

***A Spiritual Bill of Rights for Humanity
Toward Global Spiritual Freedom and Oppression-Free Religion***

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Part One
The Seven Spiritual Rights of Humanity

What they are. Why they're important.

All of the spiritual rights identified herein are a direct corollary to the Creator's gift of individual free will and are the spiritual birthright of every person. These precious rights should not be violated by any person or institution.

- 1. The right of individuals to connect directly with the Creator in their own unique way is fundamental to human spirituality and should be protected, honored and nourished.***

No religious or spiritual institution, ideological or philosophical group, or individual representing any institution or group, or any individual acting alone should presume to act as an intermediary between persons and their Creator. Each of our relationships with the Creator is unique, primary, and sovereign in all matters relating to our spiritual lives.

There is nothing more life-giving for individuals than to discover and build a direct relationship with their Creator. This Creator-human relationship is the living source of spiritual growth and is all-important to these critical times. Although many experience this relationship in the context of religion, it is completely independent of religion or spiritual path. It is our human birthright and can be experienced by anyone.

Because of its unique and intimate nature, this connection must never be abrogated by those who would insert themselves between persons and their Creator. Religions best serve people by taking a supportive role in the sacred Creator-human relationship. Religious leaders appropriately serve by leading group worship, teaching spiritual concepts and facilitating the sharing of spiritual insights; their role should be considered ancillary to the Creator-human relationship.

- 2. Individuals have the right to affirm their inherent goodness as beloved children of the Creator.***

Humanity is not inherently sinful and unworthy of the Creator's love. Such teachings prevent humanity from reaching its full potential. They do not reflect the Creator's infinite love, parental devotion and spiritual empowerment toward humanity. Rather, each of us are created in goodness and beauty as precious seeds of great promise. Religious, philosophical and ideological systems cooperate with the Creator's high purpose for us when they foster self-respect, thereby unleashing full human potential to solve our serious problems. The human spirit, when awakened and enlivened by a direct relationship with the Creator, naturally yields abundant fruits of loving service, unselfish devotion, courageous loyalty, sincere fairness, enlightened honesty, undying hope, confiding trust, merciful ministry, unfailing goodness, forgiving tolerance and enduring peace.

3. Individuals have the right to freedom from fear, especially fear of divine punishment.

The primitive-origin concept of eternal torment, or hell, as well as other concepts of divine chastisement and retribution are demonstrably false. These teachings have long been a source of distress and an obstacle to spiritual growth for innumerable people. They stand in stark contrast to the Creator's all-loving nature, who never uses fear to control us. In the Creator, we have the personification of our ultimate ideals—the perfect parent, teacher, friend; to portray our Creator as a punisher is simply untrue. No one has anything to fear from the Creator. Rather than accepting this long-held belief, we can choose to uplift one another by adopting more enlightened concepts of the Creator.

The fact that the Creator's love coexists with the Creator's justice presents a paradox; in our confusion we may feel that divine punishment is a reasonable solution to human imperfection. But our limited vision cannot compare to the far-seeing eye of an infinite Creator who knows the motives of every human soul and who would not lose one child. Love and mercy are the true attitudes of the Creator. The action of any individual, even the most grievous, is always met with infinite divine patience and understanding.

While it is true that free will choice makes it possible to reject a relationship with the Creator, the theory of an eternity of torture is a human fiction born from an immature desire to punish others.

4. Individuals have the right to embark on their own search for truth.

Since every human is endowed with a unique identity from the Creator, spiritual insights and experiences vary from person to person. The most sublime of human adventures is that of discovering the Creator for oneself. The diversity of spiritual viewpoints in the human family is a great strength that points to the beauty of the Creator, but in no way dilutes the truth of humanity's unity as children of the Creator. Religions and spiritual groups should not interfere with any individual's sincere efforts to comprehend and experience truth. On the contrary, they can inspire spiritual growth by encouraging people to discover for themselves the truths about the Creator and their great purpose and destiny as children of the Creator.

5. Individuals have the right to freedom from religious obligations.

Participation in religious activities should always be voluntary. Religions become oppressive when they dictate beliefs and behaviors. Since the Creator's primary attribute is unconditional love, all people are given the divine gift of free will. The Creator does not then revoke this gift by imposing obligations on individuals. Similarly, when religions presume to claim divine penalties for not fulfilling religion-mandated obligations, it violates the spiritual liberty of followers and often results in shame and guilt.

While many religious traditions and rituals contain spiritual truth, they are not a substitute for the primary Creator-human relationship. But they should never be taken away if followers find them to be spiritually nourishing. Rather, the process of developing a personal relationship with the Creator can be prioritized for followers who may downplay this primary relationship because of their attachment to religious practices. When large numbers of these followers discover a relationship with their Creator, it could result in a tremendous collective spiritual illumination that would gather many under the twin unifying concepts of the divine Creator Parent and the family of humanity.

6. Individuals have the right to access all spiritual leadership roles.

We honor the beauty and diversity of the Creator when we invite all people into spiritual leadership, whether by gender, race, ethnicity, orientation or other identity, thereby including their precious gifts to uplift humanity. It significantly strengthens humanity whenever we do so. When people from all groups are empowered to answer the call to spiritual leadership, the Creator will be truly represented.

The exclusion of women from spiritual leadership, as entrenched in many religions throughout the centuries, has been a great loss for humanity. Their harmonizing influence is needed at all levels of religion to inspire new spiritual perspectives and help prevent tragic abuses.

Human attitudes of superiority and servility cannot reflect the Creator's love toward all. The gifts of all people, when wholly embraced, will allow humanity's full potential to emerge and heal our world. A fertile environment of equality is the spiritual salve that beckons us into a new era of light and life.

7. Individuals have the right to choose their own loving and committed partners.

Along with our personal relationships with the Creator, loving and loyal human partnerships are the most beautiful testaments to love. As loving partners commit to each other's well-being, face life's challenges, and share physical, emotional and spiritual intimacy, they create a nurturing foundation for the growth of their souls. Unselfish and spiritually fragrant human partnerships form the basis for strong societies and should be supported by religious and spiritual groups who love the Creator.

Part Two

Putting the Spiritual Rights into Practice

Toward Global Spiritual Freedom and Oppression-Free Religion

This Spiritual Bill of Rights can help prepare the way for many to discover their own relationship with the Creator, regardless of their religious status. The principles of spiritual freedom they offer encourage people to consider perspectives beyond their own tradition, and express truth from their own personal experience. Consideration of the following relevant issues may help shine a path toward putting these rights into practice globally.

Spiritual freedom banishes fear

The essence of freedom is *freedom from fear*—of judgment, punishment, rejection, abandonment, hopelessness and meaninglessness—of others or of the Creator, who should never be feared. Fear is always antithetical to the Creator’s loving nature.

Fear can also result from teachings which hurt sensitive souls, particularly when they are pressured to espouse them. Fear directly inhibits spiritual growth and has no place in spiritual life.

Liberation from fear, particularly existential fear like fear of divine punishment, opens new horizons for people to experience life without spiritual dread. When people are freed from fear, they naturally seek out their highest values, purpose and potential. This can create a force like no other to uplift humanity.

The spiritual life should be free and creative; not controlled or contained. Spiritual freedom leads to inspiration which leads to joy in sharing that inspiration through loving service. A liberated spirit is truly the master key that opens a living connection to the Creator and flows that healing connection to others.

The great spiritual teachers affirm spiritual freedom

Jesus of Nazareth and many other spiritual luminaries fearlessly proclaimed spiritual freedom for all. Jesus did not die because an angry God demanded sacrifice for human sin. Rather, he bravely faced death at the hands of jealous religious leaders who refused to give up their seats of power in a nation oppressed by laws and rituals. Through his inspiring life and courageous death, he taught the joy of living in communion with the Creator.

All the great spiritual teachers realized that beliefs and practices of themselves have little spiritual power. They understood that the freedom to embark on one’s own spiritual journey is necessary to find truth, enlightenment and connection to the Creator.

Healing the wounded human spirit

When people claim the spiritual freedom that is their birthright, they are enabled to plug into the ultimate source of healing, wisdom and power—our Creator. As each person is healed and empowered through this sacred connection, they can join together to create real and lasting solutions to the world's problems.

Secular approaches cannot solve the root of our problems because the wounded human spirit can only be healed by *spiritual* means—through a relationship with the Creator. In partnership with the divine, the human spirit is indomitable and acts to bring the light of love to all peoples and to our entire planet.

True human potential is vast but has languished for millenia; false teachings of inborn evil prevent our thriving. The truth is that each of us are seeds of goodness that blossom and bear healthy fruit under the right spiritual conditions.

Working toward oppression-free religion

Oppressive forms of religion harm, but oppression-free religion can help create spiritual growth on a global scale. The world needs a new wave of courageous reformers willing to address modern problems. Obvious issues like clergy sexual abuse, while profoundly egregious, may be less complicated to solve than the inflexible attitudes blocking positive change. Many issues could be remedied with empathy and genuine effort to dislodge negative beliefs and practices.

The problems facing today's religions have hindered their spiritual power to nourish followers; they struggle to live up to their potential as living communities of love that vitalize spiritual travelers. So a new reformation is crucial to the spiritual health of both followers and institutions. To that end, consideration of the common traits of healthy organizations versus unhealthy ones illuminates aspects in need of reform.

Common traits of healthy organizations: Inclusive, collaborative, democratic, de-centralized leadership structures, allow debate, share different perspectives, understand nuances in viewpoints, support grass-roots voices and participation, value listening, encourage mediation and compromise, promote servant leadership and group oversight of leaders, value trust, empathy and compassion.

Common traits of unhealthy organizations: Exclusive, authoritarian, oligarchic, intolerant of differing views, polarized thinking, strict adherence to onerous rules, use fear to control, rigid interpretations of ideas, enforcement and punishment common, little to no oversight of leaders, rivalry among leaders, mistrust between members and leadership, little to no participation allowed for non-leaders in decision making.

It is no coincidence that this document utilizes the American Bill of Rights as a template. The oppression wrought by totalitarian regimes, dictators and theocracies has always been obvious to the world. But if we are to progress together as a global community, oppression in any sector of society, particularly the important sector that religion occupies, must be transformed by free and democratic values, because wherever oppression rules, people suffer.

False religious superiority

The notion that one religion is superior to others, along with “the chosen people syndrome” has caused much violence over the centuries. While most religious wars have thankfully de-escalated into theological battles, some still wage. Other relics of the past, such as claims of divine favor and infallibility, should also be cast off. Only the Creator stands at the head of all religions, not human leaders.

Religious superiority remains one of the chief obstacles to spiritual unity and only serves to dampen ecumenical and interfaith efforts. But there has been progress in this delicate process. People versed in multiple traditions are especially valuable in bridging understanding between faiths and voicing unifying ideas.

Just as different faith traditions can learn from each other, so should the followers within each tradition be encouraged to share their experiences with each other. This collaborative approach adds vibrancy to traditional methods of clergy-only preaching. Open sharing cultivates fresh viewpoints and robust spiritual fruits from the grass-roots up. With new ideas filtering through old institutions, the result is a newfound respect for diverse viewpoints.

Religions serve best when they point the way forward

In order to serve effectively, religions need to honor the past as well as look to the future. But many of them exhibit a preoccupation with the past and don't recognize that spiritual wisdom is meant to evolve. Sacred stories from ages past, while they contain timeless lessons, were developed for past generations who may not have been able to comprehend modern concepts.

Humanity's capacity to understand the outer world and the inner person has increased immeasurably through science, philosophy and psychology. Religions can come alongside this process by allowing ancient stories to be seen through a metaphoric lens and encouraging the search for knowledge.

It bears mentioning that the inspired sacred texts of old were nevertheless filtered through human minds. Likewise, present-day human wisdom could do much good if it were taken

more seriously by religions. Regardless of where truth emerges, it is a mistake to disregard it just because it comes from human minds.

Progress is evident in new worship styles tailored to different tastes. Liturgies and worship services take on new relevance when they are periodically updated with new ideas and symbolism. If each succeeding generation were invited to adopt language and customs that speak to them, it would inspire more joyful worship. Past forms, particularly those reflecting the beauty of music and the arts, should be preserved by devotees. But choice is key. Moreover, creativity bespeaks beauty, and diversity of spiritual expression not only enriches human experience, but is always welcomed by the Creator.

Whether in teaching or worship, religions flourish when they balance past and present by cherishing golden threads of truth while weaving new spiritual fabric to clothe each succeeding generation in increasingly light-filled truths.

Rethinking concepts of primitive origin

Rethinking the primitive-origin spiritual concepts that have been embedded in religions for centuries is a process that is just beginning. The three most notable in western traditions are divine eternal punishment, sinful human nature and the divine demand for sacrifice, also known as atonement.

Important measures are recommended in this long-term process to respect both those who question these beliefs and those who espouse them. Most people inside religion, all the way up to top institutional levels, have lived with these concepts for so long that they have become unquestioned articles of faith. This presents an even bigger challenge insofar as subsequent concepts have been planted atop these old foundational beliefs. As a result, these primitive-origin concepts remain largely unchallenged even though they pose stark contradictions to the Creator's loving nature.

The worldwide process of introducing more enlightened ideas to update older ones will require both delicacy and boldness. Three critical guideposts are recommended:

- ***People*** are always to be treated with love and compassion while being presented with new enlightened concepts and encouraged to retire primitive ones.
- ***Religions***, society's megalithic ships, must be steered with care and patience in this process.
- ***Primitive-origin concepts*** should be consistently and intelligently examined and uplifted with more truthful ideas, taking care not to needlessly destabilize institutions or individuals.

Exchanging limited concepts for more expansive ones demands careful effort since the sudden wresting of long-cherished beliefs without first gently introducing updated ones can

be unsettling. A wise approach is one that concomitantly preserves and expands on the truths already known. Most importantly, the spiritual liberties of all involved must never be abrogated.

Kindness alone evangelizes

There will always be innumerable spiritual approaches toward truth. But evangelization into any tradition, old or new, is meant to be a reciprocal process of invitation and voluntary acceptance. Forceful evangelization methods, especially when they assert sinful human nature and divine wrath, can harm. Such strategies do not reflect the unconditionally loving nature of the Creator and should be left behind by clergy and laity alike. Kindness and love are the only true evangelizers.

Relationships and values—the ideal anchors for religion

Even as they work on reform, religions remain a beacon for humanity and should be fully harnessed for global spiritual renewal. Their success could be assured if they navigate a transformative shift both in perspective and practice—the current form for many is **belief-based**, i.e., standardized and/or compulsory beliefs and practices which can lead to enforcement of uniformity, causing schisms and sectarianism. The ideal form prioritizes **relationships and values over beliefs**, i.e., the Creator-human relationship and the family of humanity which celebrate freedom, diversity, common values, love toward all and unity. When people anchor their religious lives to relationships and values rather than beliefs, they find unity where they previously saw division.

Religions should recognize that adhering to beliefs is not as important as loving people. Valuing beliefs over people can drive the establishment of rules to “protect” beliefs. Why would **beliefs** need to be protected? **People** need to be protected, and more importantly, loved. People also deserve to be uplifted by values like peace, kindness, compassion, truth, beauty and goodness. **It is our common values that unite us, not our beliefs.** Enlightened values feed beautiful relationships and relationships alone create love, not beliefs!

Humanity has been taught that beliefs are a primary source of spiritual nourishment. While they are a meaningful part of the human journey, they are not the main course in the spiritual banquet. The true unending feast is only to be found in a living relationship with the Creator and family ties with all. Any religion that frees people from mandatory beliefs and directs them into the Creator’s loving embrace and familial love for all is destined for greatness.

Spiritual freedom is the answer to our challenging times

No previous generation has faced more spiritual challenges than the present—rampant materialism, feelings of worthlessness, lack of purpose and hopelessness. All these ills of the soul can be healed with spiritual freedom, which does not produce philosophical and religious chaos. Rather, spiritual liberty for all can catalyze a coherent force to lead humanity into spiritual unity—ending sectarian strife and debate about who has the “one true religion.” These and other barriers to unity will gradually dissolve when all are free to discover their own relationship with the Creator. Then humanity can begin to advance as a living organism empowered directly by the Creator toward the threshold of a powerful renaissance.

The world is inexorably moving toward a new paradigm of inter-connectedness with all creation. The human-Creator connection is where it all begins. Radiating from there is a whole universe of connections waiting to be explored. Unity with the Creator, with each other and with all creation is our destiny. And the greatest unifying truth of all is that we are one human family infinitely loved by our divine Creator Parent.

Introducing the “Religion of Personal Experience”

The discovery of the human-Creator relationship by a great number of people can bring about a new relationship-based spirituality within each person. The “Religion of Personal Experience” (ROPE) naturally embraces the twin concepts of the divine Creator Parent and the family of humanity while also being able to coexist in friendliness with any religion that affirms relationships and values over beliefs. In fact, the beauty of the ROPE is its flexibility with diverse ideas while remaining in unity with the Creator and the human family.

As each person feels guided, they can add beliefs and practices to enhance their spiritual development. These can change as the individual's ROPE evolves. The ROPE is the perfect vehicle for spiritual expression and will inevitably become the choice of more people. Its influence is already visible in the numbers of people identifying as “spiritual but not religious” or “nones” and it will undoubtedly spread with the rising tides of global spiritual renewal.

The time is now!

The time is now and the harvest is ripe for spiritual leaders from every tradition to resoundingly affirm the fundamental sacred rights of this new declaration of spiritual independence, this emancipation proclamation of the spirit, and ring the truth bells of liberty for many waiting to be freed from spiritual captivity. Then people everywhere will be lifted up to fulfill their shining potential and lead our suffering world into the dawning age of light and life!