gem so rare and precious the fiercest battles rage over it. The blood of thousands is spilled for it—past, present, and future. Where true and unblemished freedom exists, it shines with perfect clarity, drawing the greedy masses, both those who desire a portion of the spoils and those who would rob the possessor of the treasure, hoping to bury it away.



Without freedom I am a slave in shackles on a ship lost at sea.

With freedom I am a captain; I am a pirate; I am an admiral; I am a scout; I am the eagle soaring overhead; I am the north star guiding a crew; I am the ship itself; I am whatever I choose to be.

Source: <http://regoodrichnews.blogspot.com/2014/05/some-say-freedom.html>

Small Group Discussion Guide

Mature Patriotism

Right or Wrong?

Rev. John Taylor

At the end of the 19th century, Carl Schurz ...quoted ...Stephen Decatur ...ninety years earlier: "Our country right or wrong..." The Senator added "When right, to be kept right; when wrong, to put right."

The first phrase, when uttered without the second, is an unmitigated example of narrow nationalism. When the comments are joined, however, the statement becomes one of mature patriotism worthy of thoughtful and courageous citizens of all nations.

The sorrow is that here, as in so many cases, we listen to only part of the truth. It must be acknowledged that life is easier that way. We cannot deny the convenience of mouthing some simplistic view of nation, family, or ourselves. "Our country, right or wrong," "My family, right or wrong," or "Myself, right or wrong" can be an excuse for every stupidity and asserted by the scoundrel or the hypocrite with abandon. It is the remainder of Schurz's statement, "When right, to be kept right; when wrong, to be put right," which exacts responsible and unflinching effort.

Love for nation, neighbor, family and self requires ...the labor of mind and hand.

Source: *Notes on an Unhurried Journey* by John Taylor, 1991.

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Theme for Discussion

Freedom & Responsibility

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: We are resolved to protect individual freedom of belief. This freedom must include the child as well as the parent. The freedom for which we stand is not freedom of belief as we please, ... not freedom to evade responsibility, ... but freedom to be honest in speech and action, freedom to respect one's own integrity of thought and feeling, freedom to question, to investigate, to try, to understand life and the universe in which life abounds, freedom to search anywhere and everywhere to find the meaning of Being, freedom to experiment with new ways of living that seem better than the old.

Rev. Sophia Lyon Fahs

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake)

(adapted)

(In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: Freedom is the ground of all vital activity. Faith without freedom is dogma. Love without freedom is an illusion. Justice without freedom is oppression. In every instance, freedom is the factor that sustains and completes the other goal. It is the oxygen of the human spirit, the indispensable element for growth and wholeness.

Rev. David Rankin

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on. When have you benefitted significantly because of a freedom? What was the freedom that you exercised? How did you benefit?

While freedom should be a right, it is often functionally a privilege. What freedoms do you have that others in different circumstances would not be able to exercise as you can?

What responsibilities do you feel because of the freedoms that you enjoy? What specific responsibilities do you take seriously that you can link to specific freedoms?

Share examples.

There is a sense that we can take our freedoms in America for granted. Do you agree? If yes, why? If no, why not?

What freedoms, if any, do you feel are at risk? In relationship to these, what responsibility do we have to preserve and/or extend these freedoms?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice

(Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison)

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Closing Words Rev. Philip R. Giles

(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*