



EXPLORATION

Freedom & Responsibility

Readings



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The Fourth Principle

by Rev. Frederic Muir

Life is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be lived, a far more interesting and exciting perspective.... As ...we live the mystery of life, we covenant to affirm and promote a way that is both free and responsible. Free because we know that every person is unique—in the first principle we affirm an individual's worth and dignity, and with that comes free will, the freedom to believe as your conscience dictates. It's your search and no one else's. A responsible search because the right of conscience demands it: You're not a "loose cannon" in search of whatever works. In the more orthodox faiths, freedom is checked by the responsibility of authority—whether it be from tradition, the hierarchy, or sacred scripture and liturgy. In Unitarian Universalism, while these may hold value, they are clearly not the final authority; they alone won't balance freedom and responsibility. Balance comes from each person: human experience is the final authority. Lessons are learned from tradition, leadership, and the world's sacred scriptures, as well as from life experiences, but eventually we each provide balance to our search; we give direction to our lives.

Source: *With Purpose and Principle*, Edward Frost, editor, 1998

A Quintessential Faith

by Rev. Dr. Forrest Church

...Unitarian Universalism is the quintessential American faith. When Thomas Jefferson and John Adams threw off the yoke of political bondage to the crown head of England, they did so because they believed in liberty and democracy. It is hardly surprising that both men exhibited the same free spirit in their religious lives. As Unitarians, they rejected the authority of the mitred heads of Christendom, exercising freedom of religious belief even as they exercised freedom in political association. As advocated so vigorously by Jefferson in particular, the separation of church and state is a founding principle both of the United States and of Unitarianism. We can protect our own religious freedom only by protecting the religious freedom of both those who draw their own circle more tightly and those who stand outside the circle of religion altogether.

Unitarian Universalist principles reflect the encompassing faith in liberty and equality expressed in the *Declaration of Independence*. Not only that but, the *United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights*—itself the greatest modern expression of American idealism and therefore of true American patriotism—springs from the same source. The next time you read the preamble to the *Declaration of Independence* or the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, listen for how our principles echo them, often word for word: inherent worth and dignity; equity and compassion; mutual acceptance; freedom and responsibility; conscience; the democratic process; peace, liberty and justice for all; and, one whole of which we are each a part.

Source: *Born Again Unitarian Universalism*, Forrest Church, <http://www.allsoulsnyc2.org/publications/sermons/fcsermons/bornagainuism.html>

Two Kinds of Freedom

by Maria Kasmirli

The 20th-century political philosopher Isaiah Berlin (1909-97) ... in his essay "Two Concepts of Liberty" (1958) ... distinguished two kinds of freedom (or liberty; Berlin used the words interchangeably), which he called *negative freedom* and *positive freedom*.

Negative freedom is freedom from inter-

ference. You are negatively free to the extent that other people do not restrict what you can do. ...Berlin stresses that it is only restrictions imposed by *other people* that count as limitations of one's freedom. ...

Virtually everyone agrees that we must accept some restrictions on our negative freedom if we are to avoid chaos. All states require their citizens to follow laws and regulations designed to help them live together and make society function smoothly. We accept these restrictions on our freedom as a trade-off for other benefits....

Whereas negative freedom is freedom *from* control by others, positive freedom is freedom *to* control oneself. To be positively free is to be one's own master, acting rationally and choosing responsibly in line with one's interests.

...In such cases, Berlin notes, it is natural to talk of something like two selves: a lower self, which is irrational and impulsive, and a higher self, which is rational and far-sighted. And the suggestion is that a person is positively free only if his [or her] higher self is dominant.

...[There] ...are questions about what kind of society we want to live in, and they have no easy answers. But in giving us the distinction between negative and positive freedom, Berlin has given us a powerful tool for thinking about them.

Source: <https://aeon.co/ideas/tools-for-thinking-isaiah-berlins-two-concepts-of-freedom>

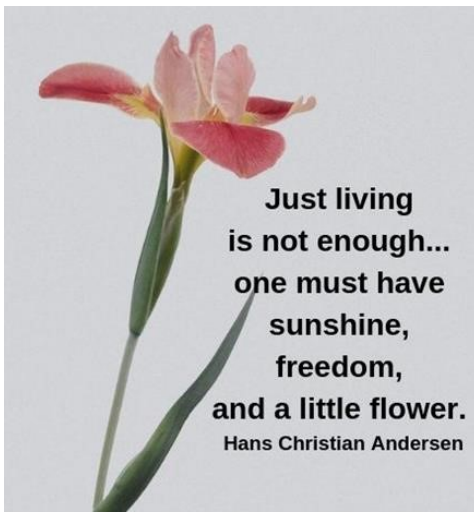
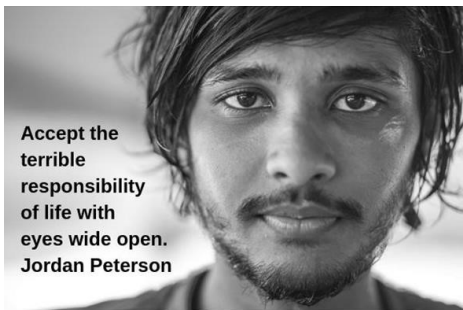


Photo by Han Chenxu on Unsplash



Accept the terrible responsibility of life with eyes wide open.
Jordan Peterson

Photo by Ishaan @seethomthesky on Unsplash

Freedom and Responsibility

by Seth Godin

Which do you want?

Freedom is the ability to set your schedule, to decide on the work you do, to make decisions.

Responsibility is being held accountable for your actions. It might involve figuring out how to get paid for your work, owning your mistakes or having others count on you.

Freedom without responsibility is certainly tempting, but there are few people who will give you that gig and take care of you and take responsibility for your work as well.

Responsibility without freedom is stressful. There are plenty of jobs in this line of work, just as there are countless jobs where you have neither freedom nor responsibility. These are good jobs to walk away from.

When in doubt, when you're stuck, when you're seeking more freedom, the surest long-term route is to take more responsibility.

Freedom and responsibility aren't given, they're taken.

Source: <https://seths.blog/2016/03/freedom-and-responsibility/>

With Freedom Comes

Responsibility by Darren Walker

I've been reflecting on ...[the] commitment to democracy—and the ways that today, around the world, democracy and democratic values are under siege.

Of course, this is not a new challenge.I've found myself reflecting on the "Four Freedoms" so eloquently outlined by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1941. Addressing Congress as war raged around the world, President Roosevelt made a point of laying out the essential freedoms he believed every person should enjoy: Freedom of speech. Freedom of belief. Freedom from want. And freedom from fear.

...While these freedoms may well be "inalienable," in Thomas Jefferson's words, they are not inevitable. Our freedom—as individuals and collectively—is derived from

our responsibility to one other.

As I reread that seminal speech earlier this year, preoccupied with thoughts about the world's many challenges and the ways we might all rise to meet them, it struck me how profoundly freedom is connected to responsibility

...the freedom from want comes our

responsibility to serve.

...freedom of speech comes with the

responsibility to listen.

...freedom of belief means we have a

responsibility to accept each other, with empathy.

...freedom from fear gives us the

responsibility to act.

I believe that these responsibilities come along with our freedom. They are what that freedom demands we do for others. And it is through the exercise of these responsibilities that freedom expands.

Source: <https://www.fordfoundation.org/ideas/equals-change-blog/posts/my-message-to-graduates-with-freedom-comes-responsibility/>

The Price of Freedom

by Frederick Douglass

Let me give you a word of the philosophy of reform. The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all-absorbing, and for the time being, putting all other tumults to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.

This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.

Source: <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1857-frederick-douglass-if-there-no-struggle-there-no-progress/>

Beyond the Zero-Sum Game

by Rev. Nathan C. Walker

For centuries, insiders have been democratizing their religions. Incremental moments of institutional reform have led to a new era of theological enlightenment.

From out of ancient times into the twilight of now, these reformers have made a sacred vow: to never mischaracterize freedom as a zero-sum game.

True freedom is not jealous. True freedom is not envious. True freedom is not spiteful. True freedom does not desire to restrict the rights of others. True freedom knows not a selfish thought, knows not how to threaten.

To sense true freedom is to know that your win is my glory and that your suffering is inextricably tied to my own.

For, the sum of all that is holy shines far beyond the tools of our evolving democracy—from party jingles to picket signs. The sum of all that is holy is found in our collective desire to know freedom not as a political slogan, but as a way of life.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/beyond-zero-sum-game>

Wisdom Story

The Gift of a Gemstone

A wisdom tale from many cultures, including Buddhist.

A wise woman, a teacher, was passing through a forest. There, among the leaves, was something shiny. She wiped away the



Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction.
Ronald Reagan

Photo by Vincent Delegee on Unsplash

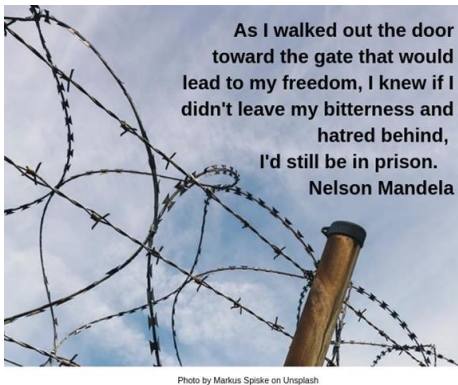


Photo by Markus Spiske on Unsplash

leaves and dirt and beheld a beautiful, large gem. "My, this is pretty," the wise woman said. She put the jewel in her pouch and continued on her way.

When the sun was high in the sky, she sat down under a tree to eat her simple lunch. She was barely settled, when she saw a figure approaching. It was a man and, to judge from his dress, a poor man. "Kind and gentle lady, do you have any food to share with a poor beggar?"

"I have plenty," she replied with a smile, digging into her small sack. She pulled out the gem that was on top, a loaf of bread and a piece of cheese. She offered the bread and cheese to the beggar. But the beggar's eyes had grown big at the sight of the lovely gem.

"Sweet lady, that is a magnificent jewel!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, do you like it? Here, take it, too." And she gave the man the gem, the bread, and the cheese.

The beggar could not believe his luck! He wrapped the gem in his cloak and quickly scampered off.

The wise woman arose and started off on her way again.

She was surprised a few minutes later to hear footsteps behind her. She turned and saw the beggar before her again.

The beggar held out the jewel. "Wise woman, may I give this back to you. I don't want it!"

"What do you want?" she asked.

"I want whatever it is you have that allowed you to give it away."

Source: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/youth/virtueethics/workshop9/194339.shtml>

Snippets

Freedom

"I've learned that fear limits you and your vision. ...Transforming fear into freedom—how great is that? Soledad O'Brien

"Every human has four endowments—self-awareness, conscience, independent will,

and creative imagination. These give us the ultimate human freedom...." Stephen Covey

"The end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom. ... where there is no law, there is no freedom." John Locke

"Freedom cannot be bestowed—it must be achieved." Elbert Hubbard

"Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes." Gandhi

The responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision. George Eliot



Photo by Elyssa Fahndrich on Unsplash

Responsibility

"Letting go ...allows others to be responsible for themselves and for us to take our hands off situations that do not belong to us. This frees us from unnecessary stress." Melody Beattie

"Perhaps it is better to be irresponsible and right, than to be responsible and wrong." Winston Churchill

"Things will only improve when the people—all of us—say to authorities, 'I will hold you responsible.' We should all be showing up at city council meetings, lighting up every community with activism and mobilization." Erin Brockovich

"Hold yourself responsible for a higher

standard than anybody expects of you. Never excuse yourself." Henry Ward Beecher
"At the end of the day, you're responsible for yourself and your actions and that's all you can control. So rather than be frustrated with what you can't control, try to fix the things you can." Kevin Garnett

Questions

Many people who come to Unitarian Universalism value it because it offers freedom from constricting religious beliefs of another tradition or the emptiness of secularism. By coming to Unitarian Universalism, what were you freed from?

Limiting our understanding of Unitarian Universalism to "freedom from" obscures the possibilities that it offers in terms of "freedom for." What has Unitarian Universalism freed you to be and do?

Although the original sentiment can be traced back to Voltaire, in the 2002 Spider-Man movie Uncle Ben explains to Peter that

**Friendship is
always a sweet
responsibility,
never an
opportunity.
Khalil Gibran**



Photo by Joshua Clay on Unsplash

“with great power comes great responsibility.” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5d6rTQcU2U>) How does freedom confer power? What power do you have? Given your power, what responsibilities do you acknowledge and address?

Share an experience where you exercised or benefited from a freedom.

For Unitarian Universalists, freedom and responsibility, as Rev. Frederic Muir suggests, require that human experience is the final authority. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Rev. Dr. Forrest Church suggested that Unitarian Universalism is the quintessential American faith. How do our seven principles support his assertion?

Maria Kasmirli writes about Irving Berlin’s two concepts of freedom: negative and positive. As above, this is a different way of articulating freedom from and freedom for. Which is the more challenging freedom? Why?

Seth Godin links freedom to responsibility. It seems that responsibility without freedom is slavery and freedom with responsibility is anarchy. What can happen when freedom is not linked to responsibility? Share some contemporary examples. What happens when responsibility exists without freedom?

Darren Walker lists the four freedoms that President Roosevelt articulated in 1941. If you were choosing, what four freedoms would you emphasize? Why? Given your list of four freedoms, what corresponding responsibilities would you propose? How does our choice to act responsibly expand freedom, as Walker suggests?

Frederick Douglass insisted that if there is no struggle there is no freedom. How is that true today? What freedoms are we in risk of losing?

Erin Brockovich calls us to hold authorities accountable for their actions or lack thereof. How is democracy diminished when we fail to hold politicians and political parties accountable?

Nathan Walker argues that freedom is not a zero-sum game. Do you agree? Why or why not? Why do some people insist that, in fact, freedom is a zero-sum game? If you get more freedom, I lose. If you get less freedom, I win. How does this distort the foundations of democracy and the rights of mi-



**The care of the
Earth is our most
ancient and most
worthy, and after
all our most
pleasing
responsibility.
To cherish what
remains of it & to
foster its renewal
is our only hope.
Wendell Berry**

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