



Soul Matters

October 2015

*What Does It Mean To Be
A People of Letting Go?*



Image: [We Heart It](#)

What Does It Mean To Be A People of Letting Go?

*When cast into the depths, to survive, we must first let go of things that will not save us.
Then we must reach out for the things that can. — Rev. Forrest Church*

All [of us] must leave room for the acts of the spirit. — Ursula LeGuin

We cling. You name it, we've wrapped our grasping fingers and anxious hearts around it: success, safety, society's standards of beauty, personal desires to be accepted, perfectionism, duty, fear, grudges, hurts, hopes, stuff, shame and privilege. Whether the object of our grasping is good or bad is not, as we learn, truly the issue. It's the grasping itself. That's the real problem. Holding on too long and too tightly is never good for the soul. So our faith pleads with us, "Let it go!"

But here's the twist: Our faith follows that up quickly with "Let it in!" This spiritual dance takes a two-step. As Forrest Church puts it, letting go must be followed up by reaching out. Or maybe it's better to say opening up. Indeed, the tragedy of grasping so tightly is not simply that we anchor ourselves to that which burdens us, but that we end up shutting out that which is trying to save and feed us. Letting go is ultimately about letting in. It's really about making room.

And the great gift of Unitarian Universalism is its claim that this is what "salvation" is all about. With all due respect to our orthodox Christian brothers and sisters who see salvation as a process of becoming cleansed or purified, we join with those who see it as a journey of remaining open. To some the world may appear a place chock-full of temptations to keep out, but to us the world is full of gifts, second chances and new starts desperately trying to get in! However, because of our clinging, there is no room.

All of which means that letting go is really an act of faith. Yes, it takes strength, resolve, discipline and courage. But mostly it requires we believe that, once we release our grips, life will not leave us empty-handed.

So friends, do you believe? Do you trust that making room will be worth it? Do you have faith that letting go will be met with a life-giving coming in? This month, let's find out.

May we all be blessed by this spiritual two-step!

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A:

Learn to Fly: The Parable of the Trapeze

Is life calling you to let go and leap into something entirely new? This six-minute video will help you decide: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWvV5N4hOGc>. Here are your instructions:

- Set aside reflective time and use this video as a meditation. Don't rush it. Watch it three days in a row or multiple times over two weeks.
- Linger with the questions it asks: What new trapeze bar has your name on it? What is your next new story? What is the new aliveness coming to get you? Are you ready to jump? Are you ready to honor and savor the transition zone? And see it as the space of real living?
- Come to your group ready to describe the bar that has your name on it.

Option B:

Spiritualize One Space in Your Life

The international bestseller, *The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, helps us see cleaning up clutter in a new light. It's not about eliminating mess; it's about letting in joy and creating space in which our spirits can breath. The author's challenge to all of us is this: "Anything that doesn't "spark joy" is to be touched, thanked and ceremonially sent on its way!" This month take up the challenge:

- Read the article about her book (and maybe read the book as well!): <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/nov/27/top-tips-to-joyfully-declutter-your-home-from-marie-kondo>
- Pick one "space" in your life and declutter it in the way she recommends. This space can be something as big as a living room or as small as a desk drawer or the back seat of your car.
- Take before-and-after pictures.
- Come to your group ready to share what it was like to thank and send the clutter on its way. Most importantly, come ready to show what it's like to have one space full of the things that "spark joy" and prop you up.

Option C:

Let Go of the Privilege of White Privilege

Letting go is ultimately about letting in. When it comes to the work of multicultural competence, this takes the form of trying to set aside one's own agenda and lens to make room for the perspective and

experience of others. But it turns out that's painfully complex. For instance, even the act of raising awareness of white privilege can unintentionally marginalize the perspectives and experience of people of color. Activist Austin Channing helps us understand this in her insightful article, "[White Privilege Weariness](#)." In it, she asks, "How often have you been [in an awareness raising workshop] where the feelings of white people take priority? Do they feel guilt or shame? Are we making them feel guilt or shame? How uncomfortable are they? Is the room safe for them? Do they get it? ...Rather than judging the success of my training on whether or not white people walked away understanding privilege, could I define success based on the emotional energy of people of color after the training is done?"

This exercise invites you to take up Channing's challenge. Here's how:

- Read over Channing's article and discuss it with friends and fellow parishioners: <http://austinchanning.com/blog/2014/3/weariness>
- As you engage in the racial justice work or consciousness-awareness efforts of your church community, keep an eye out for the dynamic that Channing names.
- Find a way to challenge that dynamic.

Straight-forward but not at all simple. Come to your group ready to share your learnings, slips, recoveries and best efforts.

Option D: **Wrestle with Surrender**

"Let go and let God" Some of us are more comfortable with the phrase than others. But all of us - theist, atheist or somewhere in between - need to get comfortable with letting go of the idea that we can do it all on our own. The famous third step of Alcoholics Anonymous is "[we] make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand God." This act of faith that we will be held by a Love that will not let us go is central to all religion. This is the challenge for many of us this month: surrender. If this is your challenge, here is your simple assignment:

- Meditate on this video. Watch and listen to it numerous times. Letting Go by Steffany Gretzinger: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_7XIKVgRGY
- Let it take you where you need to go. If the musician's theist perspective speaks to you, lean into it and let it take you deeper than you could on your own. If it doesn't resonate with your theological stance, work with and translate it until you make a connection in your own unique way. For all of us surrender may ultimately be more a matter of feeling our way into it than thinking our way into it. Let this video offer you that gift.
- Come to your group ready to share your journey - and where your journey is calling you to go (and what it is calling you to do) next.

Your Question

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework." Instead, simply pick the one that "hooks" you most and let it lead you where you need to go. Then come to your Soul Matters meeting prepared to share that journey with your group.

1. Are you living in (and holding on to) a story about yourself that isn't letting you grow?
2. Are you looking at (and holding on to) a story about others that isn't letting them grow? A story that is blinding you to the wholeness and complexity of who they really are? That is putting them in a box that they don't deserve? That is putting up an unnecessary wall between you and them?
3. Are you allowing yourself to be dragged? One of our Soul Matters participants writes, *"It took me 10 years of repression and 2 years of rumination before I forgave my ex-husband as a gift to myself for my birthday this year, and when I did, I realized how much lighter I felt. ... I'm now exercising my "forgiveness muscle"... because letting go feels so much better than being dragged."* How does your forgiveness muscle need a bit more exercising?
4. Are you writing hurts in stone and kindness in sand? The parable of Mussa and Nagib (available [here](#) and in the resources section) reminds us that when someone hurts us, we should write it in the sand so the winds of forgiveness can blow it away; but when someone is kind to us, we should write it in stone so we will never forget. Do you follow this wisdom or do you have it backwards?
5. Has letting go of "God" numbed you to "the "love that never lets us go"?"
6. Do you judge or celebrate those who have let go of God? Has your holding on to God led you to honor or look down upon those who have let God go?
7. Is doing your duty driving you farther and farther from yourself?
8. Is staying in control controlling you? Is it time to let go of always being in charge?
9. Is trying to look a certain way stopping you from seeing yourself?
10. Are you ready to forgive yourself? Sometimes the kind of mercy most needed is mercy for oneself. Is it time to let go of being so hard on yourself?
11. What's your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life 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 to open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be “a people of letting go.”

Letting Go

Synonyms: release, discard, set free, surrender, liberate

Wise Words

Skipping a Stone on Water

by Charles Darling

Whether it's the hand that finds the stone
or a stone that chooses the hand
is hard to say. The result is the same:
a thing that snugly fits the finger's crook,
smooth, nearly silky, to touch,
with heft enough to cleave the air
but light enough to spank off water —
good for ten to twenty skips
or more before it seems to skim, then float,
then sink, leaving a circle widening.

What's hard, my father taught me,
is not so much the proper match
of stone and hand, nor the way
the arm must swing exactly parallel to shore,
what's hard is what's unteachable:
reckoning that point at which you must release,
knowing something's bound to take
a proper course because you followed through
all the way, clear to the end —
it's learning the hard way how to let go.

Writers have to get used to launching something
beautiful and watching it crash and burn. They
also have to learn when to let go of control,
when the work takes off on its own and flies,
farther than they ever planned or imagined, to

places they didn't know they knew. All makers
must leave room for the acts of the spirit.

— Ursula LeGuin

Instructions

by Sheri Hostetler

Give up the world; give up self;
finally, give up God.
Find god in rhododendrons and rocks,
passers-by, your cat.
Pare your beliefs, your absolutes,
Make it simple; make it clean.
No carry-on luggage allowed.
Examine all you have
with a loving and critical eye, then
throw away some more.
Repeat. Repeat.
Keep this and only this:
 what your heart beats loudly for
 what feels heavy and full in your gut.
There will only be one or two
things you will keep,
and they will fit lightly
in your pocket.

from *Gestalt at Sixty*

by May Sarton

I am not ready to die,
But I am learning to trust death
As I have trusted life.
I am moving
Toward a new freedom
Born of detachment,
And a sweeter grace—
Learning to let go.

Not Knowing
by Stephen Levine

I may not know my original face
but I know how to smile.
I may not know the recipe for the diameter
of a circle but I know how to cut a slice
for a friend. I may not be Mary or the Buddha
but I can be kind. I may not be a diamond
cutter but I still long for rays of light
that reach the heart.
I may not be standing on the hill of skulls
but I know love when I see it.

Let It Go
by Danna Faulds

Let go of the ways you thought life would
unfold, the holding of plans or dreams or
expectations – Let it all go.
Save your strength to swim with the tide.
The choice to fight what is here before you now
will only result in struggle, fear, and desperate
attempts to flee from the very energy you long
for.
Let go. Let it all go and flow with the grace that
washes through your days whether you received
it gently or with all your quills raised to defend
against invaders.
Take this on faith; the mind may never find the
explanations that it seeks, but you will move
forward nonetheless.
Let go, and the wave's crest will carry you to
unknown shores, beyond your wildest dreams or
destinations.
Let it all go and find the place of rest and peace,
and certain transformation.

Everything I've ever let go of has claw marks on
it. — **Unknown**

For those of us getting older, with attics filled to
the brim with things we "thought we might
need", or for those who have lost a spouse and
are faced with cleaning out items with even

more poignancy, "Letting Go" is the first step in
facing the end years of our lives.

Keeping up a positive front while "downsizing"
our cherished family homes and gardens is not
done flippantly. Acceptance of change while we
are becoming physically and mentally less
flexible is a mighty undertaking, much like a
child's first steps, letting go of her parent's
steadying hands.

— **Claudia Everest, UU Milford, NH**

First Lesson
by Philip Booth

Lie back daughter, let your head
be tipped back in the cup of my hand.
Gently, and I will hold you. Spread
your arms wide, lie out on the stream
and look high at the gulls. A dead-
man's float is face down. You will dive
and swim soon enough where this tidewater
ebbs to the sea. Daughter, believe
me, when you tire on the long thrash
to your island, lie up, and survive.
As you float now, where I held you
and let go, remember when fear
cramps your heart what I told you:
lie gently and wide to the light-year
stars, lie back, and the sea will hold you.

To let go is not to quit. Indeed to let go is to
commit to something particular! The letting go
is of whatever holds you back. To let go is to
find that central and ultimate value in life
worthy of your commitment, and then to
surrender all else to win it.

—**Soul Matters Minister**

When cast into the depths, to survive, we must
first let go of things that will not save us. Then
we must reach out for the things that can.

—**Rev. Forrest Church**

Let go or be dragged. — **Zen proverb**

Let go of how you thought your life should be and embrace the life that is trying to work its way into your consciousness.

— **Unknown**

Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor the last toothsome morsel of both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—in so many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.

— **Frederick Buechner**

Videos & Online

The Parable of the Trapeze
by Danaan Parry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWvV5N4hOGc>

RadioLab with Oliver Sacks: “Memory and Forgetting”

<http://www.radiolab.org/story/91569-memory-and-forgetting/>

We let go of Oliver Sacks as he died this summer, but his wisdom about letting go lives on.

SLIP | @PhillipChbeeb & Renee Kester

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qk00gbDwGqM>

What happens when the most beautiful memories from our past end up doing the most damage to our future?

“Letting Go of God” by Julia Sweeney

http://www.ted.com/talks/julia_sweeney_on_letting_go_of_god?language=en

The Master gives himself up to whatever the moment brings.

He knows he is going to die,

And he has nothing left to hold on to:

No illusions in his mind,

No resistances in his body.

He doesn't think about his actions;

They flow from the core of his being.

He holds nothing back from life;

Therefore he is ready for death,

He holds nothing back from life;

Therefore he is ready for death,

As a man is ready for sleep

After a good day's work.

— **Tao de Ching**

The Parable of Mussa and Nagib

<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/tales/session5/123298.shtml>

Letting Go of the Pressure to Produce & Letting in a Little Useless Play

Try one of these sites:

<http://weavesilk.com/> — create interactive generative art

<http://thisissand.com/> — make virtual sand sculptures

<http://myshards.com/> — design sharp textures and patterns

Songs

“Weightless” by The Becca Stevens Band

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qk_qfA9YI_xg

“Throw It Away” by “Abbey Lincoln

Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2OO3vuk3r4>

Lyrics:<http://www.metrolyrics.com/throw-it-away-lyrics-abbey-lincoln.html>

Letting Go - Steffany Gretzinger

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_7XIKVgRGY

A beautiful theist expression of surrender and letting go

A Frozen Father (A bit of fun)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ud6B_NXoNc

Articles

Letting go of shame to embrace joy: an article engaging Brene Brown's wonderful book, *The Gifts of Imperfection*.

<http://www.yourtango.com/2015278444/dont-let-people-shame-your-goofy-open-hearted-happiness>

Letting go of who one used to be

<http://www.npr.org/2015/07/25/425655861/in-wondering-who-you-are-a-man-wakes-up-and-doesnt-know-his-wife>

Letting go of fears

<http://thespiritscience.net/2015/04/10/how-to-release-your-fears-before-they-manifest/>

Fall as a season of letting go

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/naming-the-days/view/10950/autumn-reflections-on-the-season>

Are we letting go of capitalism?

http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/17/postcapitalism-end-of-capitalism-begun?CMP=share_btn_fb

White Privilege Weariness

<http://austinchanning.com/blog/2014/3/weariness>

Movies

Griefwalker

A documentary about the leader of a palliative care team who has been at the deathbed of hundreds of people.

<http://www.nfb.ca/film/griefwalker>

Amish Grace

A drama about forgiveness and faith after the 2006 shooting at an Amish schoolhouse.

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/20229/amish-grace>

Wild

Based on the book by Cheryl Strayed.

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/27459/wild>

127 Hours

A man lives in self-imposed isolation from the people who love him in order to seek out his own individualistic adventures. An accident and the loss of a piece of himself allows him to embrace connection.

Toy Story 3

Growing up, letting go and holding on to the blessings of our childhoods.

Books

Life Lines: Holding On (And Letting Go)

by Forrest Church

The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up

by Marie Kondo

Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End

by Atul Gawande

The Gifts of Imperfection by Brene Brown

After the Sucker Punch: a Novel

by Lorraine Devon Wilke

"They buried her father at noon, at five she found his journals, and in the time it took to read one-and-a-half pages her world turned upside down... he thought she was a failure... She tries to "just let it go," as her sister suggests, but..."

Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss
by Pat Schwiebert & Chuck DeKlyen (written for children, but helpful for all ages)

A listing of books for children and families about letting go:

https://www.amazon.com/gp/registry/wishlist/2TTP2FRYCZNKA/ref=cm_wl_sortbar_v_page_2?ie=UTF8&page=2

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