

# Salvation and Transformation

## "Thank You for Your Loving Hands"

Thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart,  
your loving ways—

Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.

And if you ever doubt yourself, remember us, who love you well—

We know all the gifts you bring into the world each day.

So thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart,  
your loving ways,

Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.

—by Judy Fjell and Lisa Bregger

## The Covenant

### I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to honor the group by letting the leader know if I will be absent, and to come to the group one last time and say good-bye if I need to quit
- to avoid cross talk, giving feedback or trying to fix anyone
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and not tell other people's stories
- to listen to what others share with an open heart, and to share deeply in my turn



I will spend my soul . . .  
so I can catch every  
last thing I touch.

—Linda Underwood

# Salvation and Transformation

## **Chalice Lighting**

May this flame,  
symbol of transformation since time began,  
fire our curiosity,  
strengthen our wills,  
and sustain our courage  
as we seek what is good within and around us.  
—Bets Wienecke

## **Sharing of Joys and Sorrows**

### **Silence**

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

### **Shared Readings**

Speaking of salvation, Jesus and a host of other spiritual luminaries have weighed in on the subject with some counterintuitive and paradoxical wisdom. In a nutshell, it is this: “Don’t focus on saving yourself (however you may conceive salvation, and there are many ways people seek to save their own skins, either in this world or the next). Focus on serving, saving, helping others. For if you try to save yourself, you lose yourself, yet if you seek to save others, you save both the other and yourself.”  
—Richard R. Davis

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

God’s salvation was offered to all, to the end that (as one early Universalist put it) “the last sinner will be dragged kicking and cursing into heaven.”  
—Scott Alexander

If you begin to understand what you are without trying to change it, then what you are undergoes a transformation.  
—Jiddu Krishnamurti

Changing alignment as we rise from the wreckage  
Knowing Ruin is the Road to Transformation

Pain is the Path to Our Salvation.  
—Oz J Thomas

A major spiritual and theological discipline for UUs who have rejected other people’s definitions and beliefs . . . is to go on and make our own definitions, collect our own thoughts, and find ways to explain our own experiences.  
—Christine Robinson

I do not at all understand the mystery of grace—only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us.  
—Anne Lamott

## **Deep Sharing and Deep Listening**

**Round 1:** Share your definition of salvation.

**Round 2:** What memories does the word “salvation” evoke? How has your understanding of salvation changed over the years?

**Round 3:** Make a connection to something another participant shared.

### **Closing Words**

Salvation carries mostly negative connotations to most Western ears these days . . . Salvation is about a true and tangible change. Salvation = Transformation!  
—Kelley Johnson-Nikondeha

### **Closing Song**

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

### **Group Business**

Homework for the next meeting.

## Homework: Salvation and Transformation

The word *salvation* comes from the Latin root “salvus” and means to save, but it also has the same root as our word “salve,” with a meaning of health or wholeness. By what are you saved? What does salvation mean to you? Is transformation important as a part of salvation?

By what are you saved? And how?

Saved like a bit of string,

tucked away in a drawer?

Saved like a child rushed from

a burning building, already

singed and coughing smoke?

Or are you salvaged

like a car part—the one good door

when the rest is wrecked?

Do you believe me when I say

you are neither salvaged nor saved,

but salved, anointed by gentle hands

where you are most tender?

Haven't you seen

the way snow curls down

like a fresh sheet, how it

covers everything,

makes everything

beautiful, without exception?

—Lynn Ungar (used with permission)

Almost everyone agrees that we, as humans, make mistakes and “miss the moral mark”—otherwise known as committing a sin. How we choose to deal with this state of sin varies.

Christians use the word *salvation* to describe their belief that Jesus died for our sins. For fundamentalists, who believe that to be saved you must “know the Lord Jesus,” salvation is seen as a ticket into heaven. Buddhists find salvation (from suffering) in achieving non-attachment.

UUs, as you might expect, are all over the board with this term, *salvation*.

- Historically, the “Universalist” part of our Unitarian Universalist name carried the belief that *all* people would find salvation with the divine, not just those who believe in Jesus Christ.
- Other UUs don't believe in an afterlife and focus primarily on the here and now.
- Some UUs reject the idea that we need “redemption,” a term that means being saved from an outside force, and they go about changing/saving/transforming themselves.
- Some people see salvation as movement toward maturity, as seen in the Jungian idea of individuation. Others see salvation as our connectedness within ourselves, with others, and with larger purposes of life.
- UUs with a scientific bent declare that we are creatures of our evolutionary heritage, perhaps not needing salvation at all.

What saves you? In a sermon on salvation, Christine Robinson states, “Whether the road you are on seems a direct route to what you most want your life to be, or whether you can see that some course adjustments would get you closer to your goal, you are saved. You are saved by grace like a snowstorm that blankets all anew; saved by works that endure through the generations; saved by your own will to grow, learn, and understand; saved by those who salve you when you are most tender and by the ones you care for in their times of need. You are saved by bells, by children, by faith, hope, and love. Choose your road; our Universalist forbears said that every single one leads, eventually, to salvation.”

All this talk of saving souls.  
Souls weren't made to save,  
like Sunday clothes that  
give out at the seams.  
They're made for wear; they  
come with lifetime guarantees.

Don't save your soul.  
Pour it out like rain on  
cracked, parched earth.  
Give your soul away, or  
pass it like a candle flame.  
Sing it out, or  
laugh it up the wind.

Souls were made for hearing  
breaking hearts, for puzzling dreams,  
remembering August flowers,  
forgetting hurts.

These men who talk of saving souls!  
They have the look of bullies  
who blow out candles before  
you sing happy birthday,  
and want the world to be  
in alphabetical order.

I will spend my soul  
playing it out like sticky string  
into the world,  
so I can catch every  
last thing I touch.

—Linda Underwood

### **Questions to Ponder**

- Do you need saving? What are you being saved from? A hard life, addictions, physical problems, poverty, yourself? Is it something “out there” or something within you?
- What transforms you to health and wholeness?
- The deep listening and deep sharing periods of our covenant groups are sometimes called a transformational experience. How has this group been transformational for you?
- What are some other ways you might understand the word *salvation*?

## Leader's Guide: Salvation and Transformation

The word *salvation* comes from the Latin root “salvus” and means to save, but it also has the same root as our word “salve,” with a meaning of health or wholeness. By what are you saved? What does salvation mean to you? Is transformation important as a part of salvation?

### Chalice Lighting (2 min)

Ask someone to read the chalice lighting reading found in the bulletin as you light the chalice.

May this flame,  
symbol of transformation since time began,  
fire our curiosity,  
strengthen our wills,  
and sustain our courage  
as we seek what is good within and around us.  
—Bets Wienecke

### Sharing of Joys and Sorrows (10 min)

Ask group members to check in, telling in one or two sentences how they are doing this week. Share information about absent members.

### Silence (3 min)

Give your group the gift of three minutes of silence. Time it if you would like.

### Shared Readings (5 min)

Have each person in turn read from the shared readings found in the bulletin until all the readings are finished.

### Deep Sharing and Deep Listening (65 min)

Do three rounds of deep sharing and deep listening. Pay close attention to the time allotted each person to ensure that everyone gets a turn to share.

**Round 1 (10 min):** Share your definition of salvation.

**Round 2 (40 min):** What memories does the word “salvation” evoke? How has your understanding of salvation changed over the years?

**Round 3 (15 min):** Make a connection to something another participant shared.

### Closing Words (1 min)

Read or ask someone to read the closing words.

Salvation carries mostly negative connotations to most Western ears these days . . . Salvation is about a true and tangible change. Salvation = Transformation!  
—Kelley Johnson-Nikondeha

### Closing Song (1 min)

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

### Group Business (5 min)

Pass out the homework for next time.