

# Soul Matters

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



## 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 grip, 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



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.



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

1. Are you living in (and holding onto) a story about yourself that isn't letting you grow?
2. Are you looking at (and holding onto) 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. Has letting go of "God" numbed you to "the love that never lets us go"?
5. 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?
6. Do you judge or celebrate those who have NOT let go of God? Has your letting go to God led you to honor or look down upon those who hang on to God?
7. Is staying in control controlling you? Is it time to let go of always being in charge?
8. Is trying to look a certain way stopping you from seeing yourself?
9. 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?

### **Opening Words**

I rise to pray my story, tell my prayer,  
a thousand, thousand tiny sparks  
and I am one,  
a bit of burning dust  
of gratitude exacting,  
of light turning to praise.

~ Ted Loder

### **Closing Words**

Those are my people,  
who touch my hands,  
who invite me to come along,  
who make room for me to sit  
in the shadow of the candlelight  
and listen to their songs.

~Gerald Brennan

# *Spiritual Practice - Deepening Experiences*

## Option A:

### **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](http://austinchanning.com/blog/2014/3/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 our 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 B:

### **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](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 rather 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.



### 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.

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 steady hands.

— **Claudia Everest, UU Milford, NH**

## Other Wise Words...

### 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.

\*\*\*

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.

### 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.