

## **Opening Words - Elizabeth Harding**

We Unitarian Universalists don't drink from our chalice. Instead, we use it to hold the flame. The circle of the chalice helps keep the fire small. The flame doesn't blind us. It doesn't burn us. It gives us light, so we can see all the different things in the universe: even the invisible ones, because the Unitarian Universalist flame is a light of learning.

The flaming chalice is a symbol of learning and of love. It's our symbol: the symbol of Unitarian Universalism.

## **TFW - story adapted from *Free to Believe* by Judith Campbell**

Good morning friends. I am so glad to be here with you today as we begin our exploration of the gifts of heritage.

I would like to invite anyone who would like to join me to come forward and sit on the steps..

Who would like to open my Wonder Box this morning?

What is this? That's right, it's a chalice. This is the symbol of our Unitarian Universalist faith.

Hans Deutsch, an Austrian artist, first brought together the chalice and the flame as a Unitarian symbol during his work with the Unitarian Service Committee during World War II.

To Deutsch, the image had connotations of sacrifice and love. We're going to hear more about that story in a little bit.

Unitarian Universalists today have many different interpretations of the flaming chalice, including the light of reason, the warmth of community, and the flame of hope.

What do we light our chalice for? That's right, the warmth of love, the light of truth, and the energy of action.

I made a little chalice out of these things called wiki stix. Have any of you ever played with them? They're pretty fun right?

I'm going to invite you to take 3 or 4 of these and make your own chalice while I tell you a story.

One day after school a girl named Rachel asked her dad if she could go over to her friend Heather's for dinner.

Her dad replied "Haven't you already been over there twice this week?"

"But tonight is special! There's a meeting of a club from Heather's church and she asked me to join. They play games and go on camping trips and do good stuff like helping people. She said that there are some things that club members have to believe and some things that they have to promise, but it's no big deal. I think it sounds cool"

"Wait a minute here, my dear" Rachel's dad liked to rhyme when he could "What church is this club connected to? We already go to church."

"I don't know much about the church" Rachel said, "All I know is that they have a girls group and a boys group and Heather's brother John is in the boys group and he invited Tony to join too. Sometimes the two groups do things together. It sounds really neat."

"I think we should know more about what you are supposed to believe and what you are supposed to do to be a member of this club before you decide to join," her dad said.

"But dad," Rachel argued, "we're Unitarian Universalists. Didn't you tell us that we were free to believe whatever we want? What if I decided to believe the things that Heather's church believes? That's ok, isn't it?"

“It might be ok, but only after you have done a lot of hard thinking about it. Unitarian Universalists don’t just believe anything. We ask lots of questions and make sure that those beliefs - and the actions people take because of those beliefs - are things that make the world a better place” explained Rachel’s dad

“Tell you what though, you go to your friend’s tonight and tomorrow we’ll all talk about it. Then, if you still want to join , you can”

The next day Tony, who had attended the boys group, and his parents, joined Rachel’s family for dinner. At the dinner table everyone, as usual, was talking all at once. Rachel’s dad stood up and tapped his glass with his spoon and said in a deep booming voice

“Hear ye, hear ye, this dining table will come to order”

“Rachel Morgan, tell us about your visit to the church club last night.”

“It was boring” Rachel sighed “First they read from the bible, and everyone recited their creed, which was all about obedience to authority and the leaders, whoever they are. Then we played a game with words from the bible. Then Heather’s mom talked to us about how important it was to be in this club and how it was our job to try to get more kids to join so that more people would get the message and be saved I wanted to ask “what message” and “saved from what” but nobody else was asking any questions so I didn’t say anything. Anyway, I didn’t like it”

“It sounds really different from our church” Rachel’s dad offered

“It was really different from our church but when they asked me about our church I couldn’t think of anything to say” Rachel continued “They knew exactly what to say about their church and what they believed. But what do Unitarian Universalists believe?”

“Rachel has asked a very important question” her dad said “Can anyone sitting here give an answer to that question” He seemed to be having fun talking like a real judge

“Well, what about the words that we say at the beginning of church, when we light our chalice?” Tony offered “You know, we light this chalice for the light of truth, the warmth of love, and the energy of action?”

“Those words are a perfect place to begin” said Rachel’s father “We believe that love is the strongest power in the world, stronger than hate and stronger than fear. I like to call this power God, because that’s the best word that I know to describe something that is so much bigger and stronger than any one person. Your mom doesn’t like to use the word God because it makes her think of an old man sitting up on a cloud. But even though we use different words to describe this power of love, we believe in it in the same way.

“There’s also the light of truth” offered Rachel

“That’s right” said Rache’s dad “We believe that searching for truth, or using a light, much like from our chalice, to light the way to find truth, is a very special and important part of our faith. And searching for truth is more important than never telling a lie.”

“Wait, I’m confused. What do you mean?” asked Rachel

“For one thing, it means that what is true for us today might not be true tomorrow if we learn something new.” answered Rachel’s dad

“You mean like how people used to think the world was flat?” Asked Tony

“Or that only birds could fly until someone invented the airplane? Added Rachel

“That’s it exactly” said her dad

“Or that someone named God invented the world in seven days even though the study of science has given us different facts to believe” added Rachel’s mom

“You see, some people believe that God told the truth many years ago to men who wrote it down in holy books like the Hebrew or Christian bible or the Islamic holy book the Koran. They believe that this one truth is the only truth they need to know to live a good life, so they don’t question it”

“Other people, like Unitarian Universalists” she continued “keep asking questions because we believe that there is always more to know, always news way of thinking and acting that can make the world a better place.”

“So what about the last part, the energy of action?” asked Rachel

“Most UUs believe that words alone aren’t enough. We have to work to make the world a better place, not just talk about it.” said Rachel’s mom

And for a moment, as strange as it seems, everybody in this noisy wonderful family was quiet.

“So” said Rachel’s dad “What do you think?”

“I still think that Unitarian Universalism is a hard religion to explain” answered Rachel “But from now on when I’m asked I’m going to say ‘We believe in love. We believe in searching for truth, and we believe in making the world a better place.’”

“I think that’s a very good answer Rachel” said her dad “It says alot about how we think in just a few words. And in this family saying anything in just a few words is pretty amazing indeed.”

“Well” said Rachel “I think I ask too many questions for that church club anyway. I’m glad that I’m a UU.”

Thank you for listening to my story.

Do any of you want to show me what you made with your wiki stix?

Those are so cool!

As UUs, we like to ask questions, it’s how we shine a light on truth. Do any of you have any questions?

Thank you, friends. I’m going to invite you to return quietly to your seats for our Joys, Sorrows, and Appreciations but don’t worry, we’ve got more stories and activities to do together today.

### **Meditation- Lego Activity**

Today as you entered you were invited to take two Lego pieces.

I have here a chalice that has been constructed from Legos.

The flaming chalice is a part of our heritage, and this community and our broader faith, rest on a shared set of values, with love at the center, to help us to grow and thrive.

And heritage means not just what comes before, but also what we are building for the future.

So I am going to invite you to build with me this morning.

As you feel so moved you are welcome to come forward and add your two pieces to this chalice.

As you do so, notice how your pieces fit together with others and how you can help create a firm foundation, and how you can build up, and how sometimes continuing that foundation is also building upwards.

As you place your two pieces I invite you to place them with intention. One piece for that firm foundation of what has come before, and one piece creating something new for the future.

(pause for activity - sing Rise Up O Flame)

May this community be blessed with the gifts of our heritage. The gifts of principles, purposes, and sources of wisdom which are the bedrock of this faith.

And may we also bless those to come with gifts of our shared values of justice, equity, transformation, pluralism, interdependence, and generosity. With love, always love, at the center.

### **Kindling the Flame** - *story by Noreen Kimball*

Friends, I have another story, this one is about where the symbol of our flaming chalice comes from. If you would like to come and sit on the steps as I tell my story you are welcome to do so.

Many Unitarian Universalist churches, societies, and fellowships start their worship service on Sunday morning by lighting a flame inside a chalice. This flaming chalice is a symbol for Unitarian Universalists just as the cross and the Star of David are symbols for other religious groups. The story of how the flaming chalice became our symbol is an interesting one and it begins during the Second World War.

During that war, a lot of people living in Eastern Europe—Unitarians, Jews, and others—were in danger of being put in prison or killed by Nazi soldiers. A group of Unitarians came together in Boston, Massachusetts, to form the

Unitarian Service Committee and their plan was to help the people in danger from the Nazis.

The director of the Service Committee was the Unitarian minister Charles Joy. Rev. Joy had an office in Portugal so he would be near the people he wanted to help. He was in charge of a whole secret group of agents and messengers who worked hard trying to find safe routes for people to escape.

Rev. Joy and his assistants often needed to ask governments and other organizations for their help to save people who were in danger. They would send messages to anyone in government who might give them money, transportation, or a safe route.

Because they were a new organization though, not very many people had heard of them. This made it much harder for Rev. Joy and the people in the Unitarian Service Committee to get the help they needed.

In those days during the war, when danger was everywhere, lots of people were running away from their own countries. Often, people who were escaping and people who wanted to help didn't speak the same language. Rev. Joy decided it would be much better if the Service Committee had an official symbol, or picture, to help identify its members. With a picture or symbol, it wouldn't matter if people couldn't read the language.

It looked like Rev. Joy would need to find an artist. He went to a very talented man named Hans Deutsch for help. Deutsch had escaped from the Nazis in Paris, France, where he was in danger because he drew cartoons showing people how evil the Nazis were. Rev. Joy asked Deutsch to create a symbol to print on Service Committee papers to make them look important. He wanted the symbol to impress governments and police who had the power to help move people to safety.

For his drawing, Deutsch borrowed an old symbol of strength and freedom from Czechoslovakia—a chalice with a flame. Rev. Joy wrote to his friends



in Boston that the new symbol seemed to show the real spirit of the Unitarian religion. It showed a chalice, or cup, that was used for giving a healing drink to others. And it showed a flame on top of the chalice because a flame was often used to represent a spirit of helpfulness and sacrifice. And so the flaming chalice became the official symbol of the Unitarian Service Committee.

Many years later, the flaming chalice became the symbol of Unitarian Universalist groups all over the world. By the early 1970s, enough UUs had heard the story of the flaming chalice symbol that they began to light a flaming chalice as part of the worship service in their churches. Over the years, this practice has spread over most of the United States and Canada.

What does it mean to have a symbol like this? Well, one thing it means is that wherever you see a flaming chalice, you know that there are Unitarians and Universalists nearby. Having a symbol also can remind you of what's most important to you—and sometimes a reminder can make a very big difference.

One very old woman told how the flaming chalice of her homeland, Czechoslovakia, helped her while she was in a Nazi prison camp. Printed under the picture of the Czech flaming chalice was the motto "pravda vitezi," which means, in English, "truth overcomes," or "truth prevails."

Every single morning in that terrible camp, the old woman said, she traced a picture of a flaming chalice in the sand with her finger. Then she wrote the motto underneath it. "It gave me the strength to live each day," she said. Whenever she drew the chalice in the dirt she was reminded that some day the world would remember the important truth that every single person is important and should be free to think and believe as they choose.

When we see people light the chalice at the beginning of our service every Sunday, we can enjoy it because it is a lovely thing to do. But we can also remember the story of the flaming chalice and the strength it has given

people for hundreds of years. We use it to let everyone know that Unitarian Universalists believe in helping others.

Our Unitarian Universalist chalice comes from a heritage of offering help to people who are in need. Of offering the light of hope in a time of darkness.

What do we want the heritage of our faith to be for the future?

I have this chalice here and in the pew there are baskets with paper flames and markers. I invite you to take one of those flames and write one word on your flame that is something that we light our chalice for. A word that symbolizes the light that we, as UUs to, shine into the world.

The word I'm going to use is love, and then I'm going to stick it here on our chalice.

I invite you to join your flames together when you feel so moved by coming up and attaching your flame with the word that you wrote to our chalice this morning.

Thank you so much. Thank you for kindling this flame for

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May our light be a beacon of hope shining from the echoes of the past and into a bright future.

**Closing words** - *adapted, Melanie Davis*

Under the right circumstances, playing with fire is a delight—imagine being gathered round a firepit as the crackling flames invite us to sing, dance, and roast a marshmallow or two.

Our chalice also invites us to play, although with ideas rather than with marshmallows. The flame encourages us to explore who we are, who our neighbors are, and where we are on our spiritual journeys.

Today, we lit our chalice in the spirit of play and of the light that shines from each of us. Let us trust that light to guide us in this hour and in the days to come, finding joy, and a little bit of sweetness, along the way.

## **Postlude**

For our final song this morning I am going to invite you to join me in reprising This Little Light of Mine, but this time we are going to take inspiration from the collective chalice that we created. We are going to sing a couple of verses with the words "Our light shines for \_\_\_\_\_," and choose one of our words that was written on a flame. Finishing up each verse with "we're gonna let it shine"

Do I have a couple of helpers to choose flames for us?

Thank you!

Our first word is \_\_\_\_\_

Go in peace. Blessed be. And Amen.