

# Have just, joyous Human Rights Day

**D**ecember is a month rich with days of spiritual significance, including St. Nicholas Day, Bodhi Day, Solstice, Hanukkah, Christmas and Kwanzaa.

Among the characteristics of Unitarian Universalism I value is that while our tradition's roots stem from Christianity, we draw on the spiritual wisdom found within various religions as well as other sources some might not perceive as spiritual. One such source I appreciate is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

On Dec. 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which has become the international standard for defending and promoting human rights. On every Dec. 10, Human Rights Day is observed to mark the adoption of this declaration and to remember, as it asserts, that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

From my religious perspective, Human Rights Day is another of December's spiritually significant days. That might seem odd, for clearly Human Rights Day has no religious association. Yet I understand spirituality as that which reveals life's inherent sacredness by awakening us to life's oneness and our interdependence with all other people, Earth and all that is within the web of existence some experience as God.

The vision underlying the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ([www.un.org/rights](http://www.un.org/rights)) is informed by an awareness of life's sacredness. Its preamble begins: "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." Implicit in that phrase is an awareness of life's inter-

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dependence. For freedom, justice and peace depend not just on some of us having dignity and rights but "all members of the human family" having them.

The Declaration also stipulates that for people to live with dignity and freedom, they must have security, decent work and the basic necessities of food, water, clothing, housing and medical care.

The focus for this year's Human Rights Day is elimination of poverty. Louise Arbour, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, wrote: "Today, poverty prevails as the gravest human rights challenge in the world. Combating poverty, deprivation and exclusion is not a matter of charity. ... By tackling poverty as a matter of human rights obligation, the world will have a better chance of abolishing this scourge in our lifetime. ... Poverty eradication is an achievable goal."

In my moments of pessimism I'm led to think, "How likely is that?" In fact, in those moments, the idea of all people attaining the rights outlined in the Declaration seems far-fetched.

Then, as I read through it again, and feel the hope it embodies for humankind — such hope still alive in 1948 in the aftermath of World War II — I am reminded of the Czechoslovakian activist and former President Vaclav Havel's description of hope: "Hope is an orientation of the spirit," he said, "an orientation of the heart. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out."

The Declaration imparts

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such an orientation, speaking to the certainty that the identified rights are essential to the well-being of each of us individually and all of us together. It's not our pessimism that serves humanity's betterment but our participation in the world, oriented by hearts filled with awareness of our interdependence with all other people within the grand web of existence.

In that spirit, may we orient ourselves and our country to the fulfillment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And may you have a just and joyous Human Rights Day!

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