

# The Practice of Liberating Love



Photo: Dimitar Belchev/Unsplash

Meaning Making Project May 2026

## Meeting this Moment with Love & Justice

# WELCOME

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that English has only one word for love, while other cultures have multiple words for describing the different manifestations. The ancient Greeks described different kinds of love that occur at different stages of life: *eros* for the intensity of attraction that has sexuality in its mix. *Philia* for the deep love that we have for our friends. *Agape*, the love that we have for those who are flawed and vulnerable – variously translated as compassion or charity.

There is value in understanding the ways different experiences of love are shaped by our age and stage of life and the form of relationship that they arise within. There is also value in turning a critical eye on the way that modern Western culture speaks about love – predominantly romantic love (especially the love of opposite-sex cis-gendered people – cue all the clichés here!) and secondarily the love of a parent for a child (cue another large bucket of clichés).

All these things are true. And yet. When we speak of the liberation that is possible within love, because of love, it can show up at any age or stage of life and in any form of relationship. It doesn't matter whether we are learning to love ourselves, the ones we live with, the ones we care about, or this good earth that we inhabit. Love draws us out of ourselves, nudging us, in small and big ways, to be more . . . *ourselves* in all of our relationships, just as it draws us into more concrete actions *for others*.

How this happens is a bit of a mystery and it can come wrapped up in other strong and sometimes not-very-loving feelings.

Years ago, I had a friendship that ended painfully. I struggled with memories and recriminations long after we broke contact. I wrote about my anger, I listened to it, attempted to make friends with it, meditated on it, and called my energy back in ritual. All to no avail, or at least, not much in the way of results.

Then one day, stopped at a traffic light, listening to the radio, I looked up into the deep blue sky and the thought came, unbidden, that I wished my former friend well.

Why did that happen right then? I don't know. I could write about how all the various attempts to come to terms with the ending of the friendship and my role in that built up some sort of architecture in my brain and eventually this showed up in my life. Maybe that's true. Somehow, it seems more true that this revelation was tied to the particular blue of the sky that day. I wonder whether my former friend somehow let go of their struggle at the same time (although not enough to contact them!).

## Meeting this Moment with Love & Justice

That moment of looking into the blue sky did not prevent my former uncharitable thoughts from coming back – several times after that, I found myself regurgitating my former way of thinking. But over time it happened less, and when it did, I was able to catch myself, reminding myself that I didn't need to think like that anymore.

Love is both very simple and very complicated.

Love requires our intention and it exists beyond our intention.

Love is both an experience and an action.

Love is at the heart of what it means to be a human being and it is not unique to us.

This year the Meaning Making project has explored how we can meet this moment with love and justice, two important values in Canadian Unitarian Universalism. With this last packet, “liberating love,” we are stepping onto hallowed ground – following in the footsteps of some of our religious and spiritual ancestors.

For our Universalist ancestors in Ontario, Québec and Nova Scotia in the 1840s, the belief that we are loved by God was revolutionary. People left the faiths of their families in the hundreds because this belief was liberating. Universalism relieved them of a horrible burden and gave them a profound purpose in their daily lives – to express this love in their interactions with all of God's beloved.

In the late 1800s, as more mainstream Christian movements adopted some aspects of Universalism, the momentum faltered. Now, almost 200 years later, we are living through a rise of a secular form of predestination: people are condemned for being immigrants, or trans, or some other aspect of their life and identity. Now is the time to catch the echoes of our Universalist ancestors and shape their words and actions to fit our century and our problems.

May it be so.

Yours in faith,

*Karen*



# REFLECTION QUESTIONS

## The Practice of Liberating Love

- What is your earliest experience of love? What did you learn about love from your family and culture as you were growing up?
- How do you show love to yourself and others? What means do you use – words, gifts, services, physical affection?
- How do you receive love? What do you find easy and what do you find challenging about receiving love?
- Have you experienced liberation through love? How did this experience impact your life?
- Have you ever acted to save something that you love?
- How does your calendar or daytimer show what (or who) you love?
- When have you felt most loved?
- What kinds of love have you experienced?
- How does the land love you?
- How have cultural stereotypes about love and romance impacted your life?
- How has your understanding of love evolved over time?
- How did you learn about the relationship between love and justice – did you have mentors or teachers as a child, youth or adult?
- Whose love has helped you believe that the world can be a fairer, kinder place?
- What does love mean to you?



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS - 2

- Have you experienced love from an other-than-human animal/kin?
- Have you experienced love from something or someone much larger than yourself or any single species or kin? This could be from the loving god of your understanding, the land, the natural world, the universe, or something else.
- What commitments have you made to those you love?
- What have you gained from love?
- When have you experienced your heart “opening” in a loving way and what brought it about? How did you respond? What did you learn from this experience?
- When have you experienced your heart “closing” in response to hurt, fear, or misunderstanding? How did you respond? What did you learn from this experience?
- Who is included in the circles you inhabit — and who might be left out, consciously or unconsciously? What might it look like to widen those circles?
- Communities sometimes experience heartbreak, misunderstanding, or conflict. What helps a community move toward repair and healing? What role can each of us play in practicing “truth in love, accountability in love, and repair in love”?
- In this month’s sermon, Rev. Samaya gives examples of practices that invite liberating love (e.g. curiosity over certainty, compassion over gossip). What practices do you use to encourage liberating love?



Photo: Arran Morton

# FROM THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

## Christianity

Matthew 22:37-39: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart...Love your neighbour as yourself."

## Buddhism

"Hatred is not diminished by hatred, but by love alone" (The Dhammapada)

## Hinduism

"Love is not a mere sentiment. It is the ultimate truth at the heart of creation." (Bhagavad-Gita)

## Islam

"Allah loves those who do good." (translation from the Quran, 2:195)

## Judaism

"What is hateful to you, do not do to another." (Talmud, Shabbat 31a)

## Sikhism

"Those who have loved are those who have found God." (Guru Nanak)

## Taoism

"See the world as your self. Have faith in the way things are. Love the world as your self; Then you can care for all things." (Tao Te Ching)

**"Though we cannot think alike,  
may we not love alike?"**  
Sometimes shared as "we need  
not think alike to love alike" and  
attributed to the Unitarian  
Francis David, but the original  
quote is from John Wesley, 18th  
century founder of methodism.

## Unitarian Universalism

We are called to love and justice through our interdependence on each other and on the world around us.

(Canadian Unitarian Council)

Love is the power that holds us together and is at the center of our shared values. We are accountable to one another for doing the work of living our shared values through the spiritual discipline of Love.

(Unitarian Universalist Association [US], Article 2)

Love is a more positive force for good than fear

George Whaley (d. 2007)

Member, UU Church of Olinda

## Buddhism

In Buddhism, we speak of salvation by understanding. We see that it is the lack of understanding that creates suffering. Understanding is the power that can liberate us. It is the key that can unlock the door to the prison of suffering. If we do not practice understanding, we do not avail ourselves of the most powerful instrument that can free us and other living beings from suffering. True love is possible only with real understanding. Buddhist meditation — stopping, calming, and looking deeply — is to help us understand better. In each of us is a seed of understanding. That seed is God. Thich Nhat Hanh,

*Living Buddha, Living Christ*

# QUOTATIONS

Love is a form of sweet labor: fierce, bloody, imperfect, and life-giving – a choice we make over and over again.  
Valarie Kaur.

Real love comes with a powerful recognition that we are fully alive and whole despite our wounds or our fears or our loneliness. It is a state where we allow ourselves to be seen clearly by ourselves and by others, and in turn, we offer clear seeing to the world around us. It is a love that heals.  
Sharon Salzberg

Love is what brought us here. Love is what sustains us here, and it is love that will deliver us back home. There is one love ('eshq, in Persian). Human love, when it is stripped of the traps of ego, is divine. To journey on this one love is what the mystics called the path of radical love. How liberating this can be, to know and realize that to participate in any love is to be a part of the divine unfolding, the cosmic unleashing.  
Omid Safi

We live through times when hate and fear seem stronger  
We rise and fall and light from dying embers  
Remembrances that hope and love last longer  
And love is love is love is love is love is love is love is love.  
Lin-Manuel Miranda

Justice and love are not identical, but they are indivisible.  
Cornel West

As Canadian Unitarians our interdependence calls us to love and justice. Love and justice.  
Love asks us to enlarge the circle over and over again, until all are welcome.  
Rev. Fiona Heath

The more I wonder, the more I love.  
Alice Walker

Never let a problem to be solved become more important than the person to be loved.  
Barbara Johnson

Every action for peace requires someone to exhibit the courage to challenge the violence and inspire love.  
Thich Nhat Hanh

The practice of love is the most powerful antidote to the politics of domination.  
bell hooks

To practice love is to disrupt the status quo which is masquerading as peace.  
Austin Channing Brown

## QUOTATIONS - 2

I'll love you forever,  
I'll like you for always,  
As long as I'm living,  
my baby you'll be.

Robert Munsch, *Love You Forever*

It occurs to Blanche that English doesn't have French's useful distinction between *libre*, meaning that something's unconstrained, and *gratuit*, meaning that it costs nothing. Free thought, free speech, free love: the English word that Arthur was so fond of obscures the price of things." Emma Donoghue, *Frog Music*

I write for my people, as an act of love and resistance and because until relatively recently, very few people were able to do so. I grew up a disappointed reader because I never saw myself in the books I was reading—none of the books were written for me. I made a decision early on in my career to speak first to a Nishnaabeg audience, as a way of not centering whiteness. I am not writing to educate white folks. That's not what motivates me. I want to interact with my audience on my own terms.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

"How a mother comes to love her child, her caring at all for this thing that's made her heavy, lopsided and slow, this thing that made her wish she were dead ... that's the miracle." Ami McKay, *The Birth House*

Love doesn't just sit there, like a stone, it has to be made, like bread; remade all the time, made new.

Ursula K. Le Guin,  
*The Lathe of Heaven*

There are a lot of different ways to experience love within the world.

Tracey Lindberg

Every fall into love involves the triumph of hope over knowledge.

Alain de Botton



Photo: Ben Mater/Unsplash

# MEDITATION

Rev. Fiona Heath

One year my partner and I went to Paris to visit our son, who was studying there. One of the days we wandered around the district of Montmartre, all cobble stone streets and cafes on the side of a great hill. We came upon a little square tucked into the hillside. At one side was a huge crowd of people, so we went to see why.

Against one of the old buildings was a tall black wall and people were standing in clusters, staring at the wall and then breaking out into grins, talking and laughing and taking so many selfies.

The wall was covered in words, in words in hundreds of languages, words all saying the same thing, over and over again:

Mahal kita (filipino)  
seni seviyorum (turkish)  
te quiero (spanish)  
Je' t'aime  
I love you

This Wall of Love was created by two artists, Frédéric Baron and Claire Kito, who many years ago collected the words I love you in as many languages as possible. The day we were there, there were people from all over the world searching for their language and squealing with joy when they found it.

Everyone was happy, if only for a moment, affirmed by seeing their language so far from home, and not just the familiarity of the language but the sweetness of the words.



Photo: The Wall of Love, Montmartre, Paris - photo by Fiona Heath

# MEDITATION

**Mark Nepo**

There is no end to love. We may tear ourselves away, or fall off the cliff we thought sacred, or return one day to find the home we dreamt of burning. But when the rain slows to a slant and the pavement turns cold, that place where I keep you and you and all of you— that place opens, like a fist no longer strong enough to stay closed. And the ache returns. Thank God. The sweet and sudden ache that lets me know I am alive. The rain keeps misting my face. What majesty of cells assembles around this luminous presence that moves around as me? How is it I'm still here? Each thing touched, each breath, each glint of light, each pain in my gut is cause for praise. I pray to keep falling in love with everyone I meet, with every child's eye, with every fallen being getting up. Like a worm cut in two, the heart only grows another heart. When the cut in my mind heals, I grow another mind. Birds migrate and caribou circle the cold top of the world. Perhaps we migrate between love and suffering, making our wounded-joyous cries: alone, then together, alone, then together. Oh praise the soul's migration. I fall. I get up. I run from you. I look for you. I am again in love with the world.

From *Things that Join the Sea and the Sky: Field Notes on Living* (2017).

# SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

## Singing Resistance

In today's renewed focus on justice and democracy, singing has become an important act of love and service, especially in groups. The Singing Resistance movement began in Minneapolis in 2025 as a key part of anti-ICE protests. Bringing simple uplifting songs to the streets, Singing Resistance is now spreading rapidly across the continent, with local groups forming to sing in non-violent protest. The Singing Resistance [toolkit](#) is accessible via social media.

## The Things We Do For Love

Reflect on the ways that you love the many beings in your life: people, places, creatures, groups and other living things. How is the love you feel expressed in words, actions and feelings? What was one thing you did today to offer love, to express it, to demonstrate it or live into it? What are the ways of loving that call you into new relationship with others?

## In Community

### Love is . . .

Create an interactive invitation for your community inspired by the installation created by the artists Uncutt and Noodlelove in New York City in 2020. Write in pen on a large sheet of paper or use chalk on a blackboard. Include at least three columns, one for "love" one for "justice" and a third for "accountability." In the love column, write "Love is . . ." multiple times. Under justice write "justice for . . ." and under accountability write "I am . . ." Learn more about this Love Wall project.



Photo from Mean Genius Experience Design, shared by Ralph Andre, March 11, 2025.

## WITH CHILDREN

The idea of telling heroes' stories to inspire others to action has deep roots. People have been telling the stories of heroes for thousands of years as a way to communicate their culture's values. Ann Medlock invented the Giraffe Heroes Project to do the same thing for our times. Ann's strategy for the Giraffe Heroes Project is simple— find unknown heroes, commend them as Giraffes for sticking their necks out, and get their stories told on radio and television and in print.

Giraffe stories demonstrate that anyone can help, that there are individuals everywhere who have the courage to move into action. While begun in the United States, Giraffe Heroes arise all over the world.



<http://giraffeheroes.org/>

### From the Stars in the Sky to the Fish in the Sea



A story about inclusion and exclusion and the differences between home and school. Written by Toronto author and activist Kai Cheng Thom and beautifully illustrated by Wai-Yant Li and Kai Yun Ching.

The story can function as a way of opening up a conversation about non-binary gender identities (or not).

# THE BOOKSHELF

*All About Love: New Visions* by bell hooks (1999).

*The Cree Word for Love: Sâkihitowin* by Tracy Lindberg (words) and George Littlefield (art) (2017). An exploration of the many forms of love – romantic, familial, community, and kin.

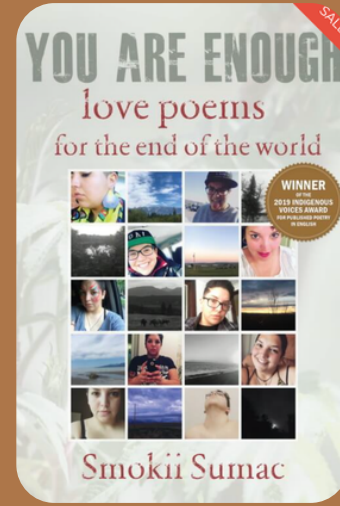
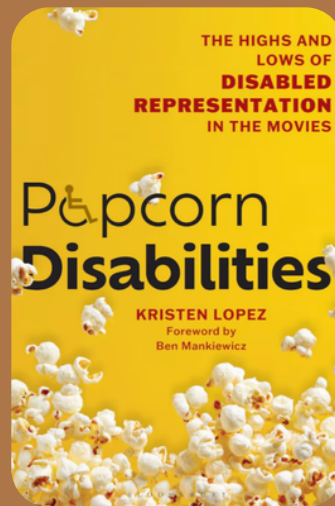
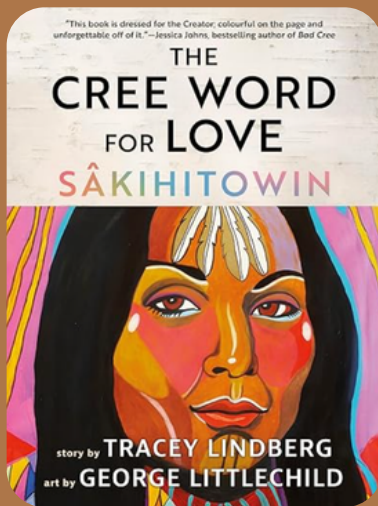
*A Generous Spirit: Selected Work* by Beth Brant, ed. by Janice Gould (2019). Collected works of the late Beth Brant, “survival and empathy at the intersection of Native American and lesbian experience.”

*Popcorn Disabilities: The Highs and Lows of Disabled Representation in the Movies* by Kristen Lopez (2025). How Hollywood has responded to changing understandings of disability. See interview with Stacy Lee Kong in online resources, below.

*Real Love: The Art of Mindful Connection* (2017) by Sharon Salzberg

*So You're Ready to Choose Love: Trauma-Informed Conflict Transformation for Social Justice & Spiritual Growth.* A Loving Justice Workbook by Kai Cheng Thom (free).

*You Are Enough: Love Poems for the End of the World* by Smokii Sumac (2019). Winner of the 2019 Indigenous Voices Award in Published Poetry in English and short-listed for the 2020 Dayne Ogilvie Prize for LGBTQ Emerging Writers.



# ONLINE RESOURCES

Check out the Canadian Unitarian Council's justice and equity resources which details actions congregations can take on eighth principle issues.

In particular, check out the "Dismantling Barriers" resources and toolkits. We highly recommend the **Solidarity Toolkit**, which provides practical answers to the question "How do we live out love in public?"

"And They Will Know We Are UU By Our Love" Rev. Melora Lynngood, Confluence Lecture, Canadian Unitarian Council Annual General Meeting (May 2016).

"There Are So Many Real World Consequences That People Don't Notice" Stacy Lee Kong, author of the *Friday Things*, a Canadian pop culture newsletter, talks with Kristen Lopez about her new book, *Popcorn Disabilities: The Highs and Lows of Disabled Representation in the movies* (Feb 2026).

"Playing Jab at Grenada's Carnival Gave Me Access to a Different Type of Freedom" also by Stacy Lee Kong (Aug 2025). Body liberation, self love, and playing mas -- participating in masquerade at Carnival.

Hold Fast to Love - Lynn Harrison

This new hymn was written in early 2025 and is now included in the new UUA "Sing Out Love" virtual hymnbook.

"Temporary Spaces of Joy and Freedom" Leanne Betasamosake Simpson in conversation with Dionne Brand. *Literary Review of Canada* (June 2018)

"The True and Hard Work of Love and Relationships" *On Being with Krista Tippett*, interview with Alain de Botton (Feb 2021)

"I am willing" - Holly Near. This version is by Parker Woodland, featuring UU minister and singer/songwriter Erin Walter. Images provided by the Texas UU Justice Ministry.

"Remembering Beth Brant" from *Queer Remembering* (Aug 2018) gives a brief overview of the path-breaking work of poet and activist Beth Brant, a Bay of Quinte Mohawk from Deseronto, Ontario and Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory.

***If you watch only one online resource, watch this:***

A wonderful video from Soul Pancake, a youtube channel which for many years offered thoughtful content on being human. This short video asks people of all ages to answer the question 'What is Love?.'

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_UWGKzqMwso](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_UWGKzqMwso)

# Discussion Guide

## Welcome

Greet everyone. If this is a drop-in group or if there are newer folks present, do a go round of names. Give a brief overview of the session, including time expectations.

Today we are exploring the practices of liberating love: how do we bring love into the world and how can love liberate us?

## Chalice Lighting

Our chalice lighting comes from Tracey Lindberg, speaking about the book she developed with George Littlefield, *The Cree Word for Love: Sâkihitowin*:

I thought that I was going to be writing from a more frivolous place. But the lessons learned were that you can have complicated and difficult love, you can have pained and joyous love, and they can all cross and sort of live amongst each other.

## Check In

Offer a choice of these questions or one of your own:

- How goes it with your spirit?
- What's on your mind and heart today?

## Covenant

If your group has become familiar with their covenant, you could ask each member to name the line that is speaking to them today.

- Speak as personally and deeply as we wish--or not. It is always okay to pass.
- Speak kindly about ourselves and others.
- Speak from our own experiences.
- Hold confidentiality. Share your experience of the conversation, not other people's stories.
- Listen respectfully. Avoid giving advice or asking probing questions about others' lives.
- Be aware of power differentials. Consider our own and others' identities and how these identities shape the impact of our contributions.
- (Include any agreements added by your group)

# Discussion Guide - 2

## Conversation

This month we are exploring liberating love, the ways that we express and receive the love that frees us and connects (or re-connects) us to ourselves, our communities, our society, and this earth.

Invite participants to respond to a reflection question or share their experience with a practice from the theme packet. You may choose to begin with a go-round or simply let the conversation flow, making sure everyone has a chance to share. If there is a lull, let the silence sit for a time, then offer up a question to continue the conversation.

Optional starting questions:

- What have you learned about love from your family and/or your culture?
- In what ways has the experience of love opened you up?

## Optional Activity: The Things We Do For Love

*Part one: Who, where and what we love*

Invite each person to reflect on the ways they love the many beings in their life by making a list of the people, places, creatures, groups and other living things that they love. For each being or place on the list, note how your love is expressed in words, actions, feelings or some other way.

*Part two: looking at our calendars*

Take a look in your calendar or run through your activities yesterday (or for the past week). What did you do to offer, express or live into your love? How do these experiences of offering (and possibly receiving) love influence and shape you?

*Part three: Community reflection*

Invite each person to share one insight or observation from part one or part two.



Photo: Judd Mauricio/Pexels

# Discussion Guide - 3

## Sharing Silence

Before closing the session with the check out and chalice extinguishing, offer a minute of silence to give people a moment to process all that has been said and to share a time of quiet respite.

## Leaving

What is staying with you, in your heart, mind or spirit, from today's conversation?

## Closing Words

Our closing words come from Zen Buddhist priest Zenju Earthlyn Manuel:

We don't have to wait for death to approach to liberate ourselves from hatred. We can begin by asking ourselves, have I loved enough — within myself, within my house, beyond my doors, and into the world? Have I expressed the loving being that I am? Have I borne this love even when someone's heart is closed to it? I am not advocating love or the way of tenderness as an answer to all the ills of the world. Then again it is just that simple: to be love. We need such love to continue to confront the truth of the prolonged mistreatment that oppression brings to the world.

## Extinguish the chalice



Photo: Jametlene Reskp/Unsplash

**Love liberates us because it  
reminds us we belong together,  
we are capable of repair, we  
can open again and  
again and again.**

**Rev. Samaya Oakley**



Meaning Making Packets are created by a team of Canadian UU ministers:  
Arran Morton, Fiona Heath, Karen Fraser Gitlitz, & Lynn Harrison, with  
administrative support from Crystal Ironside.  
[www.MeaningMakingProject.com](http://www.MeaningMakingProject.com).

Photo: Alex Jackman/Unsplash