



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



# What Does It Mean to Be a People of Brokenness?

My friend Leena once brought me a gift from a trip to her family's homeland in Myanmar – a small seated figure carefully carved in rosewood with great attention to his hatted face, robe and bare feet. But when Leena retrieved the figure from her suitcase after the long flight home, she discovered the wood had split. A crack, starting between the figure's feet, extended all the way up through his torso to his left shoulder.

Leena was disappointed and apologetic. But I appreciated the carving and have treasured it for decades since, even as the crack has deepened. An added line in the wooden figure, it reminds me of the broken openings that inevitably occur in the course of every life and the new contours created by time and travel.

Today, in our disrupted era of so much brokenness, writ large across the globe and also as personal as it comes, I am wondering, what could it mean to notice and accept the broken cracks within and around us all as the gift they might be? Not denying the pain and grief caused by brokenness, but accepting that neither life nor love, relationship nor growth is possible without it. As Judith Butler once said, "Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something. If this seems so clearly the case with grief, it is only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact."

This is true not only of the human heart and in personal relationships, but also of the systems and covenants undergirding our communities and nations. What might we learn by being present to the brokenness so apparent all around us today? What might be possible if we accept the invitation brokenness issues to bring our fractures together, side by side, discovering what might emerge from their reassembled pieces?

In the ancient story of the Israelites fleeing Egypt, when Moses received the ten commandments on Mount Sinai, the first pair of tablets was the set Moses broke in anger, dashing them to the ground when he returned and found the Israelites worshipping idols made in his absence. The second set of tablets, created in Moses' next trip up Mount Sinai, was the pair that stayed intact. Jewish teachings on this story suggest that both sets of tablets – the broken and the whole – were kept in the holy ark as the Israelites traveled through the wilderness, prompting poet Rodger Kamenetz to consider the fragments and muse:

*how they must have rattled around until the pieces  
broke into pieces, the edges softened  
crumbling, dust collected at the bottom of the ark  
ghosts of old letters, old laws.<sup>1</sup>*

Today, as the old year has ended and a new one begins, perhaps we are asked to consider, what are we each carrying in our heart, broken and unbroken? What ghosts of letters and trusted words are still whispering to us from the dust of shattered dreams, personal or shared – dreams of peace and well-being, of democracy and justice, of habitat and ecology? What old patterns of relationship remain present inside each of us, carved into our being despite the divisiveness and isolation of our times? What deeper patterns of interdependence are still shaping and supporting the tattered communities we tend today?

As we begin the new year focusing on the theme of Brokenness, how might we carry our covenants forward, remembering the larger wholeness in which all brokenness is nested? What new resolutions and realities might be born of a brokenness noted and tended like that?

Karen Hering, associate minister

(adapted from *CommUNITY*, January 2020)

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<sup>1</sup> "[\*The Broken Tablets.\*](#)" Rodger Kamenetz.  
Chalice Circles

## *Our Spiritual Exercises*

### **Option A: Brokenness as a Natural State**

*"Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something. If this seems so clearly the case with grief, it is only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact." Judith Butler*

Read Dorianne Laux's poem "What's Broken" in the resources of this packet and notice that her litany of broken things makes no mention of repair. Instead, in the middle of the poem, the poet asks a question that suggests brokenness may be our natural state, bringing a certain poetic sense of order and perhaps healing to the brokenness she catalogs.

*... What hasn't / been rent, divided, split? Broken / the days into nights, the night sky / into stars, the stars into patterns / I make up as I trace them / with a broken-off blade / of grass....*

At the end of each day, take a few moments to recall and list what you have experienced or encountered that is broken. They can be objects, habits, relationships, hopes, promises, systems. Notice the feelings that arise in you as you name them. It might be grief, or anger, or despair. Depending on your relationship with the brokenness, it could also be acceptance or curiosity, or even relief. Try to name one or more brokenness that is not sorrowful and may just be the nature of the world (like Dorianne Laux's days broken into nights). Choose one entry on your list each day to write about – a few sentences or at most, a page – reflecting on the nature of that brokenness and what it means to you.

After a week of this practice, review your lists and write your own "What's Broken" poem, modeled after Dorianne Laux's. What do you learn from your listing and reflecting? What comes to light as you write your poem about brokenness?

## Option B: The Buddhist Practice of Maitri: Sympathy for Ourselves

Buddhism teaches a meditative practice that engages compassion for ourselves and others to help us deal with our pain and anger. The practice called “maitri” teaches us to develop our unconditional love for ourselves as a path to healing. In this video, Pema Chodron explains the practice:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=pema+chodron+maitri+youtube&oq=pema+ch&aqs=chrome.69i59j0l2j69i57j69i61j0.4566j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

Our brokenness allows us to begin to care for and soothe ourselves. When we begin to love ourselves unconditionally, we begin to know that even our brokenness is a part of who we are and that we can live with that. That we are still whole, even though parts of ourselves are wounded. Maitri offers us a meditation of compassion for ourselves that encompasses all our experiences in life even the most painful ones. It allows us to practice acceptance of all of the parts of our lives, knowing that while we may not be healed, we can move on. We can love again. We can stop blaming others for our difficulties and can start moving ahead as people with the realities of both pain and joy in our life history.

### The Practice:

1. Think about a time in your life when your feelings were hurt – someone said something to you and you felt hurt, stupid, ugly, weird, or out of step because of something you said or did and you got some kind of reaction from someone. You felt hurt and had a hard time accepting yourself afterwards. Spend a few minutes thinking about such a time.
2. Now take a minute to sit in a comfortable seat with your feet planted firmly on the floor. Close your eyes if that feels comfortable or gaze at the floor softly. Begin with a minute of silence – just focusing on your breathing, in and out.
3. As you breathe, begin to feel what you are feeling as a result of the experience you identified. Name the difficult feelings, the sadness, the pain that this experience brought you. See your pain and hurt as an object within your body. Imagine it as something real, and begin to send this object your love. Love your pain as if it were another being. Love yourself and send yourself soothing and relaxing messages of love.
4. Spend a couple of minutes just sending yourself messages of love. Say, “You are beautiful. You are loveable. I love you.” Say it again: “You are beautiful. You are loveable. I love you.”
5. As you end your meditation, ask yourself if you can keep loving this hurt and vulnerable place in yourself. This place that needs your love. And if you can, promise yourself that you will keep sending yourself this acceptance and this love for yourself. Commit to this meditation daily if you can. Keep a journal and share your experiences with the group.

This practice was adapted from a sermon titled: *Out of Brokenness* by Rev. Amy Russell

<https://mvuuf.org/worship/sermon-archive/out-of-our-brokenness/>

## **Option C: Broken Open to Something New**

*It is good to realize that falling apart is not such a bad thing. Indeed, it is as essential to transformation as the cracking of outgrown shells. Anxieties and doubts can be healthy and creative, not only for the person, but for the society, because they permit new and original approaches to reality. What disintegrates in periods of rapid transformation is not the self, but its defenses and assumptions. Self-protection restricts vision and movement like a suit of armor, making it harder to adapt. Going to pieces, however uncomfortable, can open us up to new perceptions, new data, and new responses. - Joanna Macy*

Breakage is often necessary for growth – either because it has become too small for who we are or because it turns us away from new relationships or experiences that we are growing toward.

As you begin the new year, write three paragraphs, each on a different color of paper (or with a different colored pen), writing large with space between the lines. In the first, describe five things you are grateful for. On the second, write about five things you wish to continue doing or developing in the new year. On the third, describe five things you wish to “break open” to make room for something new. (e.g. breaking an old habit or way of being, breaking a tradition that you want to be otherwise, breaking a rule you no longer want to live within, breaking an expectation....). NOTE: you can be grateful for things you are now ready to break away from.

After you’ve written these, cut each paragraph apart in strips or into short phrases. Mix them up and rearrange them so the different colors come into contact with each other. Make new sentences and phrases that might express new possibilities for the year to come. You don’t have to use them all – and you can add new words or phrases to make sentences of the pieces. Experiment. Explore what comes from the chaos. Then make a poem or a new resolution or a collage of phrases that expresses some wish or possibility for the year to come.

Are there surprises that rise from the broken pieces of your gratitude and your desire for things to change or stay the same? How did it feel to cut your sentences apart? To make new arrangements? What do you learn about your own approach to brokenness in this exercise?

# Your Question

*As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is not to analyze what "brokenness" means in the abstract, but to figure out what being a part of a people of brokenness means for you and your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work"?*

1. What part of you is broken? How do you deal with that? Do you ignore it, hide it or gently acknowledge it? What feelings are stirred by it? How does that affect your relationships with others?
2. What breaks your heart? What are you going to do about it? What is made possible and impossible by having a broken heart?
3. C.S. Lewis writes, "Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable." Recall a time when you became or tried to become unbreakable. What did that mean for you and for others?
4. Where have you noticed beauty and brokenness residing together? What understandings rise from noticing that?
5. Is taking on the care of the broken things of the world breaking you? What does that ask of you or mean for you?
6. Are you ready to heal from your failures? ("Failure should be our teacher, not our undertaker. Failure is delay, not defeat. It is a temporary detour, not a dead end. Failure is something we can avoid only by saying nothing, doing nothing, and being nothing." - Denis Waitley)
7. What if talk of healing needs to wait? ("Let us not rush to the language of healing, before understanding the fullness of the injury and the depth of the wound." - Dr. Yolanda Pierce) What might it mean to stay with the brokenness for a while?
8. How does your personal experience of brokenness – and your beliefs about it – influence your response to the broken systems of our times (including the brokenness embedded in systemic racism as well as broken institutions)?
9. 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 these pieces in our group. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get your thinking started, and maybe open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of brokenness.

### Word Roots

#### Brokenness (n).

Reduced to fragments; ruptured; torn; fractured; shattered. Infringed or violated. Disrupted by change. Made weak or infirm. Riven, separated, disintegrated, disconnected, crushed, sorrowful.

**Brainstorm:** broken heart, breaking records, breaking bread, breaking the glass ceiling, breaking the chains of oppression, breaking through to the other side, break free, breaking barriers, break of dawn, break the fast, break records, spring break, put on the brakes, break dance, the breaking point.

### Wise Words

I've never been very good at feasting on the daily newspaper. It turns bitter in my mouth. And yet, this is my world. This face of suffering I must embrace as part of my responsibility. Part of the feast is becoming aware of the world that is mine. Part of the feast is owning this broken world as my own brokenness. I clasp the newspaper to my heart and ask once again in the stillness of the night, "What are we doing to the image of God in one another?"

*-Nikos Kazantzakis in A Tree Full of Angels by Macrina Wiederkehr*

Our inability to tolerate material brokenness inundates us with debris. Unique to our time and culture is the preoccupation with the cost of waste disposal, the phenomenon of automobile graveyards, and odysseys of barges towing garbage out to sea. As computers rapidly become obsolete, to be replaced by new and ever better models, I read that we face a crisis: what to do with the millions of tons and cubic feet of discarded and now worthless technology.

*-Margaret Guenther in Toward Holy Ground*

Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid.

*-Frederick Buechner*

As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "There is a crack in everything God has made." As we age, the cracks begin to show. Are they just about darkness and brokenness? Or are they also a place for the light of Spirit to stream through? The truth is they're both. Let's embrace it all.

*— Drew Leder in Spiritual Passages*

A haunting sense of incompleteness, a yearning for completion, an uncertainty craving for certainty, a brokenness hungering for wholeness. These things seem to lie at the bottom of our human spirituality. Human beings are, as Karen Armstrong says; "compelled to search for hidden meaning and to achieve an ecstasy that makes them feel fully alive."

*— James B. Nelson in Thirst: God and the Alcoholic Experience*

When things are shaky and nothing is working, we might realize that we are on the verge of something.

*—Pema Chodron*

Now if you listen closely  
I'll tell you what I know.  
Storm clouds are gathering  
The wind is going to blow  
The human race is suffering  
And I can hear the moan,  
Cause nobody, But nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

*—Maya Angelou*

Trauma victims cannot recover until they become familiar with and befriend the sensations in their bodies. Being frightened means that you live in a body that is always on guard. Angry people live in angry bodies. The bodies of child-abuse victims are tense and defensive until they find a way to relax and feel safe. In order to change, people need to become aware of their sensations and the way that their bodies interact with the world around them. Physical self-awareness is the first step in releasing the tyranny of the past... As I often tell my students, the two most important phrases in therapy, as in yoga, are "Notice that" and "What

happens next?" Once you start approaching your body with curiosity rather than with fear, everything shifts."

*-Bessel A. van der Kolk, The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*

Broken things have been on my mind as the year lurches to an end, because so much broke and broke down this year in my life, and in the lives of the people I love. Lives broke, hearts broke, health broke, minds broke. On the first Sunday of Advent our preacher, Veronica, said that this is life's nature, that lives and hearts get broken, those of people we love, those of people we'll never meet. She said the world sometimes feels like the waiting room of the emergency ward, and that we, who are more or less OK for now, need to take the tenderest possible care of the more wounded people in the waiting room, until the healer comes. You sit with people, she said, you bring them juice and graham crackers. ~

*-Anne Lamott, Traveling Mercies*

## Poems

### "What Is Broken Is What God Blesses,"

*Jimmy Santiago Baca*

The lover's footprint in the sand  
the ten-year-old kid's bare feet  
in the mud picking chili for rich growers,  
not those seeking cultural or ethnic roots,  
but those whose roots  
have been exposed, hacked, dug up and burned  
and in those roots  
do animals burrow for warmth;  
what is broken is blessed,  
not the knowledge and empty-shelled wisdom  
paraphrased from textbooks,  
not the mimicking nor plaques of  
distinction  
nor the ribbons and medals  
but after the privileged carriage has passed  
the breeze blows traces of wheel ruts away  
and on the dust will again be the  
people's broken  
footprints.

What is broken God blesses,  
not the perfectly brick-on-brick prison  
but the shattered wall  
that announces freedom to the world,  
proclaims the irascible spirit of the human

rebellious against lies, against betrayal,  
against taking what is not deserved;  
the human complaint is what God blesses,  
our impoverished dirt roads filled with  
cripples,

what is broken is baptized,  
the irreverent disbeliever,  
the addict's arm seamed with needle marks  
is a thread line of a blanket  
frayed and bare from keeping the man  
warm.

We are all broken ornaments,  
glinting in our worn-out work gloves,  
foreclosed homes, ruined marriages,  
from which shimmer our lives in their  
deepest truths,  
blood from the wound,  
broken ornaments—  
when we lost our perfection and honored our  
imperfect sentiments, we were  
blessed.

Broken are the ghettos, barrios, trailer parks  
where gangs duel to death,  
yet through the wretchedness a woman of  
sixty comes riding her rusty bicycle,

we embrace

we bury in our hearts,

broken ornaments, accused, hunted, finding  
solace and refuge

we work, we worry, we love  
but always with compassion  
reflecting our blessings—  
in our brokenness

thrives life, thrives light, thrives  
the essence of our strength,  
each of us a warm fragment,  
broken off from the greater  
ornament of the unseen,  
then rejoined as dust,  
to all this is.

### We are here because we are a people of faith

*Kendell Gibbons*

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/5888.shtml>

We are here because we are people of faith.  
Within each of us lives the conviction of a  
saving faith that could restore our broken planet  
and illuminate the lives of our sisters and  
brothers.

Ancient wisdom teaches that we who would  
save the world must first save ourselves. We



who would restore the planet must learn to restore the broken structures of the institutions closest to hand; to illuminate the lives of our companions and friends.

To this end let us center ourselves, acknowledging the trouble of mind and vexation of spirit that accompany us even here. Let us open ourselves to that creative mystery which is at work in our striving, whose servants we are and seek to be.

### **We are whole**

*Beth Lefever*

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/we-are-whole>

We are whole,  
even in the broken places,  
even where it hurts.  
We are whole,  
even in the broken places,  
the places where fear impedes our full  
engagement with life;  
where self-doubt corrupts our self-love;  
where shame makes our faces hot and our souls  
cold.

We are whole,  
even in those places where perfectionism blunts  
the joy  
of full immersion into person, place, activity;  
where “good enough” does not reside except in  
our silent longings;  
where our gaps must be fast-filled  
with substance, accomplishment, or frenzied  
activity  
lest they gape open and disgust.

We are whole  
where we would doubt our own goodness,  
richness, fullness and depth,  
where we would doubt our own significance, our  
own profoundness.

We are whole,  
even in our fragility;  
even where we feel fragmented, alone,  
insubstantial, insufficient.

We are whole,  
even as we are in process,  
even as we stumble,  
even as we pick ourselves up again,  
for we are whole.

We are whole.

### **Blessing for a Broken Vessel**

*Jan Richardson*

Do not despair.  
You hold the memory of what it was  
to be whole.

It lives deep  
in your bones.  
It abides  
in your heart  
that has been torn  
and mended  
a hundred times.  
It persists  
in your lungs  
that know the mystery  
of what it means  
to be full,  
to be empty,  
to be full again.

I am not asking you  
to give up your grip  
on the shards you clasp  
so close to you.

but to wonder  
what it would be like  
for those jagged edges  
to meet each other  
in some new pattern  
that you have never imagined,  
that you have never dared  
to dream.

by Jan Richardson, *Circle of Grace*, (Orlando,  
FL: Wanton Gospeller Press, 2015)

### **Healing**

*Adam Lawrence Dyer*

Don't speak to me of “healing” racism,  
or “wounded souls” or the “painful hurt”  
until you are willing to feel the scars  
on my great-great-grandmother Laury's back.  
Don't speak to me of “values”  
or “justice” or “righting wrongs”  
until you are able to feel the heartache  
of my great-grandfather Graham  
whose father may have been his master.  
Don't speak to me of “equity”  
or “opportunity” or the “common good”  
until you are able to hear the fears  
from my grandmother Mae  
as the only black woman in her college.

Don't speak to me of "passion"  
 or "longing" or "standing on the side of love"  
 until you know the shame  
 felt by my mother Edwina  
 mocked by teachers for the curve of her back.  
 Don't speak to me of "together"  
 or "understanding" or "empathy"  
 until you know my rage  
 as a young actor hearing the direction  
 to "be more black . . . more male."  
 The pain you are trying to heal has no real name.  
 This "pain" you speak of has no story;  
 it is anonymous, vague, and empty.  
 Don't speak to me of "healing"  
 for I heal the second I am ripped apart.  
 My wounds self-suture,  
 and like the clever creature I am,  
 I just grow new legs to outrun the pain ever  
 faster.  
 It is something I have had to practice for  
 generations,  
 that feel like an eternity.  
 So, please don't speak to me of "healing"  
 because you cannot know what healing means  
 until you know the hurt.

### **Breakage**

*Mary Oliver*

I go down to the edge of the sea.  
 How everything shines in the morning light!  
 The cusp of the whelk,  
 the broken cupboard of the clam,  
 the opened, blue mussels,  
 moon snails, pale pink and barnacle scarred—  
 and nothing at all whole or shut, but tattered,  
 split,  
 dropped by the gulls onto the gray rocks and all  
 the  
     moisture gone.  
 It's like a schoolhouse  
 of little words,  
 thousands of words.  
 First you figure out what each one means by  
 itself,  
 the jingle, the periwinkle, the scallop  
     full of moonlight.

Then you begin, slowly, to read the whole story.

### **What's Broken**

*Dorianne Laux*

The slate black sky. The middle step  
 of the back porch. And long ago  
  
 my mother's necklace, the beads  
 rolling north and south. Broken  
  
 the rose stem, water into drops, glass  
 knobs on the bedroom door. Last summer's  
  
 pot of parsley and mint, white roots  
 shooting like streamers through the cracks.

Years ago the cat's tail, the bird bath,  
 the car hood's rusted latch. Broken  
  
 little finger on my right hand at birth—  
 I was pulled out too fast. What hasn't

been rent, divided, split? Broken  
 the days into nights, the night sky

into stars, the stars into patterns  
 I make up as I trace them

with a broken-off blade  
 of grass. Possible, unthinkable,

the cricket's tiny back as I lie  
 on the lawn in the dark, my heart  
 a blue cup fallen from someone's hands.  
*Dorianne Laux, "What's Broken" from Facts  
 About The Moon. © 2007 W. W. Norton & Co.*

**Song of the Shattering Vessels, by Peter Cole**  
<https://vimeopro.com/vtvt/vtpol2015/video/126091373>

"Either the world is coming together  
 or else the world is falling apart..."

Today, tomorrow, within its weather,  
 the end or beginning's about to start...

The image, gradually, is growing sharper;  
 now the sound is like a dart:  
 It seemed their world was coming together, but  
 in fact it was falling apart.

That's the nightmare, that's the terror,  
 that's the Isaac of this art—  
 which sees that the world might come together  
 if only we're willing to take it apart...."

## Videos and Podcasts

### Podcast: The Paradox of Suffering and Love

Kate Braestrup

<https://onbeing.org/blog/the-paradox-of-suffering-and-love-kate-braestrup/>

“The question isn’t whether we’re going to have to do hard, awful things. The question is whether we have to do them alone.” UU law enforcement chaplain Kate Braestrup tells the story of a police woman who embodies the both/and of love and new life, and crime and death.

### Podcast: L’Arche: A Community of Brokenness and Beauty

Jean Vanier and Jo Anne Horstmann

<https://onbeing.org/programs/jo-anne-horstmann-larche-a-community-of-brokenness-and-beauty/>

Forty years ago in France, philosopher Jean Vanier founded an international movement, L’Arche. The L’Arche community in Clinton, Iowa is part of this movement — people of faith living and worshipping alongside developmentally handicapped adults. There are now over 120 L’Arche communities in 18 countries. The community in Clinton is one of the oldest and most rural of the 14 American communities. In this "radio pilgrimage," we take listeners into a radically different faith community that confronts our assumptions about service and diversity, and the worth of individuals.

### Ted Talks on Brokenness:

#### Suddenly my Body

Eve Ensler

[https://www.ted.com/talks/eve\\_ensler](https://www.ted.com/talks/eve_ensler)

Poet, writer, activist Eve Ensler lived in her head. In this powerful talk from TEDWomen, she talks about her lifelong disconnection from her body -- and how two shocking events helped her to connect with the reality, the physicality of being human.

#### What really matters at the end of life

BJ Miller

[https://www.ted.com/talks/bj\\_miller\\_what\\_really\\_matters\\_at\\_the\\_end\\_of\\_life](https://www.ted.com/talks/bj_miller_what_really_matters_at_the_end_of_life)

At the end of our lives, what do we most wish for? For many, it's simply comfort, respect, love. BJ Miller is a hospice and palliative medicine physician who thinks deeply about how to create a dignified, graceful end of life for his patients. Take the time to savor this moving talk, which asks big questions about how we think on death and honor life.

#### On Humanity

Chris Abani

[https://www.ted.com/talks/chris\\_abani\\_muses\\_on\\_humanity](https://www.ted.com/talks/chris_abani_muses_on_humanity)

Chris Abani tells stories of people: People standing up to soldiers. People being compassionate. People being human and reclaiming their humanity. It's "ubuntu," he says: the only way for me to be human is for you to reflect my humanity back at me.

#### What we don’t know about Europe’s Muslim Kids

Deeyah Khan

[https://www.ted.com/talks/deeyah\\_khan\\_what\\_we\\_dont\\_know\\_about\\_europe\\_s\\_muslim\\_kids](https://www.ted.com/talks/deeyah_khan_what_we_dont_know_about_europe_s_muslim_kids)

As the child of an Afghan mother and Pakistani father raised in Norway, Deeyah Khan knows what it's like to be a young person stuck between your community and your country. In this powerful, emotional talk, the filmmaker unearths the rejection and isolation felt by many Muslim kids growing up in the West -- and the deadly consequences of not embracing our youth before extremist groups do.

## Articles

### This Isn't About Bad Apples; It's about our Broken Sexual Culture

Courtney Martin

<https://onbeing.org/blog/courtney-martin-this-isnt-about-bad-apples-its-about-our-broken-sexual-culture>

This is not about bad apples but a root system that is insufficient to grow healthy sexual humans. I've been thinking about this a lot lately as I have been reading Jaclyn Friedman's insanely timely book, [\*Unscrewed: Women, Sex, Power, and How to Stop Letting the System Screw Us All\*](#). The basis of Jaclyn's argument is that we have been living through an "era of fauxpowerment" — "a time when shiny pictures of individual women wielding some symbol of sexual power are used to distract us from our still mostly retrograde and misogynist status quo."

### America only gets outraged about gun violence in white neighborhoods

Mia McKenzie

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/29/us-gun-crime-race-disparity>

There's a racial double standard about the horrors of US gun crimes.

### Truths about adulthood that no one tells You

Courtney Martin

<https://onbeing.org/blog/courtney-martin-a-couple-of-truths-about-adulthood-that-no-one-tells-you>

The organizations and institutions you admire from afar are riddled with problems — and still worth admiring.

What is true in micro is true in macro. All of the organizations and institutions that are [run by these imperfect humans](#) are also imperfect.

Sometimes fatally flawed (in which case, don't walk, run), but sometimes just broken in various, potentially fixable ways for various, complex reasons, and this, too, can become a testing ground for wisdom.

## Music

### Hallelujah

Leonard Cohen

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

Baby I've been here before  
I've seen this room and I've walked this floor  
I used to live alone before I knew you  
And I've seen your flag on the marble arch  
And love is not a victory march  
It's a cold and it's a broken Hallelujah

### Swing Low Sail High

The Wailin Jennys

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3e3IwXpyY0>

I have failed you, I have failed you  
I have lost my way, lost my nerve  
I've failed you  
But I love you, how I love you  
I have turned my back, left you last  
but I love you

### Storm Comin'

The Wailin Jennys

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDYI2Pcb9v8>

When that storm comes  
Don't run for cover  
When that storm comes  
Don't run for cover  
When that storm comes  
Don't run for cover  
Don't run from the comin' storm cause there ain't no use in runnin'

### Shatter

Dolly Parton

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7sNWMvLL4>

**Shatter** my image with the rocks I'd  
throw **Shatter** my image with the rocks I'd  
throw Long time gone and a long time ago  
When I shattered my image with the rocks I'd  
throw The world is cruel and people are cold  
Now they **shatter** my image with the rocks they  
throw

### Beautiful Pain

Eminem

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKdYs6xhnhU>

I'm standin' in the flames  
It's a beautiful kind of pain  
Settin' fire to yesterday  
Find the light, find the light, find the light

## Today

*Alanis Morsette*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TG\\_5OyoZmJw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TG_5OyoZmJw)

Smile upside-down

Rupture is rising, families are scrambling for custody

Faithlessly drowned

The chase of this dollar is tilting my altar toward apathy

## King of Pain

*The Police*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFN5DveQH0o>

There's a little black spot on the sun today

It's the same old thing as yesterday

There's a black hat caught in a high tree top

There's a flag pole rag and the wind won't stop

## Pain (contains profane language)

*Tupac*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSgkBF6LjH4>

I couldn't help but see your pain

## Pilgrim of Sorrow

*Sam Cooke with Soul Stirrers*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHt3DaguqCM>

## Nobody knows the trouble I've seen

*Mahalia Jackson*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHt3DaguqCM>

## Magic and Loss

*Lou Reed*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96o5XXMAu mo>

## Movies

### Dead Poet's Society

In 1959, the Welton Academy is a staid but well-respected prep school where education is a pragmatic and rather dull affair. Several of the students, however, have their thoughts on the learning process (and life itself) changed when a new teacher comes to the school. John Keating (Williams) is an unconventional educator who tears chapters of his textbooks and asks his students to stand on their desks to see the world from a new angle and live their lives boldly; but when this philosophy leads to an unexpected tragedy, headmaster Mr. Nolan (Norman Lloyd) fires Keating, and his students leap to his defense.

#### Review:

[https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/dead\\_poets\\_society](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/dead_poets_society)

### Cries from Syria

At the end of this watershed documentary masterpiece, seven-year-old Bana Alabed, who describes herself as a "peace preacher" on her Twitter account (@AlabedBana), is being interviewed about her hometown of Aleppo. Saying she wants to speak for the children of that besieged city, she ends with "We shall overcome someday." It is a remarkable statement, full of courage and hope, considering all that she and the people of her country have been through in the last six years.

#### Review:

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/28383/cries-from-syria>

### Felicite

The city is the perfect place to listen to the blues. After being worn and torn by the sharp edges of financial peril or an undercurrent of violence, it makes sense to retreat to your local bar and let the music take you away.

#### Review:

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/28524/flicit>

### Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri

Mildred is angry because she is still in a deep and unsettling state of grief after the murder of her teenage daughter Angela (Kathryn Newton) nine months ago. She has taken \$5000 and rented three billboards near her house so she can

vent her spleen on the police for not solving this terrible crime. A sturdy depiction of the grace that accompanies turning an enemy into a friend.

**Review:**

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/28524/flicit>

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/28539/three-billboards-outside-ebbing-missouri>

**God Said, Ha!** Sweeney proves that humor is a lifesaver in the midst of pain, suffering, and setbacks -- including her brother's terminal cancer and her own cervical cancer diagnosis.

[https://www.amazon.com/God-Said-Ha-Julia-Sweeney/dp/B000089795/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?s=movie&ie=UTF8&qid=1470365688&sr=1-2&keywords=god+said+ha](https://www.amazon.com/God-Said-Ha-Julia-Sweeney/dp/B000089795/ref=sr_1_2?s=movie&ie=UTF8&qid=1470365688&sr=1-2&keywords=god+said+ha)

## Books

### When Things Fall Apart

*Pema Chodron*

A collection of talks she gave between 1987 and 1994, the book is a treasury of wisdom for going on living when we are overcome by pain and difficulties. Chödrön discusses:

- Using painful emotions to cultivate wisdom, compassion, and courage
- Communicating so as to encourage others to open up rather than shut down
- Practices for reversing habitual patterns
- Methods for working with chaotic situations
- Ways for creating effective social action

### When Bad Things Happen to Good People

*Harold Kushner*

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/46676.When\\_Bad\\_Things\\_Happen\\_to\\_Good\\_People?from\\_search=true](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/46676.When_Bad_Things_Happen_to_Good_People?from_search=true)

When Harold Kushner's three-year-old son was diagnosed with a degenerative disease and that he would only live until his early teens, he was faced with one of life's most difficult questions: Why, God? Years later, Rabbi Kushner wrote this straightforward, elegant contemplation of the doubts and fears that arise when tragedy strikes. Kushner shares his wisdom as a rabbi, a parent, a reader, and a human being.

### Things Fall Apart (Novel)

*Chinua Achebe*

*Things Fall Apart* is the first of three novels in Chinua Achebe's critically acclaimed African Trilogy. It is a classic narrative about Africa's cataclysmic encounter with Europe as it establishes a colonial presence on the continent. Told through the fictional experiences of Okonkwo, a wealthy and fearless Igbo warrior of Umuofia in the late 1800s, *Things Fall Apart* explores one man's futile resistance to the devaluing of his Igbo traditions by British political and religious forces and his despair as his community capitulates to the powerful new order.

### Broken For You (Novel)

*Stephanie Kallos*

*Broken for You* is the story of two women in self-imposed exile whose lives are transformed when their paths intersect. Both women are guarding dark secrets and have spent many years building up protective armor against the outside world. As their tentative friendship evolves, the armor begins to fall away.

This packet was created based on the Soul Matters Sharing Circle model of small groups for use within Unity Church- Unitarian.



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