

# Soul Matters

A Kaleidoscope of thoughts, images,  
stories, poetry, and ideas  
to engage hearts and minds



## *What Does It Mean To Be A People of Resistance?*

...it starts when you care to act,  
it starts when you do it again  
after they said no,  
it starts when you say We  
and know who you mean, and each  
day you mean one more.

--Marge Piercy, *from The Low Road*

Yes, this month's theme is among the most complex of them all. But it also may be the most simple. The complexity is clear:

Sometimes being a people of resistance involves struggle and requires us to disobey; other times it asks us to just be ourselves and not hide who we really are. Sometimes it involves defeating the enemy; other times, it is a matter of noticing that treating them as the enemy defeats us all.

Sometimes being a person of resistance is about fighting all the way to the top; other times, it's about picking yourself up off the floor and taking one tiny step. Sometimes it depends on the will to never let them win; other times it hinges on the wisdom to follow the path of least resistance.

It certainly takes the form of speaking our truth. But more often than not, it's about the harder task of speaking the truth in love.

We all know being a people of resistance involves refusing to comply and demanding change, which requires great courage. But sometimes the most courageous thing is to stop resisting and accept that things just aren't going to work out the way we hoped.

Bottom line: being a people of resistance is tricky business and takes multiple forms.

But beyond this complexity lies the simplicity of Marge Piercy's words. In all cases, she reminds us, being a people of resistance starts when we say *we*.

January puts this in stark relief. Think about all those New Year's resolutions that try to overcome our personal inertia. Who of us ever accomplishes that without help? Without someone holding us accountable or cheering us on?

Martin Luther King, Jr., Day makes it just as clear. Although we celebrate him as a great leader, he preached that change requires a movement. Simply put, none of us resist alone.

Or maybe it's better to say that none of us *have* to resist alone. We all know what it is like to *want* to resist. Think of all those voices we hear in our heads and feel in our hearts: (I'm not going to take it any more. I will not go along. I will not submit. I refuse to conform. I will no longer be numb. I will not give up. I will not forget. I will not go to sleep. I will ignore it no longer. I will not turn a blind eye.) And yet, we also know that those voices are hard to hear and hold on to by ourselves. The blessing, of course, is that we don't have to hold on alone.

It is one thing to be told, "Resist!" It is quite another to be told, "Resist together!" But often what we need most is simply to be reminded that we don't have to resist alone.

May this be the gift we give each other this month. Let's help each other remember to start by saying WE! It may be as simple as that.

# QUESTIONS TO WALK WITH

Below is a reflection and a list of questions to open the mind's gateway to reveal the wisdom that is right below the surface of our everyday ordinary lives. Pick one question, any, the one that grabs you and won't let go, then walk with it. Let your mind wander and wonder. Let the question percolate. Listen curiously to what surfaces. Live into the answers. Be surprised by what is discovered. Share what you learn with someone you meet along the way.



1. What would happen if you saw praise, joy or the creation of beauty as your primary form of resistance? What if the world needs your praise as much as your picket signs? What if it needs the creation of beauty as much as the elimination of injustice?
2. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." How is life asking you to end your silence?
3. Is it really an insurmountable and futile challenge? Or just a matter of taking the next small step?
4. The psychiatrist Carl Jung wrote, "What you resist, persists." So, is it possible that your resistance is the source of the struggle you are in? Would the fight end if you stopped fighting? Would the wall fall down if you *stopped* pushing on it?
5. Has the habit become bad? Is it time to be honest about how your habit controls you more than you control it?
6. If you were put on trial for being countercultural, would you be convicted?
7. Is it possible that your refusal to give up and give in may be a way of avoiding the pain?
8. Is labeling them the enemy defeating both them *and you*?
9. Are your efforts to save the world leaving room to savor it?
10. What would happen if you saw your justice work not as saving the world or bending the arc of the universe towards justice, but simply as "being a pest"? (Inspired by the Dalai Lama, who wrote: "If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito.")
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.

## Opening Words

The moment we begin to fear the opinions of others and hesitate to tell the truth that is in us, and from motives of policy are silent when we should speak, the divine floods of light and life no longer flow into our souls.

~ Elizabeth Cady Stanton

## Closing Words

The Touch still burns, and because it does, there remains for all of us a chance to light up the tomorrow and brighten the future. ... this is the challenge that makes life worthwhile.

~Robert Kennedy

# *Spiritual Practice - Deepening Experiences*

## Option A

### **Give It Some Thought**

This exercise invites us into internal work. Authored by one of our Soul Matters ministers, the following poem challenges us to face those “impenetrable places” in a new way. Instead of pushing against or running away from those inner “steel doors” right away, it asks us to just “stay there” and “breathe.”

In that spirit of sitting still, use this poem as your guide and companion this month. Weave it into your daily meditation or reflective practice. Pay attention to the way a new line will stand out each day. Come to your group ready to share the journey, where it took you and what it taught you about the resistance we wrestle with inside.

### **Resistance**

**By Peter Friedrichs, Soul Matters Minister**

Press the tender flesh of your knowing  
Against the steel door of your fear.

Stay there, breathing,  
as its icy skin draws out the heat  
of your racing heart.

Feel its resistance  
to the yes of your hopes,  
the imminent expiration  
of your dreams.

You could have avoided this pain.  
You could have stayed safely cradled,  
blind, in the womb of your ignorance.

But in the silence of a moonless night  
something called you here,  
to this impenetrable place.

At the edge of sleep, or death,  
you heard a sound  
from beyond this door:

A prisoner, past all hope of release,  
tapping his bent spoon  
against the cell wall  
that divides you,  
desperate to be heard and known.

This is your life calling.  
And now, having heard its cry,  
you have no choice but  
to find a way through.

## Option B

### **Get Going ... But Not On Your Own**

This is the month of New Year’s resolutions. This year don’t just pick a resolution; pick a partner! Honoring the spiritual practice of accountability, tell a trusted friend about your resolution and then ask them to help hold you to it. Choose whatever accountability strategy that works best for both of you. Maybe ask them to text you once a day to remind or encourage you. Instead of running alone, ask them to run with you for the month. Maybe your resolution is to get back to writing. If so, ask them to be your editor.

And don’t just ask them to hold you accountable. Ask them to help you reflect on the experience itself. Sit down for at least one conversation before your small group meeting to talk with your “resolution partner” about how it felt to be held accountable and to hold one accountable. What did it teach you - and them - about the power of resisting *together*?

## Option C

### **Give Thanks!**

Who made resistance possible for you? Who stood beside you as you stood against the status quo? Who helped remind you that the arc really can be bent? Who invited you into a vision of an entirely new day? Who made you feel like a one of a kind rather than a misfit? Who helped you resist the pressures to follow the herd?

Someone stood beside you. Someone picked you up for the protests. Someone taught the class that opened your eyes. Someone wrote the poem that inspired you. Someone’s sacrifice moved your heart. Someone’s courage rubbed off on you. Someone told you that you were precious. Someone made you feel like you aren’t in the fight alone.

Thank them! That’s it. Your assignment: Find a way to thank them and tell them how they made your resistance possible. Let them know what a gift it was.



### **Here's to the crazy ones.**

Here's to the crazy ones.  
The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers.  
The round pegs in the square holes.  
The ones who see things differently.  
They're not fond of rules.  
And they have no respect for the status quo.  
You can praise them, disagree with them,  
quote them,  
disbelieve them, glorify or vilify them.  
About the only thing you can't do is ignore them.  
Because they change things.  
They invent. They imagine.  
They heal. They explore. They create. They inspire.  
They push the human race forward.  
Maybe they have to be crazy.

How else can you stare at an empty canvas and see a  
work of art?  
Or sit in silence and hear a song that's never been  
written?  
Or gaze at a red planet and see a laboratory on  
wheels?  
While some may see them as the crazy ones, we see  
genius.

Because the people who are crazy enough to think  
they can change the world,  
are the ones who do.

~ Advertisement for Apple Computer, snatched -  
without attribution - from the writings of Jack  
Kerouac

## Articles & Online

### **“Holy, Holy, Holy! Praise as Resistance” by Trevor Malkinson**

The author states: “But it somehow never occurred to me that I could also voice this positive dimension, this praise for creation, as a form of political resistance.” Be sure to listen to the Allen Ginsberg reading “A Footnote to Howl” linked to at the end of the article. (This is slightly “not safe for work” due to a little bit of R-rated language.)

<http://tinyurl.com/q9gk9nu>

### **White Debt**

An article about resisting the reality of white privilege: <http://tinyurl.com/obpgt3p>

### **“How to Overcome Immunity to Change” by Jessie Scholl**

For those looking for some practical guidance on how to make real and lasting changes, “two prominent researchers share a step-by-step plan that can help you break through old patterns and finally make the shifts that matter.”

<https://experiencelife.com/article/how-to-overcome-immunity-to-change/>

## Books

### ***Spiritual Defiance: Building a Beloved Community of Resistance* by Robin Meyers**

*from the book review:* “In this provocative and passionate book, [Meyers] explores the decline of the church as a community of believers and calls readers back to the church’s roots as a community of resistance. Shifting the conversation about church renewal away from theological purity and marketing strategies that embrace cultural norms, and toward ‘embodied noncompliance’ with the dominant culture, Meyers urges a return to the revolutionary spirit that marked Jesus’s ministry.” <http://tinyurl.com/pd3a7ya>

### ***All the Light We Cannot See: A Novel* by Anthony Doerr**

A Pulitzer Prize winning novel “about a blind French girl and a German boy whose paths collide in occupied France as both try to survive the devastation of World War II.” This book “illuminates the ways, against all odds, people try to be good to one another.”

<http://tinyurl.com/zsrckm6>



This Soul Matters packet was created by Rev. Carie Johnsen at Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Augusta, ME.

Thoughts within were gleaned from the Soul Matters Network, the UUCC Resource Circle, and other sources. If you would like to share your experience and wisdom for future packets, please email [minister@augustauu.org](mailto:minister@augustauu.org). To receive an electronic copy please email [info@augustauu.org](mailto:info@augustauu.org). To learn more about Unitarian Universalist Community Church, please visit our website [www.augustauu.org](http://www.augustauu.org).