



Soul Matters

What does it mean to be
a people of **LIBERATION**?



Small Group

April 2020

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

Jena is right. Liberation is much more complicated than we usually tell ourselves. It would be so much easier if life really was divided up neatly between the good and bad guys, between those trapped and those holding the key. There are certainly times when the fight for freedom is about calling out and challenging “those people.” But true liberation seems to rest with those who have the courage to start with themselves and notice how “me” and “them” are more entangled than it appears at first blush.

And seeing ourselves as both prison and key is only the beginning. Sometimes we are also the guard, carrying out orders we don’t like but are too afraid to challenge. And what about the many ways we are funders of the entire jail? The wise ones are right: dismantling oppressive systems begins with noticing the many ways we ourselves prop it up.

So does this mean that confession plays a bigger role in liberation than we’d like to admit? Well, yes, a bit of healthy self-confrontation seems a must. We need to push ourselves when we play the helpless victim, put on the holier-than-thou cloak of self-righteousness and hide behind those stories about having “good intentions” or “clean hands.”

Yet, as every religion worth its salt says, confession by itself leads down a dark road. It must always be paired with compassion. We’ve got to remember that as well. We’ve got to remember that we are all liberators and oppressors, victims and victimizers. It’s not just you that is prisoner, key, guard, warden and jail funder wrapped into one. It’s all of us. You, me, them. We all play all the parts. We’re all caught up in the mess, pain and tragedy of it together.

Which seems to mean we all need to be a bit more humble and a bit more kind.

Indeed, in the end, maybe those are the most important keys. Maybe that’s the way we all can make it out together.

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A:

The Mess That Set You Free

Alanis Morissette's song, [Thank U](#), functions like a gratitude prayer to the many unexpected sources of liberation in her life:

*“Thank you India
Thank you terror
Thank you disillusionment
Thank you frailty
Thank you consequence
Thank you silence!”*

It’s a testament to the way liberation comes from the most unlikely of sources, such as struggle, pain and mess.

So how about you? When was the last time you thanked the challenges and messes in your life for surprisingly setting you free? When has the thing you resisted ended up showing you the way to new life? Saying thanks for those moments starts with remembering.

So find a quiet moment this month and make Morissette’s song the centerpiece of your meditation. Set aside at least a half hour and play the song numerous times, long enough for the lyrics to wash over you. Eventually, one of Morissette’s phrases will transport you back to a memory. Once you’ve arrived, spend some time with that memory and, in your own way, say thanks!

Here’s a version of the song that lists the lyrics in case you it helps you focus on the words:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DK9zCnfMAeM>

Option B:

Escape Your Ruts

Our ruts are among the most ubiquitous forms of imprisonment out there. Their power rests in their comfort. Going through life on autopilot is more alluring than we acknowledge. And more dangerous. Numb is no way to go through our days.

So, this month, why not liberate yourself from your routines?! We promise an unexpected gift will arise.

Here are some suggestions to get you inspired. Do them for a week or two:

- Instead of starting your day with the news, find a way to begin with beauty.
- Forgo your usual route home and explore some back roads and “new ways home.”
- Trade in coffee for tea.
- Swap chores with your spouse or kids.
- Noticing that your wardrobe is a bit neutral tone heavy? Force yourself to weave some color into what you wear.
- Been bingeing on Netflix a lot lately? Why not try out one of these things they call “a book”?
- Proud of how many books you read weekly? Ask your friends to recommend their favorite Netflix series?
- End your pattern of checking email first thing when you wake up.

Option C: Face a Fear

“Fear is the cheapest room in the house. I’d like to see you in better living conditions.” – Hafiz

Ok, let’s be honest: none of us *want* to do this exercise! If we did, that bag of fears would be empty by now. But notice that we’re not asking you to *overcome* one of your fears. The challenge is just to *face it*.

You see maybe we’ve missed the point for a while now: We talk so much about *eliminating* our fears that we fail to notice the other options and opportunities. What about *listening* to our fears? Or *learning* from them? Or even *befriending* them? In other words, what if fear isn’t just a threat but also a messenger? What if facing our fears doesn’t just lead to bravery but also insight?

With this in mind, you’re invited not only to face a fear but also hang out with it long enough to see what it might have to teach you. Here are some questions to take with you as you dive in:

- **Who** taught you this fear? (Notice how different this question is from “What caused it?” or “When did it arise?”)
- Who in your family of origin shares the fear? What did you learn from the way they handled it?
- Have you told others about your fear? Why not?
- Are you embarrassed of your fear?
- Are you passing your fear on to others?
- Have you ever felt grateful for this fear? i.e. Has it ever usefully given you an excuse? Do you actually like how it spices up your personality? Could part of the reason we hold on to our fears be that they make us more interesting?
- Is there a deeper fear behind the fear you picked?

For many of us, picking an activity to face our fear will be straight-forward. For instance, those of us with a fear of heights will likely choose to have lunch on the top floor of a skyscraper, or those with a fear of spiders or snakes will go to the zoo on the day when the zookeeper pulls them out and allows people to hold them. But for those of us who have fears that aren’t so straight-forward, here are some suggestions about how to engage them:

- Afraid of expressing your feelings? Write a letter to someone you love and tell them why that is the case.
- Afraid of being with yourself? Go out to dinner alone or see a movie by yourself.
- Afraid of admitting something to yourself? Go on a day-long or weekend silent retreat where you won’t be able to escape yourself.
- Afraid of aging or losing your physical beauty? Stop using makeup for a month, stop dyeing your hair or stop wearing that hat to cover up the bald spot.
- Afraid of rejection? Invite just two friends over for dinner and finally read your poems out loud to an audience?
- Afraid of losing what you have? Go out for a ridiculously expensive meal?
- Afraid of asking for help? Go back to that friend or family member who offered you a loan, helping hand or listening ear and take them up on it.
- Afraid of being rejected or being noticed? Dye your hair a bold color, buy new glasses with outrageous frames or add some serious color to your wardrobe.

Finally, here are some great videos to accompany you along the way:

- 10 TED Talks: <https://www.inc.com/john-boitnott/10-inspiring-ted-talks-that-will-help-you-overcome.html>
- 100 days without fear: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qst7R7e0Q20> & <http://100dayswithoutfear.com/list>

Option D: Remind Yourself You Did It Before... and Can Do it Again!

What about being your own inspiration?!

Sure others motivate us. All the time. They give us the courage and imagination to make changes in our lives that set us free.

But what about our own courageous choices? What about those times in our lives when we surprised ourselves with what we could do? What about those moments when we stuck with it and altered our lives for the better? Remembering how we set ourselves free in the past is the best way to escape what is imprisoning us today!

So this month, instead of turning to others, make time to review your life for those many moments when you made a change that markedly improved your life. Literally **make a list!** Keep it handy for at least a few days so you can add to it as new memories come to mind.

After your list feels hefty enough, move on to the next step of figuring out what **new change** is calling to you. What can you do right now to feel more free? What's a change you can make to improve your life?"

To help, here's a list of what a number of anonymous church folk said when they were asked about what "liberating change" they made in their life:

*I no longer feel guilty about saying "No, I'd prefer not to.
I spend at least 10 minutes of sitting in silence everyday by myself
I'm finally going to therapy and sticking with it.
I stopped believing I was unhealthy because I was fat.
I called myself "an artist" rather than telling people "I do art sometimes."
I meditate every single day.
I removed toxic people from my life.
I take all of my vacation time every year after many years letting it lapse.
I hired someone to clean my house, even though my parents-in-law were appalled that I did it.
I let myself go gray grey.
I've stopped saying "yes" when i want to say "no"
I no longer allow men to interrupt me.
I buy the expensive beer.
I read my poems out loud to people who ask.
I started telling myself "You know what you are talking about."
I started praying*

Option E: Give A Liberator a Boost!

The work of liberating others comes at a cost. There's a reason we so often use the language of "laying down your life for others." This is true regardless of whatever liberating work one has given their life to, be it that of an activist, social worker, nurse, planned parenthood doc, teacher or school tutor, just to name a few.

And maybe the greatest cost is the nagging worry that it might not be worth it. Fighting deeply entrenched social and personal foes rarely leaves one feeling "I've won." It's hard to see the difference you've made. And that takes a toll.

What helps is when others come along and tell you that your work and sacrifice has mattered.

So this month, get busy and give a boost to a few liberators you admire the most!

Maybe it's an old teacher of yours. Could also be a politician who has stood by their integrity and paid for it. Maybe it's the unsung lawyer who has given up the "big jobs" to make sure the doors of the legal aid clinic stay open. Or what about the burnt out volunteer who has spent 1-2 Saturdays every month for the past ten years at the local shelter?

Send them a note or an email. Take them out to lunch. Make a donation in their honor. However you decide, tell them you admire them. Tell them how inspiring it has been to watch them from afar. Tell them how they have liberated or inspired you! Maybe you know them personally; maybe you don't. Maybe they have helped you directly; maybe not. What matters is that they hear you say you notice them and that you believe the world is better because of them.

Option F: Find Liberation in Our Recommended Resources

Our recommended resources are full of wisdom about what it means to be a people of and a person of liberation. Engaging these resources and finding the one that especially speaks to you is a spiritual practice in and of itself.

So, if none of the above exercises call to you, engage the recommended resources section of this packet as your spiritual exercise for the month.

Set aside some regular time throughout a week to go through them and meditate on them until you find the one that most expands or deepens your understanding of liberation. After you've found it, consider printing it out and carrying it with you or pinning it up so you can continue to reflect on it throughout the weeks leading up to your group meeting. Come to your group ready to share where the journey led you.

Your Question

Don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every single one. Instead, make time to meditate on the list and then pick the one question that speaks to you most. The goal is to figure out which question is "yours." Which question captures the call of your inner voice? Which one contains "your work"? What is that question trying to get you to notice or acknowledge?

Often it helps to read the list to a friend or loved one and ask them which question they think is the question you need to wrestle with!

1. What's something you know now about liberation that you didn't know when you were 18 years old?
2. Have you become more or less free as you've aged?
3. For you, what is the opposite of liberation?
4. Do you need to liberate yourself from the ordinary?
5. Is the strategy you once used to survive now leaving you with no room to breathe?
6. *Who* taught your greatest fear? (Notice how different this question is from "What caused it?" or "When did it arise?")
7. Who in your family of origin shares your greatest fear? What did you learn from the way they handled it?
8. Do you need a new metaphor for your liberation? After all, telling yourself "I need to escape" is very different than "It's time for me to finally leap." Or maybe it's time for you to "break free" or "let go" or "refuse to carry it anymore." For some, liberation is found in "refusing to run away." For others, it's about "allowing myself to feel I deserve it." How about you?
9. Are you unnecessarily trapped in shame? There's a big difference between shame and guilt. Telling yourself "something is wrong with me" is very different than telling yourself "I did something wrong." Do you know the difference? Could reminding yourself of it be the key to setting yourself free?
10. They say the role of the artist is to make revolution irresistible. Could this be your calling?
11. Do you ever feel like you are spending your days on the ends of strings that somebody else pulls?
12. Have you ever used the work of liberating others as a way of avoiding your own liberating work?
13. Do you need to ask someone to **stop** trying to liberate you?
14. Are you imprisoned by what *might* happen?
15. Who needs let out of the box you've put them in?
16. Do you need to let *yourself* out of the box you've put yourself in?
17. **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. Or maybe the question or call you need to hear is waiting in one of the quotes listed below. Consider looking there!

Companion Pieces

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. We will not analyze these pieces in our group. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get you thinking and open you up to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of liberation.

Wise Words

To be free...You must know, not that you can do whatever you want... You must know instead, that inside you are entire Universes [and]... you must fight for the entire Universes inside of everyone else...

[Rev. Theresa I. Soto](#)

No one who has ever touched liberation could possibly want anything other than liberation for everyone.

[Rev. angel Kyodo williams](#)

i am learning that getting well in community is liberation. we are interdependent. when one of us attains freedom it elicits/rekindles that longing in each of us.

adrienne maree brown

We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Marianne Williamson

There is something in you that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself. It is the only true guide you will ever have. And if you cannot hear it, you will spend your days on the ends of strings that somebody else pulls.

Howard Thurman

The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion.

Camus

The truth is, however, that the oppressed are not “marginals,” are not people living “outside” society. They have always been “inside”—inside the structure which made them “beings for others.” The solution is not to “integrate” them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become “beings for themselves.”

Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

The [person] who proclaims devotion to the cause of liberation yet is unable to enter into communion with the people, whom he or she continues to regard as totally ignorant, is grievously self-deceived. The convert who approaches the people but feels alarm at each step they take, each doubt they express, and each suggestion they offer, and attempts to impose his "status," remains nostalgic towards his origins.

Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

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

Your uprising against the forces of darkness has got to do more than say "no." A fierce, primal yes should be at the heart of your crusade.

[rob brezny](#)

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have never yet engaged in a direct action movement that was "well timed," according to the timetable of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the words "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

I'm an organizer, not an activist. An activist goes to meetings, an organizer knocks on doors.

Abbie Hoffman

Liberation that raises a cry against others is no true liberation. Liberation that means revolutions of hate and violence and takes away lives of others or abases the dignity of others cannot be true liberty.

Oscar Romero

The role of the artist is to make revolution irresistible.

Toni Cade Bambara

The small man

Builds cages for everyone

He

Knows.

While the sage,

Who has to duck his head

When the moon is low,

Keeps dropping keys all night long

For the

Beautiful

Rowdy

Prisoners.

Hafiz

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

Come to the edge. We can't. We're afraid. Come to the edge. We can't. We'll fall! Come to the edge. And they came. And he pushed them. And they flew.

Guillaume Apollinaire

Fear is the cheapest room in the house. I'd like to see you in better living conditions.

Hafiz

None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

Romans 7:15

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

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

Johnathan Jena

I used to be afraid of the dark. I used to be afraid of what's inside my broken parts... They asked me why I won't set them free... We are the prisoners and the guards. Holding our pain hostage in our hearts...

Aisha Badru - [Prisoners & Guards](#)

We are our stories, stories that can be both prison and the crowbar to break open the door of that prison; we make stories to save ourselves or to trap ourselves or others, stories that lift us up or smash us against the stone wall of our own limits and fears. Liberation is always in part a storytelling process: breaking stories, breaking silences, making new stories. A free person tells her own story. A valued person lives in a society in which her story has a place.

[Rebecca Solnit](#)

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

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... Self-compassion is a wonderful gift to give yourself.

John O'Donohue in Eternal Echoes

suffering makes sense to me... i can see the worst case scenarios fanned out before me, a million lonely paths... [so] i have had to learn to cultivate joy, to generate and extend trust, to be still, to focus my attention on what brings me ease, to give myself permission to experience beauty and love.

adrienne maree brown

Perhaps It Would Eventually Erode, But ...

Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

Full poem at

<http://www.ayearofbeinghere.com/2015/10/rosemary-wahtola-trommer-perhaps-it.html>

That rock that we
have been pushing up
the hill...
what if
we stopped? We are not
Sisyphus. This rock
is not a punishment...
It's something we've chosen
to push...

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

Bryant McGill

I have noticed that beliefs work like blinders on a racehorse. They keep you focused in a specific direction. This can be great as long as you have a destination in mind. But what good are blinders when you are grazing in a beautiful meadow on a crisp, clear spring day? I wore my blinders so long I forgot I had them on!

Melody Anderson

The more you try to control something, the more it controls you. Free yourself and let things take their own natural course.

Unknown

Sometimes what you're most afraid of doing is the very thing that will set you free.

Robert Tew

Letting go gives us freedom, and freedom is the only condition for happiness. If, in our heart, we still cling to anything—anger, anxiety, or possessions—we cannot be free.

Thich Nhat Hanh

The true liberation, the true path to freedom, lay in the ability to forgive.

Alyson Noel

in my life, liberating myself from media and most gossip has given me more time to do the things i often wished I could do – give love and attention to those who need and request it, meditate, eat healthy, yoga, compost, be present in my relationships, be a better daughter sister friend lover auntie, facilitate for low cost or free, write, create, doula, cook...be myself. now I notice when I coach or work with people who experience scarcity around time, they almost always spend a lot of time tracking, processing and proliferating news cycles on which they personally have negligible impact. I always want to ask what they are gifting their time to...do they realize how precious their attention really is? do you?

[adrienne maree brown](#)

It is our attitude toward events, not events themselves, which we can control. Nothing is by its own nature calamitous -- even death is terrible only if we fear it.

Epictetus

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response.

[Stephen R. Covey](#)

We Have Not Come Here To Take Prisoners

Hafiz, translated by Daniel Ladinsky

Full poem at

<https://jessbaldwin.com/blog/2016/4/10/we-have-not-come-to-take-prisoners>

We have not come here to take prisoners
But to surrender ever more deeply
To freedom and joy...

Run my dear, From anything
That may not strengthen
Your precious budding wings.
Run like hell, my dear...

Music

We create two different playlists on the theme each month: one in [Spotify](#) and another in [YouTube](#). We organize these lists as a journey of sorts. So consider listening from beginning to end and using the lists as musical meditations. Follow the links below to connect with our “liberation songs” and much more!

Click [here](#) for the Spotify [Liberation](#) playlist.

Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on [liberation](#).

Some extras for this month:

Easter playlist on [Spotify](#) & [YouTube](#)

Earth Day playlist on [Spotify](#) & [YouTube](#)

Videos & Podcasts

Love Liberates

Maya Angelou

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbeckv2xR14>

Still I Rise

Maya Angelou

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=59&v=JqOqo50LSZ0&feature=emb_logo

“You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I’ll rise.”

Forget Shorter Showers: Why Personal Change Does Not Equal Political Change

<https://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/forget-shorter-showers/>

Today I Rise: A call for and celebration of female liberation

<https://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/today-i-rise/>

Body Liberation – A Fearless Rebel Radio interview with Jes Baker

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSMGEF8FJdA>

On choosing “body liberation” over “body love”...

The Problem with Body Positivity, by comedian Sofie Hagen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixlcGkugZ18>

The Long Road to Pride

<https://www.facebook.com/DublinBusNews/videos/836998473340636/?v=836998473340636>

“You shouldn’t look at life as a journey. You should look at it as a dance. But it has to be a journey until you shed the loads that you are carrying. And then you can dance!”

On laughter and liberation, Anthony McCarten

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2qM1I-JCEQ>

“Humor obliges us to have an open mind. It obliges us to empathy and forgiveness. If you lose the power to laugh you lose the power to think. Sometimes only humor can break down entrenched positions and rigid ideology... If we can laugh together, we can live together...”

Stuck On An Escalator

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrSUE_m19FY&list=PLjTi_2sPB4uanB-9mwgWb_UFW1m5rIXiL&index=3

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

Articles

We Must Reclaim Our Lives from Anti-Black Racism

Chris Crass

<https://ummahwide.com/for-white-people-who-want-the-racist-nightmare-to-end-we-must-reclaim-our-lives-from-anti-black-27ce57887af2>

Breaking Silence as Our Mightiest Weapon Against Oppression

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2017/03/20/rebecca-solnit-mother-of-all-questions-silence/>

A reflection on Rebecca Solnit's idea that "Liberation is always in part a storytelling process. Breaking stories, breaking silences, making new stories. A free person tells her own story, a valued person lives in a society in which their story has a place..."

Your Liberation Is on the Line

Rev. angel Kyodo williams

<https://www.lionsroar.com/your-liberation-is-on-the-line/>

"No one who has ever touched liberation could possibly want anything other than liberation for everyone... It comes down to this: if you don't get on your path, I don't get to finish mine. We're bound..."

Books

How We Fight White Supremacy: A Field Guide to Black Resistance

Akiba Solomon & Kenrya Rankin

"A celebration of Black resistance, from protests to art to sermons to joy, offers a blueprint for the fight for freedom and justice... brings together voices such as Tarana Burke, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Harry Belafonte, Alicia Garza, Kiese Laymon, Imani Perry, Dr. Yaba Blye, Mahogany L. Brown, Aja Graydon, Christopher Rashad Green, Damon Young, and many, many more."

Interview and talk by the authors: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?459562-1/how-fight-white-supremacy>

When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir

Patrisse Khan-Cullors & asha bandele

A personal story and communal call about struggling for liberation in a culture that declares innocent Black life expendable.

Interview with Khan-Cullors on Democracy Now!:

<https://www.democracynow.org/2018/1/16/when-they-call-you-a-terrorist>

Part two of the interview:

<https://www.democracynow.org/2018/1/16/we-are-not-the-terrorists-black>

Movies & TV

[Rectify](#)

[Fearless](#)

[If Beale Street Could Talk](#)

[BlackkKlansman](#)

[13th](#)

[Wadjda](#)

[Iron Jawed Angels](#)

[Ladies in Black](#)

[The Diary of a Teenage Girl](#)

[Period. End of Sentence](#)

[Too Late to Die Young](#)

More Monthly Inspiration from Soul Matters!

Our Facebook Inspiration Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

Our Instagram Page:

Find us as “soul_matters_circle”

Music Playlists:

Click [here](#) for links to the [Spotify playlists](#) for each month.

Click [here](#) to check out the [YouTube playlists](#).

Find support for bringing the monthly themes home and into your family life with

Soulful Home: A Guide for Families:

<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/soulful-home.html>

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