



Exploring Liberation

Religious Education Activity

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*To the people who have mistaken freedom for liberation by
Rev. Julián Jamaica Soto*

To be free, you must embrace
the breadth of your own existence
without apology, even if they try to take
it from you. You must know, not that you
can do whatever you want; you are not
a kudzu vine, eating entire hillsides for
the purpose of feeding your own lush life. You
must know instead, that inside you are entire
Universes—milky blue, magenta, and gold—
expanding. But to actually be free, you must
know and you must fight for the entire
Universes inside of everyone else.
Being free is not a license, but
A promise.

with thanks to Rev. Leela Sinha

Educator Notes: *Unitarian Universalist faith formation is an invitation to stretch into relationships of care across the earth. This Guest at Your Table (GAYT) resource from your Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) is an exploration of the concept of liberation. We hope that it will be a joyful exploration of the concept and plant seeds of mutuality, remembering that liberation means that no one is free until everyone is free.*



The Big Idea

Liberation is an idea that describes a feeling of freedom – not just for us, but for everyone, everywhere. Liberation means that everyone is free to be their true self and live a life of safety and contentment. Liberation means that it is important to listen to the voices of many different people to learn what matters most to them and how we can all work together to take care of each other and the planet.

Chalice Lighting

Tiny sparks create warm fires.
Small drops of rain create vast oceans.
We are small, but we are not alone.
Together, our love grows to hold the whole world.
We light our chalice in solidarity with all children on earth today.

~Deanna Vandiver

Understanding Oppression and Practicing Liberation

Activity 1: *Soil Layers of Oppression* created by Rev. Mandi Huizenga

Materials:

- ▶ Large glass vase
- ▶ Soil, enough to cover two inches of the bottom of the vase
- ▶ Five different colors of sand, the brighter the better
- ▶ Spoon for disbursing sand

Preparation: In a glass vase, place a layer of dirt. Prepare colored sand to pour on top (each color corresponding to a different oppression.) Have a spoon ready.

Begin by asking the class what is in the vase and what it means to have rich, healthy soil.



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For thousands of years, Native Americans have lived on this land. And then Europeans came. The Europeans thought they had a better way of doing things. And when they came to the Americas, they brought these different ways.

First, they came and took the land; they became owners of the land rather than sharing it. They took over and controlled the land and the native peoples and many of them died or were hurt or were forced to live in ways that were very different from what they were used to. There is a really big word that is used to describe the controlling of land and the people who live on it: "colonization." They added colonization to the soil.

Pour in sand.

These Europeans also brought a new way of being together. This way of being together would not allow women to own property, have jobs, or even vote. This way of being together is called Patriarchy. Patriarchy is a fancy word for the idea that men are better than women. They added Patriarchy to the soil.

Pour in sand.

Then, these Europeans decided that while the land was rich and grew a lot of things, they could grow even richer themselves by forcing others to work for them. So the Europeans brought Slavery to America. They forced people from Africa onto ships and brought them across the ocean. They made them work the land without money. They added Slavery to the soil.

Pour in sand.

Overtime, other things were added to the soil as well. These other things include:

- ▶ Not letting people love who they want
- ▶ Not listening to people who are disabled
- ▶ Making it difficult for poor people to earn money
- ▶ Making voting difficult for poor people and people of color
- ▶ Putting people in prison for little problems
- ▶ Polluting our soil, air, and water



Pour in sand. Of other colors.

The word I use for all these things is supremacy. That is a big word that means a small group of people control many different things in our world and make it difficult for people who are not like this small group to live differently.

Now some of these things that were added to the soil were changed over a long time. Women are now allowed to vote and hold jobs. There is no longer slavery.

Take out a bit of the colored sand.

But these things still exist just in different ways. In many states, women still cannot do what they want to with their bodies. Slavery as it existed two hundred or four hundred years ago no longer exists, but has taken on newer forms as people are still paid poorly or not at all in this country. Rich people are getting richer and poor people are getting poorer.

All of these things are still in our soil. (Gesture to the colored sand.)

How can good food and other good things grow with these bad things on our soil? How can we be healthy if we can't grow good food or have good things in our lives?

What can we do to get to the good soil?

(Encourage ideas from those gathered.)

This is hard work. It is hard because the sand is small and it gets into everything. But if we want to be healthy and live in a world where everyone is cared for, we need to do this work of removing the sand. The best way to do this, is to do this together so we can plant the seeds of love and justice in the world.



What Mandi's vase of sand looked like after leading this activity.

Activity 2: Liberation and Human Rights

Materials:

- ▶ Device to view [What Are Human Rights? video](#)
- ▶ Butcher paper or white board
- ▶ Marker or white board marker
- ▶ Drawing paper – one for each participant
- ▶ Assortment of crayons, colored pencils, and/or markers for drawing

Watch the video [What Are Human Rights?](#) (2 minutes)

Discuss the video. Ask "What are human rights?" "Let's name some human rights." This can include more than were explicitly touched upon in the video, such as the right to a trial and the right to be free from slavery.



[This resource from the UN Declaration of Human Rights can offer additional suggestions.](#)

Each participant is invited to draw or create an image depicting a human right that is important to them.

Once the drawings are created, have participants switch drawings. Now go around the group and each person will describe what the drawing (not their own) is depicting. Facilitator records the summary of the description, i.e., what human right is being depicted, on the butcher paper or white board. Allow each participant to interpret the drawings without interruption from the original artist, but ask the artists to make note of how they feel as their drawings are being described by someone else and any urges they may have to offer their own correction or explanation while their drawing is being interpreted by someone else.

Now have the artists go around and explain their own drawings. What human right are they aiming to depict? Facilitator records this on the butcher paper or white board.

Have a group discussion about the different human rights that have been collected. What does it say that there are many different human rights listed by this group? Do some people feel that certain rights are more important than others?

Now ask the artists what it felt like to have their drawings explained by someone else. Did anyone feel misunderstood? What was that like?

Closing discussion: Every human right outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is important and universal – we cannot pick and choose which we subscribe to. But that doesn't mean we all have the same priorities about which human rights are most important or should be addressed first in a crisis. Given this, it is important that individuals and communities have the opportunity to speak for themselves. When others speak for us, incorrect assumptions are sometimes made and misunderstandings can happen. These misunderstanding can lead to real harm if they go unchecked.



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Taking it Home

Remember: Liberation is an idea that describes a feeling of freedom and contentment, not just for ourselves, but for everyone. Liberation is possible when everyone's human rights are respected.

How will you describe this idea to your family?

What might your family do to practice this big idea?