

# 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 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.



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).

# 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 meet along the way.



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?

March is also

## **Women's History Month**

In recognition of Liberation and Women's History Month, please see the following Small Group Ministry Session Plans developed by the UU Women's Heritage Society (now part of the UU History and Heritage Society) on line at <http://www.smallgroupministry.net/public/sessions/index.html>

Failure Is Impossible (3 sessions, GA 2012)  
Let Us Now Praise Those Who Came Before  
Trailblazers

A Hundred Years Hence  
Deep Roots and Hidden History

# *Spiritual Practice - Deepening Experiences*

## **OPTION A:**

### **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 free 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. The instructions are no more complicated 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/](http://gretchenrubin.com/happiness_project/2015/03/like-gollum-do-you-have-something-precious-that-isnt-good-for-you/)

## **OPTION B:**

### **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.



## Other Wise Words...

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***

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. Lounsborough**

### Closing Words

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'd have done it already  
and left the hardest for  
last.

— **Stephen Levine (adapted)**

### Opening Words

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**

### 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. Who knows why.  
I look at all the names

we once carved into  
its sedimentary sides.  
How important

I thought they were,  
those names. How  
I've clung to labels,

who's right, who's wrong,  
how I've cared about  
who's pushed harder

and who's been slack.  
Now all I want  
is to let the rock

roll back to where it belongs,  
which is wherever it lands,  
and you and I could,

Imagine! walk unencumbered,  
all the way to the top and  
walk and walk and never stop

except t to discover what  
our hands might do  
if for once they were no longer

pushing.

—**Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer**