



**DISCUSSION GUIDES | 2020-2021**

**UUA Common Read:**

# **Breathe**

*A Letter to My Sons*

Book by Imani Perry

Discussion guides by Rayla D. Mattson

# Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Single-Session Version for BIPOC Groups</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Single-Session Version for Any Congregational Group</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Three-Session Version for BIPOC Groups</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Session 1 / BIPOC Groups: Breathing</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Session 2 / BIPOC Groups: Aren't We All Human?</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Session 3 / BIPOC Groups: Claiming or Reclaiming Joy</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>Three-Session Version for Any Congregational Group</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>Session 1 / Any Group: Breathing</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>Session 2 / Any Group: Aren't We All Human?</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>Session 3 / Any Group: Claiming or Reclaiming Joy</b> .....	<b>49</b>

# Preface

I often times find that being a single Black mother can be a very lonely existence. Especially since I don't know many other single Black parents, and definitely not where I live. Reading words from a Black mother to her sons resonated with me in so many ways.

I often write about my experience as a mother to my three children and wonder if there are things I should be doing differently. What ways can I keep or shelter them from the harm of racism? I wonder if I've told them too much or not enough. I cry for them. I'm scared for them. I love them. I sit with all my thoughts and feelings.

Reading Imani Perry's book, I would often put the book down to reflect on a statement, to look something up, or pause to run something past my older two. I enjoyed looking up songs she referenced and laughing about similar childhood experiences. It was nice to see myself represented in written words, my pains and my joys laid out on display. I felt seen and I felt heard.

I thought a lot about how, as a Black mother, I could frame this discussion guide. First and foremost, I want to be clear that this is just that: a guide. It is not a rule book. White supremacy culture teaches us that we must finish. We must complete the lesson or finish the plan. In that model we often miss or overlook critical connections or learning that could have taken place had we not rushed the doing, or the knowing, or the learning.

I encourage you, when you are together, rather than focus on completing everything, allow folx to complete a thought or sentence or let silence fill some space. Silence can also teach us. So if one question takes up the entire time, then that was the question that needed to take up the entire time. If another question or thought comes up that's not in this guide, and seems pressing or important to the participants, I invite you lean into those conversations and allow others to as well. It's okay to not get to everything.

If you need permission to not do something, then I give it to you here. There is no wrong or right way to use this guide. Whatever you do will be a gift. I thank you and honor your willingness to lean into this book, this conversation, this work.

— Rayla D. Mattson

# Introduction

The UUA chose Imani Perry's book, *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons*, as the 2020-21 UUA Common Read. This beautiful book by a Black mother is many things: meditation, memoir, lament, prayer, celebration of life. A mother's heart is a timeless theme. But the dangers Black children face are a particular horror of our time, with long roots in the history of white supremacy. It is hoped that engaging with *Breathe* together will press many UUs and non-UUs toward empathy, love, and a fire for change.

These discussion materials invite you to gather as a pre-existing group or to form a group to engage with *Breathe*. Discussions may be offered as congregational, cluster, or regional programming for adults of all ages and life stages, or in gatherings of advocacy or identity-based UU groups, campus groups or young adult groups, youth groups, or cross-generational groups of adults and youth.

This Common Read provides two different plans. One is for any congregational group and the other for a exclusively BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) group. Each plan offers the choice of a single 90-minute session or three 90-minute sessions. Both plans invite follow-up action. A full three sessions will, of course, give participants opportunities to engage more deeply and broadly with the book and form personal and collective responses to it.

These sessions are written for groups meeting virtually, but will easily adapt to in-person gatherings. It is recommended that online groups be co-led, with a "facilitator" conducting the session and a "host" managing the technical flow. These roles are explained in the sessions. Co-leaders are encouraged to hold a practice session in advance so they can lead the group smoothly together from the start.

If you identify as a person of color and want to provide or join a BIPOC Common Read group for *Breathe*, please "Share Your Group" on the UUA website ([www.uua.org/read/breathe-share-or-find](http://www.uua.org/read/breathe-share-or-find)). This page also invites any group to post about your Common Read.

If you have any questions about using these guides or setting up/joining a group, please email [religiouseducation@uua.org](mailto:religiouseducation@uua.org).

We thank you for engaging with this book.

— The UUA Office for Lifespan Faith Engagement

# Single-Session Version for BIPOC Groups

## Goals

- Invite responses to *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons* by Imani Perry
- Explore lived experiences, hurt, harm, and trauma based on being BIPOC in America
- Consider paths to hope, healing, and resilience despite the challenges and the injustices of living in a white supremacy culture

## Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Zoom room with captioning

## Preparation

- Set the chalice near where you will lead your Zoom session.
- Make sure a Zoom room is scheduled at least one week prior to meeting. If possible, provide a room that has captions enabled.
- Set up a registration process to ensure security of your session. It can be as simple as inviting interested people to email an individual for the Zoom link. Do not post the Zoom link publicly.
- Send the Zoom link to all registered participants at least one week prior to the scheduled date and then in a reminder email the day before. Include email and telephone contact information in case anyone has difficulty accessing the Zoom room.
- Assign a facilitator and a host. The facilitator will conduct the session(s) and the host will play any videos, post slides, etc. and help participants with troubleshooting. When the session begins, have the facilitator type “FACILITATOR” and the host type “TECH” in front of their name so participants can easily identify them.
- Open the Zoom room 10 minutes prior to the scheduled start, so the session can begin on time. Have [What's Going On by Marvin Gaye](#) playing as participants enter.
- Write this covenant in a separate document so that you can copy and paste its text into the chat or share your screen to display it. You may choose to

make PowerPoint slides to display the covenant in this and any future sessions.

We each promise to:

- Speak from our own experiences and perspectives. Use “I” statements.
- Listen generously to the experiences and perspectives of others.
- Actively resist making assumptions about one another. Allow for space after each person has spoken so as to give time to process what has been shared.
- Be mindful of “taking space and making space” to ensure everyone has opportunities to speak and to listen.
- Expect and accept non-closure.
- Respect the confidentiality of personal information and stories shared here.
- Refrain from giving advice unless solicited.

### **Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)**

Say, “Our chalice lighting words are from Maureen Killoran from the UUA Worship Web.” Share these words:

*Welcome, you who come in need of healing, you who are confused, or have been betrayed.*

*Welcome, with your problems and your pain.*

*Welcome, too, your joys and your wonderings, welcome your need to hope, your longing for assurance.*

*Instead of answers, here may you find safety for your questions.*

*Instead of promises, may you find community for your struggles, people with hands and hearts to join you in engaging the challenges and changes of our day.*

Say, “Through the book, and our discussion here, let us explore some of the ways BIPOC folx navigate through our own joys and sorrows in a country founded on white supremacy culture.”

Light the chalice.

### **Introductions and Creating a Covenant (15 minutes)**

Invite each person to introduce themselves briefly and remind others to mute themselves before and after their turn. Ask them to share where they are from or where they are located, if participants are not known to one another, and what brought them to this discussion.

You may wish to add this question to the check-in:

What things might you be holding onto in your heart that might make it difficult for you to be fully present in this moment? Is it something you can set down, even if you need to pick it back up when we’re done? If you care to share, briefly include a sentence or two with your introduction, on what you will set down during this time together. Please know that it is okay to just think on this and not share out loud to the group.

Once everyone has introduced themselves, present the document/slides with the covenant points or post them in the chat. Propose them as guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes in the chat or in the document/slide. Be mindful that folx on cell phones may not be able to see the notes in the chat. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to thumbs up or signal agreement. If this group will have future meetings, keep these documents for your next session(s).

### **First Impressions (15 minutes)**

Ask, “What stays with you after reading *Breathe: A Letter To My Sons?*” Invite participants to share an initial response to the book. Ask them to speak one at a time, without interruption; say that it is fine to pass. Offer a 15-second pause after

each sharing, inviting participants to reflect on what each person has shared before the next person speaks.

### **Discussion and Sharing Part I (25 minutes)**

Share this quote from *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons* by Imani Perry, from page 8:

*No matter how “just so” I have tried, and often failed, to make things, I have known from the very first day of each of your lives that I cannot guarantee your safety. That is the thing that the voyeurs drink in.*

Say:

In her book, Imani Perry talks about her fear of not being able to keep her children safe. That no matter what she does, she can never fully and completely protect them from all they will face as Black boys and then Black men in this country.

Engage participants in a discussion, asking:

- At what point in your life, or in your children’s lives, did you realize that there were dangers based solely on the color of your, or their, skin?
- If you have not felt danger based on the color of your or your children’s skin, reflect on why or how your, or their, particular skin color offers safety.
- Have others been nearby when you experienced danger related to the color of your skin? Did they choose to assist or help in any way? How did that make you feel?

Allow 15-20 minutes for this part of the discussion. Then, ask participants to reflect quietly as you ask:

- Once you came to a realization about danger associated with your, or your children’s, skin color, was there anything you began doing differently as a result?
- If you have not had an experience of danger, how might the safety you experience have made certain situations in your life easier than others?



Invite any who choose to share insights from their reflection.

### **Optional Break for 90-minute Session**

Check in with participants to see if a five-minute bio break is needed.

### **Discussion and Sharing Part II (15 minutes)**

Say, “In Imani Perry’s *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons* she writes, on page 2:”

*I do not believe that the acts of the oppressors are my people’s shame. For me, that my people became, created, and imagined from a position of unfreedom is a source of pride, not shame.”*

Say:

Some Black Americans feel a deep sense of shame that their ancestors were enslaved. Many struggle with being a by-product of rape, abuse, and torture. Others feel the struggle shows their lineage has folx who persevered through the unimaginable, and that shows strength and resiliency in their lineage.

Engage participants in a discussion, asking:

- Do you feel shame or pride knowing that your ancestors came from a position of “unfreedom”? That they had to endure additional struggles or challenges based on their skin color or their enslavement? Why do you feel the shame or pride you feel?
- If your ancestors were never enslaved, how do you imagine your feelings on your lineage might be different if they had?

### **What’s Next/Closing (15 minutes)**

Say:

In Imani Perry’s book, on page 71, she writes:

*Here is a confession: Recently, I have wondered if white people are irredeemable. Again, I have to issue a caveat for the sensitive. No, I do not mean individuals. Individuals are the precious bulwark against total desperation – in them we find the persistence of possibility.*

Invite the group to begin a conversation about actions we might take individually or collectively to create a country not based on white supremacy. Suggest these areas to start discussion:

- Convene an accountability group to share about where you notice white supremacy
- Join up with people in your town or community to learn about and speak out about equity issues
- Make relationships that challenge white supremacy
- Find a supportive group where you can simply be with others with as little centering of white culture and white supremacy as is possible
- Make real connections with people who are different from you

To close, share these words from “Your Life Matters,” by Kenny Wiley:

Many of us are here because this faith and the people in it affirmed: you may not be perfect, but your life matters just the same.

That’s what’s on the line now. Through racism and posthumous victim-blaming, through silence and bullets and indifference and vilification, Black people are being told that our lives do not matter—or that they matter only conditionally. Black lives matter if: If we are educated. If we are respectful. If.

And sometimes, not even then do our lives matter.

Right now we as Unitarian Universalists are being called to act. We are being called by our ancestors—those who demanded that we help end slavery, that we fight for suffrage, that we join the struggle to end Jim Crow, that we listen to and honor Black Power.

Lydia Maria Child and William Lloyd Garrison are calling us.

Lucy Stone is calling us.

Fannie B. Williams and Frances Ellen Harper are calling us.

James Reeb is calling us.

Viola Liuzzo is calling us.

Guided by that enduring, unfulfilled promise of the belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person, ours is a faith that has said, or worked to say to those who have been marginalized:

You are a woman, and your life matters.

You are gay or lesbian, and your life matters.

You are transgender, and your life matters.

You are bisexual, and your life matters.

You have a disability, and your life matters.

You were not loved as a child, and your life matters.

You struggle with depression, and your life matters.

Right now we are being called—

by our ancestors, by our principles, by young Black activists across the country—

to promote and affirm:

You are young and Black, and your life matters.

You stole something, and your life matters.

I have been taught to fear you, and your life matters.

The police are releasing your criminal record, and your life matters.

They are calling you a thug, and your life matters.

Our ancestors, principles, and fellow humans are calling on us to promote affirm, with deeds and words: Black lives matter.

Invite participants to share a closing word or phrase about what they are taking away from their reading and discussion.

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.

# Single-Session Version for Any Congregational Group

## Goals

- Invite responses to *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons* by Imani Perry
- Explore lived experiences, hurt, harm, and trauma based on being BIPOC in America and relate that to one's own lived experiences
- Consider paths to hope, healing, and resilience despite the challenges and the injustices of living in a white supremacy culture

## Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Zoom room with captioning

## Preparation

- Set the chalice near where you will lead your Zoom session.
- Make sure a Zoom room is scheduled at least one week prior to meeting. If possible, provide a room that has captions enabled.
- Set up a registration process to ensure security of your session. It can be as simple as inviting interested people to email an individual for the Zoom link. Do not post the Zoom link publicly.
- Send the Zoom link to all registered participants at least one week prior to the scheduled date and then in a reminder email the day before. Include email and telephone contact information in case anyone has difficulty accessing the Zoom room.
- Assign a facilitator and a host. The facilitator will conduct the session(s) and the host will play any videos, post slides, etc. and help participants with troubleshooting. When the session begins, have the facilitator type "FACILITATOR" and the host type "TECH" in front of their name so participants can easily identify them.
- Open the Zoom room 10 minutes prior to the scheduled start, so the session can begin on time. Have [\*What's Going On\* by Marvin Gaye](#) playing as participants enter.
- Write this covenant in a separate document so that you can copy and paste its text into the chat or share your screen to display it. You may choose to

make PowerPoint slides to display the covenant in this and any future sessions.

We each promise to:

- Speak from our own experiences and perspectives. Use “I” statements.
- Listen generously to the experiences and perspectives of others.
- Actively resist making assumptions about one another. Allow for space after each person has spoken so as to give time to process what has been shared.
- Be mindful of “taking space and making space” to ensure everyone has opportunities to speak and to listen.
- Expect and accept non-closure.
- Respect the confidentiality of personal information and stories shared here.
- Refrain from giving advice unless solicited.

### **Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)**

Say, “Our chalice lighting words are from Angel Kyodo Williams, a Zen priest, a Black woman, as quoted in the book.” Share these words:

If we are willing to accept truth just as it comes. Without trying to change it to suit our needs, we become free of the anxiety that comes from the urge to change and control... It doesn't mean that you know everything. Rather, it means that you don't know everything. Rather, it means that you may not know anything at all in a situation, but you have become so open to the infinite possibilities that you can approach and accept anything. Even pain.

Light the chalice.

### **Introductions and Creating a Covenant (15 minutes)**

Invite each person to introduce themselves briefly and remind others to mute themselves before and after their turn. Ask them to share where they are from or

where they are located, if participants are not known to one another, and what brought them to this discussion.

You may wish to add this question to the check-in:

What things might you be holding onto in your heart that might make it difficult for you to be fully present in this moment? Is it something you can set down, even if you need to pick it back up when we're done? If you care to share, briefly include a sentence or two with your introduction, on what you will set down during this time together. Please know that it is okay to just think on this and not share out loud to the group.

Once everyone has introduced themselves, present the document/slides with the covenant points or post them in the chat. Propose them as guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes in the chat or in the document/slide. Be mindful that folks on cell phones may not be able to see the notes in the chat. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to thumbs up or signal agreement. If this group will have future meetings, keep these documents for next session(s).

### **First Impressions (15 minutes)**

Ask, "What stays with you after reading *Breathe: A Letter To My Sons*?" Invite participants to share an initial response to the book. Ask them to speak one at a time, without interruption; say that it is fine to pass. Offer a 15-second pause after each sharing, inviting participants to reflect on what each person has shared before the next person speaks.

### **Discussion and Sharing Part I (25 minutes)**

Share this quote from page 1 of *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons* by Imani Perry:

*I want them to admit that you are people...This fact, simple as it is, shouldn't linger on the surface. It should penetrate.*

Say:

Imani Perry begins her book by telling her sons that she wants people to acknowledge that they are in fact human. That they are not less than or other than but in fact human like every other race: especially the whites.

Engage a discussion, asking:

- How do you think or imagine it must have felt for the author to say to her children that she wished people could see them as human?
- How do you imagine her children reacting to this?

Allow 15-20 minutes for this part of the discussion. Then, ask participants to reflect quietly as you ask:

- Now imagine yourself, whatever race you are, as a child having your parent or caregiver assure you that you are human. How about you having the conversation with your own child(ren) or with children you know? Does changing the perspective change how the scenario unfolds in your mind?
- Did you find that you imagined both scenarios the same? Differently? Why?

Invite any volunteers to share insights from their reflection. Allow 10 minutes for this part of the discussion.

### **Optional Break for 90-minute Session**

Check in with participants to see if a five-minute bio break is needed.

### **Discussion and Sharing Part II (15 minutes)**

Say:

In *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons* Imani Perry's recalls, on page 9, her experience, as a girl, with a certain teacher in her majority white high school. It was obvious that her teacher felt some sort of disdain towards her. She writes, to her sons:

*...you learn early on, that the aversion to Blackness can turn perfectly lovely people grotesque.*

Perry mentions that she could tell some of her classmates noticed the injustice but chose not to speak up on her behalf, out of fear, self-preservation, or some other reason. She writes:

*They were disciplined into passive acceptance, into reaping the rewards, while I was humiliated over and over again.*

Have you heard of the [Bystander Effect](#)? It has been observed that people are less likely to help, the more others are around. There could be many factors in whether or not a bystander intervenes.

Engage participants to discuss:

- Have there been times or situations in your life where you felt like you wanted to intervene when someone was being treated unfairly because of their race?
- Did you intervene or not? Explain why or why not.
- Optional question: If you were in that same situation in the future, do you think you would, or would you want to, do anything differently? If so, what? Why or why not?

### **What's Next/Closing (15 minutes)**

Say:

In Imani Perry's book, on page 71, she writes:

*Here is a confession: Recently, I have wondered if white people are irredeemable. Again, I have to issue a caveat for the sensitive. No, I do not mean individuals. Individuals are the precious bulwark against total desperation – in them we find the persistence of possibility.*

Invite the group to begin a conversation about actions to take individually or collectively to create a country not based on white supremacy. Suggest these areas to start discussion:



- Convene an accountability group to share about where you notice white supremacy
- Join up with people in your town or community to learn about and speak out about equity issues
- Make relationships that challenge white supremacy
- Make real connections with people who are different from you

To close, share these words by Rev. Erika A. Hewitt from the UUA Worship Web:

The chalice, as a symbol of Unitarian Universalism, arose as a beacon of hope in an atmosphere of tyranny.

The Chalice arose as a sign of promise that the marginalized would neither be forgotten nor ignored, because they are beloved and precious from the perspective of the Holy.

This morning [afternoon/evening], we remember all of the people who have been told explicitly—or implicitly, through police violence or government policy; through dehumanization; that they're anything less than whole; anything less than beloved.

As we each light [extinguish] a chalice in our homes, may we make of our lives a beacon: a symbol of our promise to draw the circle wide; a sign that we will not rest until "all" means all.

Invite participants to share a closing word or phrase about what they are taking away from their reading and discussion.

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.

# Three-Session Version for BIPOC Groups

## Goals

- Invite responses to *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons* by Imani Perry
- Explore lived experiences, hurt, harm, and trauma based on being BIPOC in America
- Consider paths to hope, healing, and resilience despite the challenges and the injustices of living in a white supremacy culture

# Session 1 / BIPOC Groups: Breathing

## Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Zoom room with captioning

## Preparation

- Set the chalice near where you will lead your Zoom session.
- Make sure a Zoom room is scheduled at least one week prior to meeting. If possible, provide a room that has captions enabled.
- Set up a registration process to ensure security of your session. It can be as simple as inviting interested people to email an individual for the Zoom link. Do not post the Zoom link publicly.
- Send the Zoom link to all registered participants at least one week prior to the scheduled date and then in a reminder email the day before. Include email and telephone contact information in case anyone has difficulty accessing the Zoom room.
- Assign a facilitator and a host. The facilitator will conduct the session(s) and the host will play any videos, post slides, etc. and help participants with troubleshooting. When the session begins, have the facilitator type “FACILITATOR” and the host type “TECH” in front of their name so participants can easily identify them.
- Open the Zoom room 10 minutes prior to the scheduled start, so the session can begin on time. Have [What’s Going On by Marvin Gaye](#) playing as participants enter.
- Write this covenant in a separate document so that you can copy and paste its text into the chat or share your screen to display it. You may choose to make PowerPoint slides to display the covenant in this and any future sessions.

We each promise to:

- Speak from our own experiences and perspectives. Use “I” statements.
- Listen generously to the experiences and perspectives of others.

- Actively resist making assumptions about one another. Allow for space after each person has spoken so as to give time to process what has been shared.
- Be mindful of “taking space and making space” to ensure everyone has opportunities to speak and to listen.
- Expect and accept non-closure.
- Respect the confidentiality of personal information and stories shared here.
- Refrain from giving advice unless solicited.
- Cue the [YouTube clip of “Meditation on Breathing”](#) (1:48), Hymn 1009 in *Singing the Journey*, the teal Unitarian Universalist hymnbook supplement, performed by Jyvonne Haskin, to play during the final activity.

### **Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)**

Say, “Our chalice lighting words are from Maureen Killoran from the UUA WorshipWeb.” Share:

Welcome, you who come in need of healing, you who are confused, or have been betrayed.

Welcome, with your problems and your pain.

Welcome, too, your joys and your wonderings, welcome your need to hope, your longing or assurance.

Instead of answers, here may you find safety for your questions.

Instead of promises, may you find community for your struggles, people with hands and hearts to join you in engaging the challenges and changes of our day.

Say, “Through Imani Perry’s book, and our discussion here, let us explore some of the ways BIPOC folx navigate through our own joys and sorrows in a country founded on white supremacy culture.”

Light the chalice.

## **Introductions and Creating a Covenant (15 minutes)**

Invite each person to introduce themselves briefly and remind others to mute themselves before and after their turn. Ask them to share where they are from or where they are located, if participants are not known to one another, and what brought them to this discussion.

You may wish to add this question to the check-in:

What things might you be holding onto in your heart that might make it difficult for you to be fully present in this moment? Is it something you can set down, even if you need to pick it back up when we're done? If you care to share, briefly include a sentence or two with your introduction, on what you will set down during this time together. Please know that it is okay to just think on this and not share out loud to the group.

Once everyone has introduced themselves, present the document/slides with the covenant points or post them in the chat. Propose them as guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes in the chat or in the document/slide. Be mindful that folks on cell phones may not be able to see the notes in the chat. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to thumbs up or signal agreement. If this group will have future meetings, keep these documents for next session(s).

## **First Impressions (15 minutes)**

Ask, "What stays with you after reading *Breathe: A Letter To My Sons?*" Invite participants to share an initial response to the book. Ask them to speak one at a time, without interruption; say that it is fine to pass. Offer a 15-second pause after each sharing, inviting participants to reflect on what each person has shared before the next person speaks.

## **Sharing: Our Ability to Breathe as BIPOC (15 minutes)**

Say:

In the media, at protests, and online everywhere, a familiar phrase we hear is, ‘I can’t breathe.’ It is not new to us and yet in recent years, it has taken on new meaning in the context of Black and brown bodies in dealing with police and law enforcement. So it seems fitting that Imani Perry penned the title of her book to her two Black sons with the word *Breathe*.

For some, having someone tell them or ask them to breathe or take deep breaths is a gentle reminder that leads to relaxation, deeper breaths and more mindfulness. For others, having someone tell them to breathe can be a trigger or take them mentality to places that are not relaxing.

When you hear or have someone tell or ask you to breathe, what does that bring up for you? If nothing in particular, maybe reflect on why it can be a trigger for others. How have other people reacted when you told or asked them to breathe?

Invite participants to sit with the word, “breathe,” and these questions. Say that this may be difficult or triggering for some folx and, when it is time to share, anyone may “pass.” Allow a few moments for folx to collect their thoughts to help all be fully present when one another speaks. Encourage 15 seconds or so of silence between participants. Remind them to not comment on the reflections of others but to simply listen and hold each other’s words. Do not rush participants. Let them fully share.

### **Optional Break for 90-minute Session**

Check in with participants to see if a five-minute bio break is needed.

### **Discussion: Parenting or Mentoring Children of Color (15 minutes)**

Say:

Imani Perry, on page 2 of her book, states:

*Mothering Black boys in America – that is a special calling.*

On page 1, she writes:

*I want them to admit that you are people... This fact, simple as it is, shouldn't linger on the surface. It should penetrate.*

Invite the group to consider the questions you are about to share:

Many times, as Black men called out with their last breath under police brutality, they used those final moments to call out for their mother. How do you think parenting Black or brown children in this country differs from parenting white children? What have you shared with your own child(ren) or children in general about those differences? How do you wish Black or brown children were viewed, versus how they are viewed?

Invite participants who are not around children to reflect on these questions in the context of their own childhood or upbringing.

Lead a discussion.

### **Exercise: Reframing What It Means to Breathe (20 minutes)**

Say:

In many marginalized communities, people often reclaim something that was used to harm them and reframe it in a way that is healing. Youth in the Black community will often reclaim the N-word, a word that has been used to cause so much harm, and turn it into something completely different. They may use it as a term of endearment for close friends or in jest at other times. Although not everyone in marginalized communities uses, or is comfortable with, this practice, for some it can be healing.

Then, ask:

How, as BIPOC folx, can we reclaim breathing? How can we use it in a way that is uplifting and healing? In UU spaces we often use a meditation on breathing. The meditation calls us to be more mindful of how we breathe. I wonder if we can take a few moments to listen to the words; not following them but just listening to see what may come up for us.

Tell the group you are about to share a video clip of a UU musician, Jyvonne Haskin, who will offer a meditation on breathing. Say:

As we listen, feel free to close your eyes. Turn off your camera if that works for you. Find a seated or standing position that feels good for your body that allows you to just relax and listen.

Play the meditation once through. Then ask, “What, if anything, came up for you while listening?”

Allow participants to fully share what has come up for them. Then say:

Now let’s listen again. This time, I invite you to follow along, breathing in and out with the meditation. Please make sure to care of yourself and do whatever works for you in this moment.

When the meditation is over the second time, ask, “Once we reflected on the meditation, and then heard it a second time, did it change how any of you reacted to or experienced the practice? If so, how?”

End this section by saying, “The act of breathing seems so simple but can be so complicated. May we continue to move toward and find spaces where we as BIPOC folx can breathe freely and safely.”

### **Closing (5 minutes)**

Introduce the closing reading saying, “And now as we close, I would like to share with you these words by Rayla D. and Kennedy Mattson, “Breathing as a Teen.”

Breathe?

Don’t tell me what to do!

So I sit and hold my breath rather than breathing  
when someone else tells me to

Breathe?

You breathe!

Because right now I don’t want to even breathe

Breathe?



I can't breathe. You won't let me.

Breathe?

I want to; But only when it is safe to do so.

Breathe.

Remind the group that this is the first of three meetings. Confirm the day, date, time, and make sure everyone has registered to obtain the Zoom link for Session 2. Make sure to save the covenant that the participants affirmed so the group can review it at the start of the next session.

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.

# Session 2 / BIPOC Groups: Aren't We All Human?

## Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Zoom room with captioning

## Preparation

- Prepare to screen-share the covenant from Session 1.
- Set the chalice near where you will lead your Zoom session.
- Make sure a Zoom room is scheduled at least one week prior to meeting. If possible, provide a room that has captions enabled.
- Set up a registration process to ensure security of your session. It can be as simple as inviting interested people to email an individual for the Zoom link. Do not post the Zoom link publicly.
- Send the Zoom link to all registered participants at least one week prior to the scheduled date and then in a reminder email the day before. Include email and telephone contact information in case anyone has difficulty accessing the Zoom room.
- Assign a facilitator and a host. The facilitator will conduct the session(s) and the host will play any videos, post slides, etc. and help participants with troubleshooting. When the session begins, have the facilitator type "FACILITATOR" and the host type "TECH" in front of their name so participants can easily identify them.

Open the Zoom room 10 minutes prior to the scheduled start, so the session can begin on time. Have [What's Going On by Marvin Gaye](#) playing as participants enter.

## Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)

Say, "Our chalice lighting words come from the book *Spilling the Light* by Theresa I. Soto." Then, share:

**I Cannot Prove to you That I Am/We Are Human**

I cannot prove to you that I am a person.

But you can hold my hand, cool and dry, while we pray, or just breathe, ragged  
breaths catching on our aching ribs.

I cannot prove to you that brown skin is holy, that Black skin is sacred, but you  
can know it, luminous and irrepressible, the tabernacle of your own liberation.

I cannot even prove to you that every queer body, every trans and enby body,  
every ace and bisexual body sings back to the universe its immense generative  
power of yes

I cannot prove to you with quadratic certainty that what a disabled body holds is  
a story of wisdom beyond perfection, like a red sun emerging from behind a  
cloud of dust

So the answers that I have for a country hacking up a death rattle, and a  
democracy with a wheezing, waxy pallor are about our courage to love.

Our desperation, not only for survival but also to tread above the worst of our  
collective nature. And to get each other free, unashamed that there came a day  
when we were willing to risk looking foolish to simply stay together and alive.

### **Check-In (10 minutes)**

Invite participants to re-introduce themselves and, if they wish, briefly describe  
anything they may need to set aside in order to be fully present during this session.  
Also, you can ask the group to reflect on and briefly share anything that may have  
come up since the last gathering.

Review the covenant from Session 1.

### **Reflection and Sharing (20 minutes)**

Say:

One thing that BIPOC folx learn early in life is that many times life can be unfair  
or unsafe simply because of the color of one's skin. As the author shares, many  
times brown and Black children, especially those identifying as male, learn this

lesson at a very young age. On page 9, the author states to her sons the following:

*You live in some worlds that are more white than Black. And so, you learn, early on, that the aversion to Blackness can turn perfectly lovely people grotesque.*

Ask:

When was the first time you noticed being treated differently because of the color of your skin? What happened and how did you feel/react?

Allow a few moments for folx to collect their thoughts to help all be fully present when one another speaks. Say that this may be difficult or triggering for some, and anyone may choose to “pass” and not share. Encourage 15 seconds or so of silence between participants. Remind them to not comment on the reflections of others but to simply listen and hold each other’s words. Do not rush participants. Let them fully share.

After giving each participant enough time to respond, ask,

If you were young in the memory that came to you, were any adults around to help you navigate the situation? If so, what was helpful/supportive or not helpful/supportive?

If there weren’t supportive adults, how did you handle it? How would you have liked to have seen things handled and/ or how have you helped BIPOC youth or children navigate a situation like this?

### **Optional Break for 90-minute Session**

Check in with participants to see if a five-minute bio break is needed.

### **Conversation Continued (20 minutes)**

Ask participants what they recall about how they may have viewed the world differently before, and after, they noticed being treated differently based on their skin color. Then say,

Imani Perry speaks in her book about her noticing as a child when she was treated differently. She says of her white classmates in school,

*They were disciplined into passive acceptance, into reaping the rewards, while I was humiliated over and over again.*

Then say:

In your own instances or even for Perry, what do you think it would have meant—what would it have made you, or her, feel—if the white kids around you or her noticed and spoke out?

Allow some responses. You may also ask:

Do you find that people have become more likely to speak up? If so, what impact do you think that change has?

### **Discussion: Helping (25 minutes)**

In her book, Imani Perry goes on to describe how she struggles with wanting to keep her boys safe in a society where she feels she cannot. She talks about finding safe people and spaces for them. She laments, on page 44:

*Feeling deep love and complete helplessness to protect the beloveds is a fact of Black life.*

And, in her quest to protect them, she says:

*I had hoped that standing shoulder to shoulder with people of conscience, people who knew like us that the tocsin peal of Black death is wrong, would help you feel powerful, a part of something. I may have been right, but it was never enough.*

Ask, “Are there groups or places or people that you turn to for safety? What draws you into that community and what about it makes you feel safe?”

Then ask, “What would it take for us to create this same sense of safety in a broader sense? How would this manifest? A world where everyone can mostly expect to encounter safe spaces and places and people?” Lead a discussion.

### **What’s Next/Closing (10 minutes)**

Say,

Before we close, I’d like to ask you to continue to envision ways there can be greater safety for BIPOC folx and for yourself, within Unitarian Universalism, in our communities and society, in the world.

Offer to connect participants with other Unitarian Universalist BIPOC groups and programs if they are in need of safe spaces, for example, Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism (BLUU) and Diverse Revolutionary Unitarian Universalist Multicultural Ministries (DRUUMM).

Then say,

And now, as we extinguish the chalice, we will close with words from “A World Attained,” by Barrow Dunham:

[And now], since the struggle deepens, since evil abides, and good does not yet prosper, let us gather what strength we have, what confidence and valor, that our small victories may end in triumph, and the world awaited be a world attained.

Remind the group that this is the second of three meetings. Confirm the day, date, time, and make sure everyone has registered to obtain the Zoom link for Session 3. Make sure to save the covenant that the participants affirmed so the group can review it at the start of the next session.

Thank participants. Extinguish the chalice.

# Session 3 / BIPOC Groups: Claiming or Reclaiming Joy

## Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Zoom room with captioning

## Preparation

- Prepare to screen-share the covenant from Session 1.
- Set the chalice near where you will lead your Zoom session.
- Make sure a Zoom room is scheduled at least one week prior to meeting. If possible, provide a room that has captions enabled.
- Set up a registration process to ensure security of your session. It can be as simple as inviting interested people to email an individual for the Zoom link. Do not post the Zoom link publicly.
- Send the Zoom link to all registered participants at least one week prior to the scheduled date and then in a reminder email the day before. Include email and telephone contact information in case anyone has difficulty accessing the Zoom room.
- Assign a facilitator and a host. The facilitator will conduct the session(s) and the host will play any videos, post slides, etc. and help participants with troubleshooting. When the session begins, have the facilitator type “FACILITATOR” and the host type “TECH” in front of their name so participants can easily identify them.
- Open the Zoom room 10 minutes prior to the scheduled start, so the session can begin on time. Have [What's Going On by Marvin Gaye](#) playing as participants enter.
- Cue the video, [This Joy](#) (3:48), to play during the final activity
- Prepare a slide to screen-share, or a document with text to paste into the chat, with the two quotes you will share after playing the video.

## Chalice Lighting (10 minutes)

Tell the group you will share opening words from Nathaniel E. Hocker entitled “A Meditation For Lives That Matter.” Then, read:

Spirit of life: like cracks that form in the walls of a building whose foundation was built improperly, our country rests on that very same foundation. The cracks are wide and deep. We know that the mortar required is one with a consistency of love and truth, acceptance and education; when applied will yield healing.

Guide us in this time of dissonance, this time of urgency. Ignite our hearts to listen to those who are continually unheard. Amplify our voices to convey a message of unity.

Spirit of Grace: We watched a knee of color taken in silent protest, while the knee of white supremacy crushed innocent life. Spark in us the charge in connection, that we might experience the blaze of relationship.

Provide us the tools we need, that we may carve a new path forward, away from the life-denying legacy of oppression. Move us from a place of comfort, to challenges we never anticipated.

Spirit of Resistance: Lead us to fight for what is right, even when we grow tired or afraid. Remind us of the dream our ancestors had, that one day we will all be free, and live safely without the threat of brutality.

Give us the courage to speak truth to power, and hold our elected officials accountable. Mold their hearts toward compassion and reform. May they abandon winning, for justice, as we fearlessly proclaim: Black Lives Matter!

Until streams of Justice flow...Amen

Light the chalice

### **Check-In (10 minutes)**

Invite participants to re-introduce themselves and, if they wish, briefly describe anything they may need to set aside in order to be fully present during this session.



Also, you can ask the group to reflect on anything that may have come up since the last gathering.

Review the covenant from Session 1.

### **Discussion on Change (20 minutes)**

Say,

Our country has been through so much. Sometimes it can seem that current events are almost surreal, yet we must still find a way to keep pressing on. As we begin to wrap up our time and look toward ways in which systemic change can actually take place, let's hear from Imani Perry. On page 71, she writes:"

*But I worry that white people are irredeemable, and it scares me. What would the complete disassembling of the kingdom of identity look like?*

In reflecting on this quote, in what ways do you feel white people might be redeemable or irredeemable?

What is the relationship between (1) the individual and their redemption and (2) systemic change?

Before the first speaker, allow a few moments for folx to collect their thoughts to help all be fully present when one another speaks. Say that this may be difficult or triggering for some folx and that anyone may choose to "pass" and not share. Encourage 15 seconds or so of silence between participants. Remind them to not comment on the reflections of others but to simply listen and hold each other's words. Do not rush participants. Let them fully share.

After all who wish to have had enough time to contribute, share these words of Perry's from page 62 of her book:

*My failures are my lessons but I can always get better*

Then say, "From this quote and the previous one, what lessons can we learn as BIPOC? As a country? And then, in what ways can we all learn from the pain of

our shared past and move toward a better future? What would/could that look like?”

### **Optional Break for 90-minute Session**

Check in with participants to see if a five-minute bio break is needed.

### **Can we Find Joy? (20 minutes)**

Say:

Sometimes in the midst of deep sadness and despair, folks wonder, will they ever find joy again? And yet historically we find examples of marginalized people finding ways to celebrate and be joyous. Is it possible to find joy even in the struggle?

In her book, Imani Perry expresses on page 29:

*Living defined by terror is itself destructive of the spirit. And it is submission. The truth is that life is unsafe... But joy, even in slivers, shows up everywhere. Take it. And keep taking it.*

Give the group a moment to hold this quote. Then lead one or both of these discussions:

Discussion 1: When you are sad or in despair, how do you feel about looking for and experiencing joy? For you is it an act of rebellion? A time of shame? Do you feel excited? Guilty?

Discussion 2: Our country is in the midst of trying times. What are some things you can celebrate or what are some ways you can experience joy?

### **Practicing Joy (20 minutes)**

Say,

Now is a time for us to practice joy. As I share this video, feel free to sway or dance as the song calls to you. Allow the words to fill every crevice of your being. You may wish to sit or stand quietly and take in the song. May we, in the midst of our struggles, still find joy and ways to celebrate it.

Say the video clip is [This Joy](#) (3:48) by the Resistance Revival Chorus. Share the words of the song: “We sing for those who revive the heart of social justice, and we sing for freedom.” Play the video.

After the video, share these quotes with the group—read each aloud, sharing the text in a screen share or in the chat:

*Joy is an act of resistance.* —Toi Deircotte

*When the movement is strong, the music is strong.* —Harry Belafonte

### **Closing (10 minutes)**

Say, “It is time to close our session. May we continue to move towards justice while still allowing our spirits to flow with the joys we find in life.”

Then say, “Our chalice extinguishing words come from Eric Williams.” Share these words:

#### **Blessed Is the Path**

Blessed is the path on which you travel.

Blessed is the body that carries you upon it.

Blessed is your heart that has heard the call.

Blessed is your mind that discerns the way.

Blessed is the gift that you will receive by going.

Truly blessed is the gift that you will become on the journey.

May you go forth in peace.

Invite participants to share a closing word or phrase about what they are taking away from their time together.

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.

# Three-Session Version for Any Congregational Group

## Goals

- Invite responses to *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons* by Imani Perry
- Explore lived experiences, hurt, harm, and trauma based on being BIPOC in America
- Consider paths to hope, healing, and resilience despite the challenges and the injustices of living in a white supremacy culture

# Session 1 / Any Group: Breathing

## Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Zoom room with captioning

## Preparation

- Set the chalice near where you will lead your Zoom session.
- Make sure a Zoom room is scheduled at least one week prior to meeting. If possible, provide a room that has captions enabled.
- Set up a registration process to ensure security of your session. It can be as simple as inviting interested people to email an individual for the Zoom link. Do not post the Zoom link publicly.
- Send the Zoom link to all registered participants at least one week prior to the scheduled date and then in a reminder email the day before. Include email and telephone contact information in case anyone has difficulty accessing the Zoom room.
- Assign a facilitator and a host. The facilitator will conduct the session(s) and the host will play any videos, post slides, etc. and help participants with troubleshooting. When the session begins, have the facilitator type “FACILITATOR” and the host type “TECH” in front of their name so participants can easily identify them.
- Open the Zoom room 10 minutes prior to the scheduled start, so the session can begin on time. Have [What’s Going On by Marvin Gaye](#) playing as participants enter.
- Write this covenant in a separate document so that you can copy and paste its text into the chat or share your screen to display it. You may choose to make PowerPoint slides to display the covenant in this and any future sessions.

We each promise to:

- Speak from our own experiences and perspectives. Use “I” statements.
- Listen generously to the experiences and perspectives of others.

- Actively resist making assumptions about one another. Allow for space after each person has spoken so as to give time to process what has been shared.
  - Be mindful of “taking space and making space” to ensure everyone has opportunities to speak and to listen.
  - Expect and accept non-closure.
  - Respect the confidentiality of personal information and stories shared here.
  - Refrain from giving advice unless solicited.
- Cue the video, [“Meditation on Breathing”](#) by Sarah Dan Jones, performed by Mary Pratt and Rev. Jim Magaw of the UU Church of the South Hills, to play during the final activity.

### **Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)**

Say, “Our chalice lighting words, ‘Breathe with Me,’ were written by Matt Alspaugh and come from the UUA WorshipWeb.” Then share:

Breathe with me

Breathe with me—the breath of life

Inhale, Inspire, Inspiration,

Ruach, Pneuma, Spiritus, the Holy Spirit

the many names for breath.

Breathe with me.

Know that with each breath we take in molecules of air that were breathed by every person that ever lived.

Breathe with me,

and breathe the breath of Jesus, of Moses,  
of Mohammed, of the Buddha.

Breathe with me,

and know that we are all interdependent,

that the spirit of life  
flows through us all.

Breathe with me,  
as we come together to do the holy work  
of interconnection and relationship,  
that our work here may be blessed.  
Amen

Light the chalice.

### **Introductions and Creating a Covenant (15 minutes)**

Invite each person to introduce themselves briefly and remind others to mute themselves before and after their turn. Ask them to share where they are from or where they are located, if participants are not known to one another, and what brought them to this discussion.

You may wish to add this question to the check-in:

What things might you be holding onto in your heart that might make it difficult for you to be fully present in this moment? Is it something you can set down, even if you need to pick it back up when we're done? If you care to share, briefly include a sentence or two with your introduction, on what you will set down during this time together. Please know that it is okay to just think on this and not share out loud to the group.

Once everyone has introduced themselves, present the document/slides with the covenant points or post them in the chat. Propose them as guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes in the chat or in the document/slide. Be mindful that folks on cell phones may not be able to see the notes in the chat. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to thumbs up or signal agreement. If this group will have future meetings, keep these documents for your next session(s).

### **First Impressions (15 minutes)**

Ask, “What stays with you after reading *Breathe: A Letter To My Sons?*” Invite participants to share an initial response to the book. Ask them to speak one at a time, without interruption; say that it is fine to pass. Offer a 15-second pause after each sharing, inviting participants to reflect on what each person has shared before the next person speaks.

### **Discussion and Sharing Part I (15 minutes)**

Share this quote from *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons* by Imani Perry, from page 8:

*No matter how “just so” I have tried, and often failed, to make things, I have known from the very first day of each of your lives that I cannot guarantee your safety. That is the thing that the voyeurs drink in.*

Say:

In her book, Imani Perry talks about her fear of not being able to keep her children safe. That no matter what she does, she can never fully and completely protect them from all they will face as Black boys and then Black men in this country.

Engage participants in a discussion, asking:

- At what point in your life, or in your children’s lives, did you realize that there were dangers based solely on the color of your, or their, skin?
- If you have not felt danger based on the color of your or your children’s skin, reflect on why or how your, or their, particular skin color offers safety.
- Have others been nearby when you experienced danger related to the color of your skin? Did they choose to assist or help in any way? How did that make you feel?

Then, ask participants to reflect quietly as you ask:



- Once you came to a realization about danger associated with your, or your children's, skin color, was there anything you began doing differently as a result?
- If you have not had an experience of danger, how might the safety you experience have made certain situations in your life easier than others?

Invite any who choose to share insights from their reflection.

### **Sharing: Our Ability to Breathe (15 minutes)**

Say,

In the media, at protests and online everywhere, a familiar phrase we hear is, 'I can't breathe.' It is not new to us and yet in recent years, it has taken on new meaning in the context of Black and brown bodies in dealing with police and law enforcement. So it seems fitting that Imani Perry penned the title of her book to her two Black sons with the word, "breathe."

For some having someone tell them or ask them to breathe or take deep breaths is a gentle reminder that leads to relaxation, deeper breathes and more mindfulness. For others, having someone tell them to breathe can be a trigger or take them mentality to places that are not relaxing. When you hear or have someone tell or ask you to breathe, what does that bring up for you? Is it calming and relaxing? Does it remind you to pause for a moment? Does it cause you anger or anxiety?

Invite participants to respond to the word, "breathe." Say that this may be difficult or triggering for some folx and anyone may "pass" and not share. Allow a few moments for folx to collect their thoughts to help all be fully present when others speak. Encourage 15 seconds or so of silence between speakers. Remind participants not to comment on the reflections of others but to simply listen and hold each other's words. Do not rush participants. Let them fully share.

### **Optional Break for 90-minute Session**

Check in with participants to see if a five-minute bio break is needed.

## **Exercise: Reframing What It Means to Breathe (20 minutes)**

Say,

In many marginalized communities, people often reclaim something that was used to harm so that they may reframe it in a way that is healing. For example, youth in the Black community will often reclaim the N-word, a word that has been used to cause so much harm, and turn it into something completely different. They may use it as a term of endearment for close friends or in jest at other times. Although not everyone in marginalized communities utilizes this practice, or is comfortable with it, for some it can be healing.

Being told, or even asked, to “breathe” can be triggering for some people. Even if that is not your personal experience, being mindful of how people may react to being asked to ‘breathe’ can be powerful.

We are going to do a practice that can help reclaim breathing. For those who have been impacted, a meditation on breathing can reframe how we view breathing and allow for tending to harm. For those who have not been impacted, we can take pause to reflect on how something we may take for granted can be much more complicated for others. This is an opportunity to reflect on those who have different experiences from our own.

Tell the group you are about to share a video clip of “Meditation on Breathing,” by Sarah Dan Jones, performed by Mary Pratt and Rev. Jim Magaw of the UU Church of the South Hills. Say:

As we listen, feel free to close your eyes. Turn off your camera if that works for you. Find a seated or standing position that feels good for your body that allows you to just relax and listen.

Play the meditation once through. Then ask, “What, if anything, came up for you while listening?”

Allow participants to fully share what has come up for them. Then say:

Now let's listen again. This time, I invite you to follow along, breathing in and out with the meditation. Please make sure to care of yourself and do whatever works for you in this moment.

When the meditation is over the second time, ask, "Once we reflected on the meditation, and then heard it a second time, did it change how any of you reacted to or experienced the practice? If so, how?"

End this section by saying, "The act of breathing seems so simple but can be so complicated. May we continue to move toward and find spaces where all can breathe freely and safely."

### **Closing (5 minutes)**

Introduce the closing reading saying, "And now as we close, I would like to share with you the following words by Rayla D. and Kennedy Mattson, "Breathing as a Teen."

*Breathe?*

*Don't tell me what to do!*

*So I sit and hold my breath rather than breathing  
when someone else tells me to*

*Breathe?*

*You breathe!*

*Because right now I don't want to even breathe*

*Breathe?*

*I can't breathe. You won't let me.*

*Breathe?*

*I want to; But only when it is safe to do so.*

*Breathe.*

Remind the group that this is the first of three meetings. Confirm the day, date, time, and make sure everyone has registered to obtain the Zoom link for Session

2. Make sure to save the covenant that the participants affirmed so the group can review it at the start of the next meeting.

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.

# Session 2 / Any Group: Aren't We All Human?

## Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Zoom room with captioning

## Preparation

- Prepare to screen-share the covenant from Session 1.
- Set the chalice near where you will lead your Zoom session.
- Make sure a Zoom room is scheduled at least one week prior to meeting. If possible, provide a room that has captions enabled.
- Set up a registration process to ensure security of your session. It can be as simple as inviting interested people to email an individual for the Zoom link. Do not post the Zoom link publicly.
- Send the Zoom link to all registered participants at least one week prior to the scheduled date and then in a reminder email the day before. Include email and telephone contact information in case anyone has difficulty accessing the Zoom room.
- Assign a facilitator and a host. The facilitator will conduct the session(s) and the host will play any videos, post slides, etc. and help participants with troubleshooting. When the session begins, have the facilitator type “FACILITATOR” and the host type “TECH” in front of their name so participants can easily identify them.
- Open the Zoom room 10 minutes prior to the scheduled start, so the session can begin on time. Have [What's Going On by Marvin Gaye](#) playing as participants enter.
- Cue the video, [This Joy](#) (3:48), to play during the final activity
- Prepare a slide to screen-share, or a document with text to paste into the chat, with the two quotes you will share after playing the video.

## Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)

Introduce chalice lighting words from the book *Spilling the Light* by Theresa I. Soto, and share:

## **I Cannot Prove to You That I Am/We Are Human**

I cannot prove to you that I am a person.

But you can hold my hand, cool and dry, while we pray, or just breathe, ragged  
breaths catching on our aching ribs.

I cannot prove to you that brown skin is holy, that Black skin is sacred, but you  
can know it, luminous and irrepressible, the tabernacle of your own liberation.

I cannot even prove to you that every queer body, every trans and enby body,  
every ace and bisexual body sings back to the universe its immense generative  
power of yes

I cannot prove to you with quadratic certainty that what a disabled body holds is  
a story of wisdom beyond perfection, like a red sun emerging from behind a  
cloud of dust

So the answers that I have for a country hacking up a death rattle, and a  
democracy with a wheezing, waxy pallor are about our courage to love.

Our desperation, not only for survival but also to tread above the worst of our  
collective nature. And to get each other free, unashamed that there came a day  
when we were willing to risk looking foolish to simply stay together and alive.

### **Check-In (10 minutes)**

Invite participants to re-introduce themselves and, if they wish, briefly describe  
anything they may need to set aside in order to be fully present during this session.  
Also, you can ask the group to reflect on anything that may have come up since  
the last gathering.

Review the covenant from Session 1.

### **Discussion and Sharing Part I (20 minutes)**

Share this quote from page 1 of *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons* by Imani Perry:

*I want them to admit that you are people...This fact, simple as it is, shouldn't  
linger on the surface. It should penetrate.*

Say:

Imani Perry begins her book by telling her sons that she wants people to acknowledge that they are in fact human. That they are not less than or other than but in fact human like every other race: especially the whites.

Engage a discussion, asking:

- How do you think or imagine it must have felt for the author to say to her children that she wished people could see them as human?
- How do you imagine her children reacting to this?

Then, ask participants to reflect quietly as you ask:

- Now imagine yourself, whatever race you are, as a child having your parent or caregiver assure you that you are human. How about you having the conversation with your own child(ren) or with children you know? Does changing the perspective change how the scenario unfolds in your mind?
- Did you find that you imagined both scenarios the same? Differently? Why?

Invite any volunteers to share insights from their reflection.

### **Reflection and Sharing (20 minutes)**

Say:

One thing that most BIPOC folx learn early in life is that many situations can be unfair or unsafe simply because of the color of one's skin. As the author shares, many times brown and Black children, especially those identifying as male, experience this injustice or danger at a very young age. To her sons, the author writes, on page 9:

*You live in some worlds that are more white than Black. And so, you learn, early on, that the aversion to Blackness can turn perfectly lovely people grotesque.*

Ask:

When was the first time you noticed the difference in your skin versus others? When did you first notice that people were treated differently based on their skin color? How did you notice yourself or someone else being treated? How did you feel?

Offer a few moments before the first speaker to allow folx to collect their thoughts, which will help them be fully present when others are speaking. You can note that recalling such experiences may be difficult or triggering for some folx and remind the group that anyone may choose to pass and not share. Encourage 15 seconds or so of silence after each participant. Be ready to remind participants not to comment on the reflections of others but to simply listen and hold each other's words. Do not rush participants. Let them fully share.

After giving each participant enough time to respond, ask, "If you were young in the memory that came to you, were there any adults around who noticed what happened and helped you, or could have helped you, navigate the situation? If so, what was helpful/supportive or not helpful/supportive?"

How would you have liked the situation to go? As an adult, how have you, or could you, help youth or children navigate the disparities between children who mostly feel safe and treated fairly, and children who many times do not?"

### **Optional Break for 90-minute Session**

Check in with participants to see if a five-minute bio break is needed.

### **Discussion: Bystanders (15 minutes)**

Say:

Imani Perry speaks in her book about noticing, as a child in her mostly white school, that a certain teacher treated her differently, unfairly. She says of her white classmates:

*They were disciplined into passive acceptance, into reaping the rewards, while I was humiliated over and over again.*



Lead a discussion. First ask, “Why do you think the white kids around her didn’t speak up? What do you think it would have meant for her if someone had?”

Then ask, “Has there been a time when you felt you should have spoken up for others or someone should have spoken up for you? Do you find that people are more likely to speak up now than in the past? If so, what impact do you think that has?”

They say, “Do you think moving forward you will be more likely to speak up? What would cause you to speak up versus keep silent? If you identify as BIPOC, what would it mean to have someone speak up for you?”

### **Discussion: Supporting Safety (15 minutes)**

Say:

Throughout her book, Imani Perry describes how she struggles with wanting to help keep her boys safe in a society where she feels she cannot. She talks about finding safe people and spaces for them. She laments, on page 44,

*Feeling deep love and complete helplessness to protect the beloveds is a fact of Black life.*

And in her quest to keep her children safe she says, on page 20,

*I had hoped that standing shoulder to shoulder with people of conscience, people who knew like us that the toxin peel of Black death is wrong, would help you feel powerful, a part of something. I may have been right, but it was never enough.*

Then ask, “What would be ‘enough’? What would it take for us to create a world that offers a broad sense of safety? A world where everyone can mostly expect to encounter safe spaces and places and people? How would this manifest?” Invite participants to reflect and respond.

### **What's Next/Closing (5 minutes)**

Say, "As we close this session, I'd like you continue to envision ways where there is more safety for BIPOC folx as well as for folx who are white."

Mention that within Unitarian Universalism two national groups provide identity-affirming resources and safe spaces for BIPOC folx: Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism, or BLUU, and DRUUMM, or Diverse Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries.

Say, "As we extinguish the chalice for this session, we will close with words from "A World Attained," by Barrow Dunham." Share these words:

*[And now], since the struggle deepens, since evil abides, and good does not yet prosper, let us gather what strength we have, what confidence and valor, that our small victories may end in triumph, and the world awaited be a world attained*

Remind the group that this is the second of three meetings. Confirm the day, date, time, and make sure everyone has registered to obtain the Zoom link for Session 3. Make sure to save the covenant that the participants affirmed so the group can review it at the start of the next session.

Thank participants. Extinguish the chalice.

# Session 3 / Any Group: Claiming or Reclaiming Joy

## Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Zoom room with captioning

## Preparation

- Prepare to screen-share the covenant from Session 1.
- Set the chalice near where you will lead your Zoom session.
- Make sure a Zoom room is scheduled at least one week prior to meeting. If possible, provide a room that has captions enabled.
- Set up a registration process to ensure security of your session. It can be as simple as inviting interested people to email an individual for the Zoom link. Do not post the Zoom link publicly.
- Send the Zoom link to all registered participants at least one week prior to the scheduled date and then in a reminder email the day before. Include email and telephone contact information in case anyone has difficulty accessing the Zoom room.
- Assign a facilitator and a host. The facilitator will conduct the session(s) and the host will play any videos, post slides, etc. and help participants with troubleshooting. When the session begins, have the facilitator type “FACILITATOR” and the host type “TECH” in front of their name so participants can easily identify them.
- Open the Zoom room 10 minutes prior to the scheduled start, so the session can begin on time. Have [What's Going On by Marvin Gaye](#) playing as participants enter.
- Cue the video, [This Joy](#) (3:48), to play during the final activity, Practicing Joy.
- Prepare a slide to screen-share, or a document with text to paste into the chat, with the two quotes you will share after playing the video.

### **Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)**

Tell the group you will share opening words from Molly Brewer entitled “A Chalice Lighting for When Things Aren’t Okay.” Then, share:

*My beloved people,  
I cannot pretend,  
And so I will not tell you,  
That everything is okay right now.  
That there is no reason to be angry,  
That you must be optimistic  
Or at peace.*

*I cannot pretend these things,  
And so I won't tell them to you.  
But now our chalice is lit,  
And so all I ask in this moment  
is that we remember  
the words of Rebecca Parker:*

There is a Love.  
There is a Love holding us.  
There is a Love holding all.

*By the light of our chalice,  
Let us rest in this Love.*

Light the chalice.

### **Check-In (10 minutes)**

Invite participants to re-introduce themselves and, if they wish, briefly describe anything they may need to set aside in order to be fully present during this session. Also, you can ask the group to reflect on and share anything that may have come up since the last gathering.

Review the covenant from Session 1.

## **Discussion on Change (15 minutes)**

Say,

Our country has been through so much. Sometimes it can seem that current events are almost surreal, yet we must still find a way to keep pressing on. As we begin to wrap up our time and look toward ways in which systemic change can actually take place, let's hear from Imani Perry. On page 71, she writes:

*Here is a confession: Recently, I have wondered if white people are irredeemable. Again, I have to issue a caveat for the sensitive. No, I do not mean individuals. Individuals are the precious bulwark against total desperation – in them we find the persistence of possibility.*

Then say,

In reflecting on this quote, in what ways do you feel white people might be redeemable or irredeemable? Where do you see the 'persistence of possibility'?

Invite the group to begin a conversation about actions we might take individually or collectively to create a country not based on white supremacy.

Offer a few moments before the first speaker to allow folx to collect their thoughts, which will help them be fully present when others are speaking. Say that this may be difficult or triggering for some folx and that anyone may choose to a "pass" and not share. Encourage 15 seconds or so of silence after each participant. Be ready to remind participants not to comment on the reflections of others but to simply listen and hold each other's words. Do not rush participants. Let them fully share.

After giving everyone enough time, share this phrase of Perry's from page 62:

*My failures are my lessons but I can always get better.*

Say, "From this quote and the previous one, what lessons can we learn as BIPOC? As people who are white? As a country? And then, in what ways can we learn from

our past and move towards a better future? What would/could that look like? How would you envision that change?”

### **Optional Break for 90-minute Session**

Check in with participants to see if a five-minute bio break is needed.

### **Can we Find Joy? (30 minutes)**

Say, “Sometimes in the midst of deep sadness and despair, folks wonder, will they ever find joy again? And yet historically we find examples of marginalized people finding ways to celebrate and be joyous. Is it possible to find joy even in the struggle?”

Continue with this quotation from Imani Perry, from page 29:

*Living defined by terror is itself destructive of the spirit. And it is submission.  
The truth is that life is unsafe... But joy, even in slivers, shows up everywhere.  
Take it. And keep taking it.*

Lead one or more of these discussions:

- Discussion 1: When you are sad or in despair, how do you feel about looking for and experiencing joy? For you, is it an act of rebellion or a time of shame? Do you feel excited or guilty? If you feel guilt, is it race-based at all for you?
- Discussion 2: Earlier, we heard Imani Perry wonder whether white people—as a group—are redeemable. If that word “redemption” resonates for you, whatever your race, how can joy be part of someone’s redemption? How could the role of joy differ for someone who is BIPOC and someone who is white?
- Discussion 3: Our country has been through some very trying times lately. What are some things you can celebrate or what are some ways you can experience joy? How can you give or bring that joy to others?

### **Practicing Joy (20 minutes)**

Say,

Now is a time for us to practice joy. As I share this video, feel free to sway or dance as the song calls to you. Allow the words to fill every crevice of your being. You may wish to sit or stand quietly and take in the song. May we, in the midst of our struggles, still find joy and ways to celebrate it.

Say the video clip is [This Joy](#) (3:48) by the Resistance Revival Chorus. Share the words of the song: “We sing for those who revive the heart of social justice, and we sing for freedom.” Play the video.

After the video, share these quotes with the group—read each aloud, sharing the text in a screen share or in the chat:

*Joy is an act of resistance.* —Toi Deircotte

*When the movement is strong, the music is strong.* —Harry Belafonte

### **Closing (10 minutes)**

Say, “And now may we continue to move towards justice while still allowing our spirits to flow with the joys we find in life.”

Close with these chalice extinguishing words by Rev. Theresa I. Soto, from their book, *Spilling the Light*.

*This is a charm for hope. The first thing to do is tie a string around your finger. Remember that you are not alone. Think of the ways that our best shared futures are braided inextricably with your own is to untie the string and let the knots and tightness fall away. Let the burden of bleakness roll off your sore shoulders. Resistance on these opaque horizons only requires one source of strength, one ray of light. Remember that persistence doesn't require all of the answers up front. Only one. Fortunately for all of us, we have one response: to remain together through awkward times and happy ones. We remember and we find our resolve in one another.*

Invite participants to share, in a closing word or phrase, something they are taking away from these gatherings.

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.