



Soul Matters

March 2016

*What Does It Mean To Be
A People of Liberation?*



<http://tinyurl.com/h4on4ve>

What Does It Mean To Be A People of Liberation?

“True wisdom comes in understanding that sometimes, you are both the prison and the key.”
— **Johnathan Jena**

Sometimes the key is right in our hand.

Let's be clear: Liberation is about struggling against “others.” There *are* forces, structures and people that put bars around us. Liberation is indeed about “opposing the powerful,” “dismantling systems,” and “fighting *them* for freedom.” But sometimes the bars are of our own making. Sometimes the limits and boxes are self-imposed. Sometimes, we are indeed both the prison and the key.

So this month, let's make sure to look in all directions. Let's look honestly and hopefully at the many ways that liberation requires a clear-eyed re-assessment of our choices, not just a battle against those bad guys. All of the great religions agree: We are more powerful than we realize, or want to admit. We can forgive and free ourselves from the cage of resentment. We can let go of jealousy. We can stop playing the self-defeating games of status, money and beauty. We don't have to keep telling ourselves that life is unfair and we've been cheated. We can let that chip fall from our shoulder and freely move on.

Christian author, Israelmore Ayivor, writes, “You have the right to suppress yourself, oppress yourself and depress yourself. You also have the right to impress yourself. And let yourself feel happy too!” There is something perfectly balanced about that quote. It's both critical and kind. Confrontational and inspirational. It honors the fact that there are bars that hem us in, but it also invites us to notice when the key is setting right there in the lock.

May this be the month when we notice and turn that key.

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A:

Mark (and take control of) Your Hours!

Liberation is often about simply waking up! Hour by hour, we give up intentionality and let life happen to us. This exercise invites us to liberate ourselves by waking up to what our hours actually look like.

Here's your assignment: Use the alarm clock on your cell phone (or some other device) to set off an hourly alert/chime. Have the alarm/chime go off every hour on the hour for the entire day, from the time you get up to the time you go to bed. Every time the hourly alarm goes off, make a one-word note in a journal or notepad that capture what you are doing in that moment. For instance, one day's worth of entries might look like: worrying, staring, working, working, working, eating, complaining, daydreaming, emailing, working, commuting, cooking, washing, emailing, dog-walking, nodding-off.

Do this at least 2-3 days, either in a row or at different times.

Now here's the catch: Notice the pattern and figure out how you want to change it. Don't over-plan it. Just give your day a little bit more intentionality. Keep your hourly alarm in your head and tell yourself that you want to end the day with a list that you can be proud of. Imagine what kind of list would make you smile, feel in control or feel free. For instance this kind of list: snoozing, jogging, enjoying, planning, working, experimenting, advocating, working, dreaming, laughing, cooking, reading, connecting, talking, loving, breathing. Or this kind of list from a day off of work: sleeping, sleeping, soaking, painting, painting, varnishing, indulging, napping, painting, painting, dining, dancing, dancing, gazing, dreaming. It's all about consciousness. It's all about liberating yourself by simply noticing. It's all about living life rather than letting life live you!

Option B:

Let Your Precious Go

In J.R.R. Tolkien's classic, *The Lord of the Rings*, we watch a creature named [Gollum](#) give his life and soul over to his "precious." That which empowered him, ended up destroying him. That which was meant to fee and protect him, depleted and betrayed him. It's meant to symbolize the destructive lure of addiction and power. It's an extreme example. But this trap is also commonplace. All of us do things that we think will make us feel better but end up making us feel worse. We all have our "precious" that ends up betraying us.

This exercise simply asks you to use this month to work on facing your "precious" and make some small step in letting it go. There are no complicated instructions than this: Liberate yourself from your "precious."

Here is some inspiration and guidance: http://gretchenrubin.com/happiness_project/2015/03/like-gollum-do-you-have-something-precious-that-isnt-good-for-you/

Option C: **DANCEBREAK!**

Oh yeah! You know you need this one. If music and dance have saved you before, they can save and free you again. This exercise asks you to let music and/or dance interrupt your weekly routine. The instructions are easy: Sign up for DANCEBREAK! at <http://dancebreak.weebly.com/join-the-dance-party.html>

DANCEBREAK was created by Rev. Scott Rudolph, a Unitarian Universalist minister in Pittsburgh. The vision is explained here: <http://dancebreak.weebly.com/about-dancebreak.html>. Rumors have it that the real origin was to help ministers escape the pressure and fear of sermon writing right when they need it most. But don't we all need a bit of music and dance to help us step back from the stress? Don't we all need a bit of rhythm and joy to free us from our worries? Who of us doesn't need a mid-week dancebreak?!

By signing up, you will receive a weekly email that has a song/video to dance along with. If you want a dancebreak more than once-a-week, then set an alarm on your calendar and visit the DANCEBREAK archives: <http://dancebreak.weebly.com>.

And if you're up to it, help liberate other Soul Matters members by posting DANCEBREAK worthy songs on the Soul Matters Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/soulmatters/>) throughout the month of March. When you post it, tell your Soul Matters family why you picked the song and what it liberated you from.

If you need more inspiration than the dancebreak songs, try out these links:

<http://tinyurl.com/hbd943s>

<https://www.happier.com/blog/happy-songs-12-songs-to-make-you-happy-right-now>

<http://www.metrolyrics.com/news-story-10-songs-that-will-instantly-put-you-in-a-good-mood.html>

Option D: **In Order to Remain Engaged**

The task of creating a society in which none are oppressed and all are liberated is demanding and often discouraging work. The author and activist Alice Walker knows this work well: for 40 years she has been "standing on the frontlines of healing America's own violent history." She shares seven steps for how to remain a Love Activist without getting dragged down or burnt out:

- 1) Recommit Every Day
- 2) Protect What Matters Most
- 3) Embrace Your Joy
- 4) Stand for Truth
- 5) Be Courageous
- 6) Spread Forgiveness
- 7) Love the Earth

More here: <http://blog.theshiftnetwork.com/blog/love-activism-alice-walker>. For this exercise, read through the list and choose the one that calls to you the most. What do you need to liberate from within you in order to remain engaged in the wider work of liberation? Once you have your answer, take some time this month to enact that step.

Your Question

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the one question that "hooks" you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal of these questions is not to help you analyze what liberation means, but to figure out what being a person of liberation means for you today. So, which question is calling to you?

1. The sculptor Michelangelo was once asked how it was that he could create such beautiful works. "It's very simple," he answered. "When I look at a block of marble, I see the sculpture inside it. All I have to do is remove what doesn't belong." What can you remove that doesn't belong in yourself? What might be liberated by removing what doesn't belong? What beauty is waiting for you to give it a bit more room?
2. Have you let yourself become imprisoned by the fear of missing out? By the imaginings of what might have been or what others have?
3. Do you need to liberate yourself from the ordinary? ("When things are taking their ordinary course, it is hard to remember what matters." -Marilynne Robinson)
4. Have you been helping people but ignoring the call for liberation? ("If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." - Lila Watson)
5. How is your balance between spiritual/personal liberation and social/political liberation? Are they feeding each other or fighting? Or just not talking?
6. Is the thing you do to feel better actually making you feel worse? Has what you turn to for liberation become a bit of a trap?
7. Is it time to forgive (and free) yourself?
8. Are you ready to take off the mask? Do you even notice that it is on?
9. Are you looking for liberation and freedom in far away places and possibly not noticing it is waiting for you right back at home? Or right there where you are standing now?
10. Is kindness waiting for you to pick it up and liberate someone? Maybe even yourself?
11. What's your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what the theme is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

Recommended Resources

As always, this is not required reading. We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started, and maybe open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be *a people of liberation*.

Liberation

Definition: the act or process of freeing someone or something from another's control; the removal of traditional social rules, attitudes, etc.; a movement seeking equal rights and status for a group

Synonyms: setting free, salvation, emancipation, unchaining, release

Wise Words

We are not trapped or locked up in these bones. No, no. We are free to change. And love changes us. And if we can love one another, we can break open the sky. — **Walter Mosley**

No one can be perfectly free until all are free. — **Herbert Spencer**

If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together. — **Lila Watson**

It is only through disruptions and confusion that we grow and are set free, jarred out of ourselves by the collision of someone else's private world with our own. — **Joyce Carol Oates**

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. — **Henry David Thoreau**

Liberation begins with an acceptance of a past we can't change, an unrelenting conviction that the future can be different, and the stubborn

wisdom to use the past to make the future what the past was not.— **Craig D. Lounsbrough**

It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people...the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed.

One who takes away another's freedom is a prisoner of hatred, locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity. The truth is we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not be oppressed. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. That is the true test of our devotion to freedom. With freedom comes responsibilities. — **from Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom***

We will find the key to our liberation only when we accept that what we once did to survive is now destroying us. — **Laura van Dernoot Lipsky**

Jesus's resurrection is the beginning of God's new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. That, after all, is what the Lord's Prayer is about. — **N.T. Wright**

We can't even remotely fathom that whatever is ending for us is always more than an ending. ...This is the magic and meaning of Easter. — **Craig D. Lounsbrough**

We're in a free fall into future. We don't know where we're going. Things are changing so fast. And always when you're going through a long tunnel, anxiety comes along. But all you have to do to transform your hell into a paradise is to turn your fall into a voluntary act. It's a very interesting shift of perspective... Joyfully participate in the sorrows of the world and everything changes. — **Joseph Campbell**

When personal guilt in relation to a past event becomes a continuous cloud over your life, you are locked in a mental prison. You have become your own jailer. Although you should not erase your responsibility for the past, when you make the past your jailer, you destroy your future. It is such a great moment of liberation when you learn to forgive yourself, let the burden go, and walk out into a new path of promise and possibility. Self-compassion is a wonderful gift to give yourself. — **John O'Donohue in *Eternal Echoes***

Idolatry is the practice of ascribing absolute value to things of relative worth. Under certain circumstances money, patriotism, sexual freedom, moral principles, family loyalty, physical health, social or intellectual preeminence, and so on are fine things to have around, but to make them the standard by which all other values are measured, to make them your masters, to look to them to justify your life and save your soul is sheerest folly. They just aren't up to it. — **Frederick Buechner**

Comfort...was the key ingredient to making the prisoner crave the prison. — **Ashim Shanker**

True wisdom comes in understanding that sometimes, you are both the prison and the key. — **Johnathan Jena**

Blame is very tricky in that it seems like a way out when it is really a form of imprisonment. — **Bryant McGill**

None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free. — **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**

Don't let people supervise your life. — **Michael Bassey Johnson**

When grief sits with you, its tropical heat thickening the air,
heavy as water more fit for gills than lungs;
when grief weights you like your own flesh
only more of it, an obesity of grief.
you think, how long can a body withstand this?
Then you hold life like a face
between your palms, a plain face,
no charming smile, no violet eyes,
and you say, yes, I will take you
I will love you again.

— **Ellen Bass**

*from Perhaps It Would Eventually Erode,
But ...*

That rock that we
have been pushing up
the hill—that one

that keeps rolling back down
and we keep pushing
back up—what if

we stopped? We are not
Sisyphus. This rock
is not a punishment.

It's something we've chosen
to push....

—**Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer**

*This poem has a great ending! Read the rest of
it here: <http://tinyurl.com/hoxjgx9>*

The Otters and the Seaweed

This is what you need to know:
you need to know that otters wrap themselves
in seaweed so they won't,

while sleeping at night, float out to sea . . .
Are you imagining this?
Can you see the otters actually doing this?

Does it break your heart a little?
Does it seduce you just a bit
into loving more

this odd hard world?

Oh otters, wrap yourselves tight! And sleep,
exactly like you do, floating but seaweed-held

in our salty living waters! Oh otters,
wrap yourselves tight! And you,
the one who doesn't, the one who doesn't

tether himself down right,
we are with you as you float away,
we are with you as you sleep

and lose yourself in the night.

— **Teddy Macker**

Autobiography of Eve

Wearing nothing but snakeskin
boots, I blazed a footpath, the first
radical road out of that old kingdom
toward a new unknown.
When I came to those great flaming gates
of burning gold,
I stood alone in terror at the threshold
between Paradise and Earth.
There I heard a mysterious echo:
my own voice
singing to me from across the forbidden
side. I shook awake—
at once alive in a blaze of green fire.

Let it be known: I did not fall from grace.

I leapt

to freedom.

— **Ansel Elkins**

Coldilocks Celebrates Her 35th Birthday

Coldilocks celebrates her
thirty-fifth birthday
at the Philadelphia Zoo,
and we debate
the relative merits
of a long life in captivity or
a shorter one in the wild,
not that she ever had a choice.

They feed her pumpkins
filled with peanuts, and
an ice cake with granola
and peanut butter icing.

What could be better?
Except, when you
think about it,
for a polar bear,
some fresh-caught seal,
savored on an ice floe
during an endless arctic
summer day.

I wonder if her bear-self
longs for what she's lost?
Vast expanses of tundra,
endless room to roam.
Months-long darkness, and
bedding down in winter dens.
The smell of spring, and
friends, and mates.
Blessed solitude, away from
grandparents with wide-eyed
toddlers on their shoulders,
pointing. Always pointing.

Or is she content
in her hand-fed indolence?
Living like a lottery winner,
pampered, with a staff,
a private pool, and a
health plan that puts
a Senator's to shame.

When did she turn the corner,
that she lost her bear-ness to
where it could not be regained?
When she had been held
so long that her release
would mean her certain death?

How easy it is to forget
how freedom feels, and
to lose the memory
of what it's like to be
who we were born to be.

—**Peter Friedrichs, Soul Matters Minister**

From If Prayer Would Do It

If prayer would do it
I'd pray.

If reading esteemed thinkers would do it
I'd be halfway through the Patriarchs.

... If anything other than love could do it
I've done it already
and left the hardest for last.

— **Stephen Levine**

full poem here:

<http://inwardoutward.org/2013/11/08/if-prayer-would-do-it/>

Videos & Podcasts

Liberation through Art: Beyonce's Visionary Fiction - Formation

From the video's review: "We create from what we can imagine. We are living right now inside the imaginings of people whose mental illness makes them believe they are superior to other human beings. This video is part of the resistance, the new imaginings that we use to pull ourselves towards liberation."

<http://tinyurl.com/gtclrvd>

The Exodus Story and the Necessity of Desire for Liberation

This podcast explores the story of Exodus from the Hebrew Bible as myth, which is "not about something that never happened. It is about something that happens over and over again." The myth of Exodus is the story of liberation, happening over and over again.

<http://www.onbeing.org/blog/exodus-story-and-necessity-desire-liberation/3840>

Liberation as Harmony with Nature and Another Person

<https://www.facebook.com/morgan.burks.92/videos/10153769033350630/?fref=nf>

Somewhere in America (3 minutes)

A liberation poem performed by three young women who bravely speak unspoken truths that are all too often silenced.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cD6UrVHNRMc>

Articles & Online

Missing Out: Liberating ourselves from the curse of our unlived lives

An effort to help liberate us from our culture so plagued by the fear of missing out on what might have been or what others have.

https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/08/17/missing-out-adam-phillips/?mc_cid=74b7067de7&mc_eid=04e3c8a6e2

Gollum's Ring & Liberation

Has "your precious" become your prison? Is the thing you do to feel better actually making you feel worse?

http://gretchenrubin.com/happiness_project/2015/03/like-gollum-do-you-have-something-precious-that-isnt-good-for-you/

A Simple Way To Break a Bad Habit - TED Talk

Can we break bad habits by being more curious about them?

http://www.ted.com/talks/judson_brewer_a_simple_way_to_break_a_bad_habit?utm_source=newsletter_weekly_2016-02-06&utm_campaign=newsletter_weekly&utm_medium=email&utm_content=talk_of_the_week_button

"Hearing the Right Voices" by Cami Applequist

A woman reflects on what happens when she listened to "all of the wrong voices" about her body, and how the words of two young girls liberated her from that shame.

http://www.uuworld.org/articles/hearing-right-voices?utm_source=n

"What is Liberation Theology?" by Tony Campolo

Liberation theology is "the simple belief that in the struggles of poor and oppressed people against their powerful and rich oppressors, God sides with the oppressed against the oppressors."

<http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2008/04/30/what-is-liberation-theology/3419>

“Pope’s Focus on Poor Revives Scorned Theology” By Jim Yardley and Simon Romero

A report on how Pope Francis is reviving liberation theology.
http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/24/world/europe/popes-focus-on-poor-revives-scorned-theology.html?_r=0

“Why Tom Waits Quit Drinking” by TJ Dawe

How our addictions cut us off from life and how facing them can be liberating. "And it takes a while, when you've had a rock on the hose like that for so long. It takes a while for the hose to be a hose again, you know, and for things to start flowing."
<http://beamsandstruts.com/bits-a-pieces/item/882-the-piano-has-been-drinking-ginger-ale>

The 1965 murder of James Reeb

<http://www.quakerranter.org/2015/03/nytimes-video-remembers-the-1965-selma-james-reeb-attack/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tuRfS8BKpiQ>

Movies

The Shawshank Redemption

http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/shawshank_redemption/

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

The theme of liberation is an undercurrent throughout the Harry Potter series; it is vividly illustrated throughout *Chamber of Secrets*, especially in the story of Dobby the house elf.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0295297/>

Romero

The life and work of Archbishop Oscar Romero who opposed, at great personal risk, the tyrannical repression in El Salvador. (March is the month of Romero’s death)
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098219/>

Munyurangabo (Liberation Day)

Two friends in Rwanda dealing with the fallout from the genocide which lingers in their consciousness and souls. (with subtitles)
<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/17972/liberation-day-munyurangabo>

A list of ten movies about women’s liberation and feminism (March is Women’s History month)

<http://nonfics.com/10-great-womens-history-films-watch-month/>

Songs

“Take My Hand, Precious Lord” by Ledisi from the Selma Movie Soundtrack

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxVpHiyT5kE>

“Formation” by Beyonce

<http://adriennemareebrown.net/2016/02/07/beyonces-visionary-fiction-formation/>

“Pressure” by David Bowie, January, 8 1947 – January 10, 2016

A song about the liberating power of love amid all the pressures pushing us down.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YoDh_gHDvkk

“Lift Me” by the Bengsons

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9262w6umIM>

"I Wanna Get Better" - The Bleachers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khPf88uxyFo>

Books

***Liberation: New Works on Freedom from Internationally Renowned Poets* edited by Mark Ludwig**

A collection of poems from around the world that explore the question, *What does it mean to be free?*

<http://www.beacon.org/Liberation-P1146.aspx>

Ferguson and Faith: Sparking Leadership and Awakening Community by Leah Gunning Francis
<http://tinyurl.com/j9o7rcj>

Justice and Spirit online book club run by UU publishing house Skinner House Books

The Third Reconstruction: Moral Mondays, Fusion Politics, and the Rise of a New Justice Movement by **The Rev. Dr William J. Barber II and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove**

A modern-day civil rights champion tells the stirring story of how he helped start a movement to bridge America's racial divide.

Book available here:

<http://www.beacon.org/The-Third-Reconstruction-P1139.aspx>

Sign up for online book club here:

<https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/173731-justice-and-spirit-unitarian-universalist-book-club>

Past Unitarian Universalist Common Reads about the theme of liberation:

- 2014-15: [Reclaiming Prophetic Witness](#)
- 2013-14: [Behind the Kitchen Door](#)
- 2012-13: [The New Jim Crow](#)
- 2011-12: [Acts of Faith](#)
- 2010-11: [The Death of Josseline](#)

List of books for children and families about liberation:
<http://amzn.com/w/2GSMsOW14MGXP>

March Events

Easter <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter>

Lent <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lent>

Vernal Equinox

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equinox>

Ostara

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/19/ostara-2015_n_6895952.html

Purim <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purim>

Magha Puja

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magha_Puja

Women's History Month

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_History_Month

Susan B Anthony's death

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susan_B._Anthony

James Reeb's death

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Reeb

Viola Liuzzo's death

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viola_Liuzzo

Archbishop Oscar Romero's death

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oscar_Romero

If you've enjoyed this packet and are not a part of a Soul Matters congregation, please learn more about how to join us at www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com

Join the Soul Matters Facebook page to engage in the theme with participants from around the US, Canada and Europe: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/soulmatters/>