

## 2/7: SESSION 4: REVERENCE FOR LIFE

### Learning Goals:

- Be aware of various religious perspectives on the beginning of life and pregnancy.
- Confront historic and current purposes of birth control and abortion for eugenics and population control.
- Reflect on personal beliefs regarding reverence for life.

### Readings/Handouts:

- [4.1 Margaret Sanger, Birth Control, and the Eugenics Movement](#)
- [4.2 Reproductive Technology and Ableism](#)
- “The Last Children of Down Syndrome” - <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/12/the-last-children-of-down-syndrome/616928/>
- [4.3 Religious Perspectives on Life](#)

### Chalice Lighting:

- Song: “Song Swimming to the Other Side by Pat Humphries
  - [Link](#) to listen to the song
  - [Lyrics](#)
- Reading: [On the Brink by Leslie Takahashi](#)

### Check-In:

- What brings you to this space and to this work on reproductive justice?
  - Participants shared about personal and professional experiences that draw them to reproductive justice.

### Religious Perspectives on Life:

Discuss perspectives included in the handout:

- Unitarian Universalism (UUA 2015 Statement of Conscience: <https://rcrc.org/unitarian-universalist/>)
- Judaism
- Catholicism
- Presbyterianism
- Assemblies of God
- United Methodist Church
- Buddhism
- Islam
- Biology/Science

Note: Indigenous traditions were not included in the handout. There are many diverse perspectives on choice in North American indigenous cultures.

Discussion questions:

- Was there anything that surprised you?
  - Judaism
    - Interested in the statement that if a pregnant woman converts to Judaism, the fetus is considered to have converted as well.
  - Presbyterianism
    - Surprised by the progressive attitude of the 1978 statement.
  - Buddhism
    - Surprised by the emphasis on pain/not feeling pain as an element of consciousness.
  - Islam
    - Interested in the idea that a fetus gains a soul after 120 days of gestation.
  - Biology
    - Interested in the information that there isn't scientific consensus on at what point in gestation fetal pain or fetal cognition may occur--it's often presented as a certainty.
    - Interested in the phrasing "candidates for personhood" to describe different milestones of development.
- What from this tradition resonates with me?
  - Presbyterianism
    - A lot of Presbyterian perspectives are very pro-choice.
  - Different Protestant sects represented
    - Remember not to assume others' views based on their religious affiliation, despite stereotypes we may hold.
  - Buddhism
    - Resonate with the concept of "suffering"--removing suffering, why we suffer, etc as foundational questions of human life.
  - Biology

- Although science keeps pushing “viability” earlier and earlier in terms of survival, being born so early can cause many physical and cognitive struggles.
  - What from this tradition is challenging for me?
    - Catholicism
      - Reflection on personal experiences of seeing Jeremiah 1:5 quoted as rationale against abortion.
      - Wondering why it does not seem to be common to be “for” contraceptives and “against” abortion.
    - Biology
      - How should we define personhood--but also, SHOULD we define personhood?
      - “Personhood” is a legal term meant to cause a fetus’s life to weigh equally to the pregnant person’s life, and put them against one another legally.

Note: Religious Coalition for Reproductive Freedom releases regular webinars and hosts recordings of previous webinars at: <https://rcrc.org/learning-center/> Additionally, RCRF is planning to release four modules on RJ that appear to parallel the content of this seminar.

### Power Shuffle: Life and Choices

The facilitator reads a series of statements about life, personhood, contraception, and abortion. In reaction to each question, participants place their “name tag” (text box) along a Google slide spectrum from “Agree” to “Disagree”, depending on how they react to the statement.

- 1 As a society, we should come to consensus about when life begins.
- 2 If a person has more children than they can adequately care for, they should not have more.
- 3 Pregnant people should always have total autonomy when making their decision to continue or terminate a pregnancy, regardless of the reasons.
- 4 Abortion is never an easy choice.
- 5 Abortion should not be used as birth control.
- 6 If a man impregnates a woman, he should have some say in whether she continues the pregnancy or not.
- 7 If a fetus is diagnosed with Downs syndrome and the family may not have adequate resources to provide for it, deciding to end the pregnancy would be ableist.

*Ableism: Discrimination in favor of the able-bodied; the tendency to regard people with*

*a disability as incomplete, diminished, or damaged, and to measure the quality of life with a disability against a non-disabled standard. Example of word use: Ableism reinforces the idea that disability is a personal tragedy.*

- 8 Using reproductive technology to determine the health of a fetus is responsible.
- 9 RJ advocates should use the term “people who menstruate” or “people with a uterus” or “people who can get pregnant” instead of using the term “women.”
- 10 Being “pro-choice” and practicing a faith that is “anti-choice” is hypocritical.
- 11 I am pro-choice, but I’d never choose an abortion for myself.
- 12 I have internalized some stigma or shame regarding abortion and/or contraception.

Questions to reflect on after this discussion:

- What is my belief about personally terminating a pregnancy?
- What judgements do I hold about other’s decisions?
- What aspects of abortion do I believe should be legislated, if anything?

Debrief and Closing:

- Ask participants to share with the group one new idea that struck them during the session.
- Online Zoom poll regarding preferences for Session #8
  - 3/12 preferred a social hour
  - 10/12 preferred small-group activism planning
  - 6/12 preferred a movie watch hour

**1. The final session in our series is scheduled for Sunday, Feb. 28. We have several options, please indicate your general interest. (Multiple Choice)**

Social Hour: unstructured (or lightly structured) time to (3/12) 25% visit, talk, share.

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Activism Planning: small group discussions with (10/12) 83% participants interested in pursuing action focused on specifically identified topics/areas/targets

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Movie watch hour: could be feminist-oriented shorts, (6/12) 50% good You-Tube content, or even a full feature

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None of the above (0/12) 0%

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- Closing reading: "[Merger Poem](#)" by Judy Chicago

*And then all that has divided us will merge  
And then compassion will be wedded to power  
And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind*

*And then both men and women will be gentle  
And then both women and men will be strong  
And then no person will be subject to another's will*

*And then all will be rich and free and varied  
And then the greed of some will give way to the needs of many*

*And then all will share equally in the Earth's abundance*

*And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old*

*And then all will nourish the young  
And then all will cherish life's creatures*

*And then everywhere will be called Eden once again*