

January 2021 Embracing Accountability



What does it mean to be spiritually called to Embrace Accountability?

Definitions (from Lexico by Oxford)

em·brace

verb

1. hold (someone) closely in one's arms, especially as a sign of affection.
2. accept or support (a belief, theory or change) willingly and enthusiastically.

Opposite: reject

noun

1. an act of holding someone closely in one's arms.
2. an act of accepting or supporting something willingly or enthusiastically.

ac·count·a·ble

adjective

1. a person, organization or institution required or expected to justify actions or decisions; responsible.
2. Explicable; understandable

Grateful appreciation to the January 2021 writing team: Barbara de Leeuw, Mary Hammele, Ira Srole, Anne and Tom Perry and the Soul Matters facilitators. A special thanks to the POC Soul Matters group for their wisdom and inspiration. *We live and worship on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Seneca Nation.

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! This usually joyous time is traditionally filled with gathered family and friends and some urge to improve, change or try something new.

We can agree personal accountability is very important and valued, but what is our role in the institutional systems of our lives? How is accountability encouraged, supported, embraced or even demanded? When an accounting happens, are we alert and responsive?

Systemic accountability (cultural, societal, political, economic) is fodder for each of us to deeply consider. What about reimagining Unitarian Universalism? Our denomination resourced the Commission on Institutional Change Report and Recommendations (COIC), seeking long-term “cultural and institutional change that *redeems the essential promise and ideals of Unitarian Universalism.*” All facets of the denomination were scrutinized and the observations and recommendations were detailed in the book, Widening the Circle of Concern, formerly called “the COIC.”

Imagining Unitarian Universalism as inclusive, equitable and diverse with the outcome of actually *living in* an inclusive, equitable and diverse society has challenges. Many UUs are stymied at the intersection of supporting racial equity and relinquishing White advantage.

Historically, the *intense* resistance and barriers to living an equitable and inclusive life in America were insurmountable. Embracing accountability of the legacy and actively dismantling the privilege conferred by it remain impediments to eliminating all oppressions.

Cutting edge businesses are reimagining their organizations and embracing accountability. They create competitive advantage by focusing on humans, “their people,” versus the transaction. Integrating diversity, inclusion and equity into their business culture and institutionalizing accountability has created positive financial outcomes.

Currently, protesters, representing our full humanity are: challenging unethical politicians; seeking restitution from amoral businesses profiting from addiction, destruction or death; and demanding justice for murderous state actions. Embracing accountability for the current and historical exclusion of Black and Brown people (and others) from full partnership in the American Dream or Unitarian Universalist promises requires significant personal fortitude.

Like our ancestors and many of you, Reverend Shari stepped forward last November declaring herself an “abolitionist,” a **prison** abolitionist. She invites us to embrace the transformative power of restorative justice. January provides an opportunity to explore and expand your understanding of unfamiliar social justice concepts. [See Rev. Shari’s powerful 11.29.20 sermon.](#)

Meanwhile, days are lengthening, vaccinations are scheduled and embracing accountability is rich with opportunities, like our new President.

Surrounding you with love,

Barbara de Leeuw

When selecting or writing these exercises, we look for a variety of experiences, some that will be easy and comfortable, some challenging, that draw on different practices or modes of accessing the sacred. We assume that participants will have a variety of life experiences, different mobility and access needs, and cultural norms, and we write with that in mind.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Select one of the exercises below to practice, and come prepared to discuss the experience and your thoughts and feelings about it with your group.

Option A: Embrace Caring for Each Other

Community Connection in times of COVID, as a spiritual practice. How can we care for the people in our congregation or friends and family? Consider embracing accountability by staying connected by phone, note, video call, social media or ghost gifting. Develop a list of names to contact or embrace someone new, just as you would at church. Simple Church can help with addresses and phone numbers. These small gestures bring hope and dispel despair.

- Commit to contacting 2-3 people per week and have a “church lobby” conversation. Practice engaging and listening with different people during each week in January.
- Everyone says they love email, but getting a mailed note is a joy (and uses up all that old stationery and postcards). Write 2-3 notes per week expressing gratitude, job well done or thinking about you.
- Create a treat (sweet or not), clip a good article, share a book then gift it by leaving it outside your recipient’s door (no contact).

Option B: Buddy Up to Embrace Accountability

Following through on resolutions or commitments can be difficult. Excuses abound with our over-scheduled lives. One way to try to instill accountability in your goals is to tag-team a friend or family member to work on the same or similar goal, or just report periodically about how you’re doing. You can research together about ways to help meet milestones, as well as articles, workshops, seminars, or organizations devoted to your goals. This is equally true for weight loss or dismantling systemic racism. Huge goals can be daunting, but imposing a reasonable timetable and establishing discrete steps can help mitigate anxiety about the bigger aspiration. A buddy can be a touchstone and co-collaborator in celebrating small successes and commiserating about setbacks.

For this activity, think about a goal on which you have had trouble moving forward. Ask someone to join you and keep you (and you keep them) accountable to achieving the goal in small, manageable steps. Work with them to break the goal into steps, work toward each step, and concretely measure achievement of those steps. What are some ways you can manage expectations, celebrate achievements, and talk about setbacks in gentle, non-judgmental and constructive ways? Perhaps journaling or creating an online Google Group or place to share articles and other materials would be helpful. Let your group know how this plan is unfolding.

Option C: Widening the Circle of Concern

This research was produced by UUs for UU and published in book form as Widening the Circle of Concern. The link will take you to the free version on the UUA.org website. Embrace the winter months by reading the full document or picking and choosing topics that interest you. It was written as a guide to transformation and accountability within Unitarian Universalism. Compare our local work with the national suggestions; share with your group, they may be surprised. [Widening the Circle of Concern | Commission on Institutional Change](#)

Here is the section on recreating Unitarian Universalism as a theology of liberation:

[Theology | Widening the Circle of Concern | UUA.org](#)

Option D: Reimagining Public Safety

In the wake of the very public evidence of systemic racism in policing around the United States in recent years, “Defund the police/Refund the community” have become rallying cries of social justice organizations demanding accountability for police officers. What do these ideas mean *to you*? In what ways can you reimagine public safety in your community and across the nation? Can police departments focus on guardian versus warrior roles? Should other types of professionals be involved in public safety intervention, such as counselors and mental health experts? Can you envision a different kind of community-centered care and allocation of resources aimed at alleviating root causes of poverty and disenfranchisement? Here are a couple of links that touch on the guardian vs. warrior aspect of training and mindset, with links to other articles you may also find interesting in considering what other cities are trying or investigating. [New Perspectives in Policing: From Warriors to Guardians: Recommitting American Police Culture to Democratic Ideals](#) and [Should cops move from warrior mindset to guardian mindset?](#)

Spend some time reading and considering, and then have a discussion with someone about what you learned. Let your group know how your thinking is evolving or what feelings your reading has evoked for you.

If you find you have become intrigued, you might want to consider finding out more about the evolution of the Police Accountability Board in Rochester at <https://pabnow.github.io/>



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions aren't "homework" that need to be covered entirely. Instead, simply pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The questions often lead to more questions rather than answers.

1. What is accountability? What supports your accountability? Self? Others? Spirit? How is "accountable" different from or the same as "responsible?"
2. What supports or encourages community, institutional and systemic accountability? Do we need more or less? What is our moral imperative? What could change?
3. Think about our geographical community; reimagine Rochester as a community that prioritizes humans AND embraces accountability. Where would you begin?
4. Scientist and author David Brin has written, "Liberty flourishes, not when the government is weak, but when the government is accountable." A large portion of the American electorate seems to conflate a weak national government with enhanced personal liberty. In our capitalist economic system, who or what should command corporate accountability? Shareholders? Managers? Workers? Customers? Your answers may be informed by what position you occupy in the system.
5. The Brennan Center states that in the United States, the number of people incarcerated in America today is more than *four times larger* than it was in 1980, when wages began to stagnate and the social safety net began to be rolled back [[brennancenter.org](https://www.brennancenter.org)]. We've long known that people involved in the criminal justice system — disproportionately poor and Black — face economic barriers in the form of hiring discrimination and lost job opportunities. What does this mean for American accountability to concepts of equality and justice? How do we reconcile these statistics with an ideal that a "meritocracy" works for everyone? What changes are needed in the inner workings of the prison/criminal justice system?
6. Take a look at Rev. Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley's "Litany of Restoration,"* in Additional Resources, written in 1987. Some of her thoughts in working towards reconciliation seem dated - how does it translate to 2020 and how would you express these thoughts?

Growing Our Souls

1. What *activity* will you put on your calendar? On what *date* will you begin?
2. Within our church community, where can you help to make changes related to embracing accountability?
3. How does this discussion relate to other activities in which you are engaged at church (e.g., parenting, religious education, social justice, worship, music)?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

From Unitarian Universalism

Readings for chalice lighting/extinguishing

Rev. Dr. Mark Morrison Reed, "The Central Task of the Religious Community," *Singing the Living Tradition* #580

The central task of the religious community is to unveil the bonds that bind each to all. There is a connectedness, a relationship discovered amid the particulars of our own lives and the lives of others. Once felt, it inspires us to act for Justice.

It is the church that assures us that we are not struggling for justice on our own, but as members of a larger community. The religious community is essential, for alone our vision is too narrow to see all that must be seen, and our strength too limited to do all that must be done. Together, our vision widens and our strength is renewed.

***Rev. Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley**, "Litany of Restoration," *SLT* #576, *Written in 1987*

If, recognizing the interdependence of all life, we strive to build community, the strength we gather will be our salvation.

If you are black and I am white, it will not matter.

If you are female and I am male, it will not matter.

If you are older and I am younger, it will not matter.

If you are progressive and I am conservative, it will not matter.

If you are straight and I am gay, it will not matter.

If you are Christian and I am Jewish, it will not matter.

If we join spirits as brothers and sisters, the pain of our aloneness will be lessened, and that does matter. In this spirit, we build community and move toward restoration.

V. Emil Gudmundsen, *SLT* #693 *untitled*

And now, may we have faith in the life to do wise planting that the generations to come may reap even more abundantly than we. May we be bold in bringing to fruition the golden dreams of human kinship and justice. This we ask that the fields of promise become fields of reality.

Jewish prayer, *SLT* #507

Grant us the ability to find joy and strength

not in the strident call to arms,

But in stretching our our arms to grasp our fellow creatures

in the striving for justice and truth.

QUOTATIONS

“Without responsibility, accountability and transparency, no one is safe.” **Linda Reinstein**

There are two choices in life: to accept conditions as they exist, or, to accept responsibility to change them.” **Denis Waitley**

“Without strong watchdog institutions, impunity becomes the very foundation upon which systems of corruption are built.” **Rigoberto Menchu Tum**

“Every great dream begins with a dreamer; always remember you have within you the strength, the patience and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.” **Harriet Tubman**

“It is not only what we do, but also what we do not do, for which we are accountable.” **Molière**

“Human beings should be held accountable. Leave God alone. He [sic] has enough problems.” **Elie Wiesel**

“Corruption is paid by the poor.” **Pope Francis**

FROM SACRED TEXTS

Buddhism:

“Today, more than ever before, life must be characterized by a sense of universal responsibility, not only nation to nation and human to human, but also human to other forms of life.” **The Dalai Lama**

Confucianism:

“A [person] who has committed a mistake and doesn’t correct it is committing another mistake.”

Judaism:

“I did not find the world desolate when I entered it; my father planted for me before I was born; so do I plant for those who will come after me.” **Talmud: Ta’anith, 23a**

Judeo-Christian Old Testament:

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up their fellow. But woe to them who are alone when they fall and have nor another to lift them up!” **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**

Muslim:

“Hold yourself accountable before you are held accountable and weigh your deeds before they are weighed for you.” **Umar Bin Al Khattab**

PODCASTS, SONGS, ARTICLES, FILMS & BOOKS

Music:

Reach Out and Touch Somebody’s Hand <https://youtu.be/KmFnjuFR8TI>

Build Your House <https://youtu.be/gYDo0ZjXegM>

Podcasts:

I Am Accountable, series by Sam Silverstein

George Floyd and the National Accountability Discussion (4 min.)

<https://www.podbean.com/eu/pb-esp87-e7f72>

Policing In America: The Accountability Crisis (4 min.)

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/policing-in-america-the-accountability-crisis/id363780242?i=1000489803203>

The Solution to the Accountability Crisis in Law Enforcement (4 min.)

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/solution-to-accountability-crisis-in-law-enforcement/id363780242?i=1000489973781>

Articles:

What Does Accountability Mean Anyway?

<https://medium.com/@getsupporti/what-does-accountability-mean-really-bb3c7f867a53>

Abolition & Reparations Histories of Resistance, Transformative Justice & Accountability

<https://harvardlawreview.org/2019/04/abolition-and-reparations-histories-of-resistance-transformative-justice-and-accountability/>

Dear White Boss (Harvard Business Review, 2002)

Articles <https://hbr.org/2002/11/dear-white-boss>

Dear White Boss -18 Years Later (Harvard Business Review, 2020)

A follow up 2020 <https://hbr.org/2020/09/what-has-and-hasnt-changed-since-dear-white-boss>

“Are your ideas of safety policed by White supremacy?” Ryan Lugalía-Hollon

<https://www.beaconbroadside.com/broadside/2020/06/are-your-ideas-of-safety-policed-by-white-supremacy.html>

“The Issue of Public Accountability: A Summary for Citizens,” Accountabilitycircle.org

“Racial Activism Takes All Minorities to Influence Change,” by Tiffany Tran, Led Camille Soriano, and Rose Yang, Psy.D.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/mind-matters-menninger/202009/racial-activism-takes-all-minorities-influence-change?eml>

YouTube/Movies:

“Community Policing and Police Reform,” The Time for Reckoning Symposium (17 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INAQpREipX4>

“Accountability versus Responsibility,” a skit with four office workers, Somebody, Anybody, Everybody, and Nobody (3:14)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Hn1yixxa0s>

Erin Brockovich

Julia Roberts stars as Erin Brockovich, a feisty young mother who fights for justice against a giant corporation and brings a small town to its feet and a huge company to its knees. 2000, Universal Studios.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELzu636Xf6Y>

Inside Job

From Academy Award® nominated filmmaker, Charles Ferguson ("No End In Sight"), comes INSIDE JOB, the first film to expose the shocking truth behind the economic crisis of 2008. "Financial engineers build dreams, but when those dreams turn to nightmares, other people pay."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzrBurlJUNk>

Too Big to Fail

A gripping look at the financial crisis of 2008 from the perspective of the insiders who prevented a global economic meltdown. HBO 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqYTQB6lrQQ>

Books:

The Sustainability Generation : The Politics of Change and Why Personal Accountability Is Essential Now!, by Mark C. Coleman, 2012

Nurturing our sense of personal responsibility, and squashing our hunger for more stuff, is the single most important step toward saving our world for future generations. It is vital to emphasize the need for replacing our entitlement culture with sustainable growth through redefining our core values.

How to Be an Antiracist, by Ibram X. Kendi, 2019

Kendi asks us to think about what an antiracist society might look like and how we can play an active role in building it.

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/40265832-how-to-be-an-antiracist>

So You Want to Talk About Race, by Ijeoma Oluo, 2018

Ijeoma Oluo offers a contemporary, accessible take on the racial landscape in America, addressing head-on such issues as privilege, police brutality, intersectionality, microaggressions, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the "N" word. Perfectly positioned to bridge the gap between people of color and white Americans struggling with race complexities, Oluo answers the questions readers don't dare ask, and explains the concepts that continue to elude everyday Americans.

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/35099718-so-you-want-to-talk-about-race>

The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe, by C.S. Lewis, 1950

Edmund makes a poor choice and must become accountable to himself, his siblings and the citizens of Narnia. All four children learn something about themselves, bravery and accountability in the fantasy world of Narnia.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lion,_the_Witch_and_the_Wardrobe