



What Does It Mean To Be a People of Surrender?



March 2019

What Does It Mean To Be a People of Surrender?

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

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 to surrender and to "let it go!"

But here's the twist: Our faith follows that up quickly with "Let it in!" This spiritual dance takes a twostep. 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 free us. Surrender is also about letting in and making room. And the great gift of Unitarian Universalism is its claim that this is what "salvation" is all about. Instead of 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!

All of which means that surrender 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 grips, life will not leave us emptyhanded.

March is also the month in which we honor many people who gave their lives to the cause of justice. The list is large:

- The [Selma–Montgomery March](#) happened March 21-25, 1965
- [James Reeb](#) was murdered on March 11, 1965
- [Viola Liuzzo](#) was murdered on March 25, 1965
- March is Women's history month with its call to remember the long history and continuing work for Women's equality.
- [Susan B. Anthony](#)'s death was March 13
- Archbishop [Oscar Romero](#) was killed on March 24, 1980

These anniversaries remind us that being a "people of surrender" is often the opposite of giving in or giving up. In order to move toward justice, we have to upset the current state of things. Oppressive systems need challenged and toppled. We need to sacrifice our calm and comfort, and instead "go all in." So let's us be about the task of letting go of the things that will not save us and reach out for the things that can.

In faith,
Andrea Johnson

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A: 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
- 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 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.

Option B: Let Go of the Privilege of White Privilege

Surrender and letting go is also 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.”](#) 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 your 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 C: Pray with your whole body

To engage in the divine exchange, so that you belong to God (the universe, the spirit of life, a love that will not let you go) and God (the universe, the spirit) belongs to you, listen deeply to the needs of your soul. Surrender is the lifelong practice of allowing the Divine and not the ego to be the center of reality. Make it a practice in everything you say and do to ask yourself, "Am I coming from a place of divine attributes in me — truth, or love, compassion, or beauty — or am I coming from a place of the little self — from fear, pettiness, or jealousy?" Be mindful of the answer and make sincere efforts to act on your soul's needs, no matter how inconvenient or difficult.

One way to embody this concept of surrender is to engage in a whole body prayer. This body prayer has been adapted from a Sufi practice. In Islam, the concept of surrender is experienced by praying 5 times a day. How about trying this prayer once or twice a day – perhaps in the morning and when you go to bed. What does it feel like to touch the ground with your head? Does embodying this prayer help you to more deeply surrender?

Come prepared to share your experiences with the group.

A Sufi Body Prayer From: *Developing & Deepening Your Spiritual Practice: An Interspiritual Approach*, by Rev. Diane Berke, PhD

"I step into the embrace of the Beloved . . ."

Take one step forward with the right foot, then bring the left to meet it.

". . . to receive and to give."

Cup hands in front of heart, then extend forward as a gesture of giving.

"I put behind me all worldly concerns and egoistic thoughts."

Bring hands back, palms facing forward, at shoulder level, elbows bent.

"I open my heart . . ."

Place hands over heart center.

"and offer thanksgiving and praise."

Lift hands and arms upwards, while also looking up.

"I surrender to you . . ."

Bow at the waist, sliding hands down thighs to the knees.

". . . that I may do your will . . ."

Drop to the knees and touch forehead to the ground.

". . . now and always . . ."

Sit up and back on heels, hands resting on thighs.

". . . at One with you."

Touch forehead to the ground again.
Stand and take one step back to original starting place.
Repeat the entire cycle three times.

Your Question

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every single one. Instead, make time to meditate and reflect 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 it trying to get you to notice? Where is it trying to lead you?

1. [Miriam Greenspan](#) explains that emotions live in the body. Paying attention to our emotions is not the same as endless navel gazing; it is mindfulness of the body, an ability to listen to the body's emotional language without judgment or suppression. Surrendering is the spiritual part of this process and is what brings the unexpected gifts of wisdom, compassion and courage. Surrendering is about saying yes when we want to say no – the yes of acceptance. We don't "let go" of emotions; we let go of ego, and the emotions then let go themselves. What parts of your ego do you need to let go of?
2. What if the problem is not about being busy and all those balls you're juggling? Could the balance you seek be about connecting who you are inside with how you use your time outside? Are you sure that you are overwhelmed, or just out of alignment?
3. What happens when you sit quietly in a room? Surrender is the lifelong practice of allowing the divine and not the ego to be the center of reality. Are you coming from a place of divine attributes (e.g., truth, love, compassion or beauty) or from a place of the little self (fear, jealousy, pettiness)?
4. Are you trying too hard to make something work? Might surrender for you be a matter of accepting defeat or finally letting it go?
5. Is it time to surrender by returning to something that was?
6. Is it time to give up one of your passions so the other can fully live?
7. Is time to toss balance to the side and go all in?
8. Are you trying to both hold on to and let go of someone at the same time?
9. Is it time to let go of bitterness and finally forgive?
10. Do you need to let go of something in order to fully love and accept your friend, partner, spouse parent or child?

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.

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 your thinking started and open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of Surrender.

Word Roots

Surrender: cease resistance to someone or something; yield, concede, submit, defer, release, set free, let go.

Wise Words

Passion makes a person stop eating, sleeping, working, feeling at peace. A lot of people are frightened because, when it appears, it demolishes all the old things it finds in its path. No one wants their life thrown into chaos. That is why a lot of people keep that threat under control, and are somehow capable of sustaining a house or a structure that is already rotten. They are the engineers of the superseded. Other people think exactly the opposite: they surrender themselves without a second thought, hoping to find in passion the solutions to all their problems. They make the other person responsible for their happiness and blame them for their possible unhappiness. They are either euphoric because something marvelous has happened or depressed because something unexpected has just ruined everything. Keeping passion at bay or surrendering blindly to it - which of these two attitudes is the least destructive? I don't know."

~ Paulo Coelho, *Eleven Minutes*

Death is not the greatest loss in life. The greatest loss is what dies inside while still alive. Never surrender."

~ Tupac Shakur

No matter how busy you may think you are, you must find time for reading, or surrender yourself to self-chosen ignorance."

~ Atwood H. Townsend

In the end, though, maybe we must all give up trying to pay back the people in this world who sustain our lives. In the end, maybe it's wiser to surrender before the miraculous scope of human generosity and to just keep saying thank you, forever and sincerely, for as long as we have voices."

~ Elizabeth Gilbert

Love is like a narcotic. At first it brings the euphoria of complete surrender. The next day, you want more. You're not addicted yet, but you like the sensation, and you think you can still control things.

~ Paulo Coelho, *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*

Don't surrender all your joy for an idea you used to have about yourself that isn't true anymore."

~ Cheryl Strayed, *Tiny Beautiful Things: Advice on Love and Life from Dear Sugar*

When life itself seems lunatic, who knows where madness lies? Perhaps to be too practical is madness. To surrender dreams — this may be madness. Too much sanity may be madness — and maddest of all: to see life as it is, and not as it should be!

~ Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*

The more you struggle to live, the less you live. Give up the notion that you must be sure of what you are doing. Instead, surrender to what is real within you, for that alone is sure....you are above everything distressing.

~ Spinoza

To a mind that is still the whole universe surrenders.

~ Lao Tzu

To be left alone on the tightrope of youthful unknowing is to experience the excruciating beauty of full freedom and the threat of eternal indecision. Few, if any, survive their teens. Most surrender to the vague but murderous pressure of adult conformity. It becomes easier to die and avoid conflict than to maintain a constant battle with the superior forces of maturity.

~ Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

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

Let go or be dragged.

~ Zen proverb

Let go of how you thought your life should be and embrace the life that is trying to work its way into your consciousness.

~ Unknown

Poetry

There's My Temple

Ma Theresa Gustilo Gallardo

Full poem:

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/affirmation/theres-my-temple>

There's my temple!

Believer, unbeliever or wild one.

You are welcome!

We have no definition of who we are but human.

We have no code but that of respect.

We have no creed but that of equality.

There's my temple!

Identity-seeker, sinner, stateless or not.

You are welcome!

We have no constraints on expression but space.

We have no code but to listen to poetry between the silence and the surrender.

is to dream,

Let the Artists Win

Bob Janis-Dillon

Full poem:

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/poetry/let-artists-win>

I vote we let the artists win
the ones covered in paint from their last attempt
to smuggle across the beauty of a bowl of fruit
the 14-year-old rapper learning to spit
throwing life's chaos on the rhythm wheel
uncovering the shapes that live on after
the next break
I say we let the food bank volunteers win
the ones always carrying around their agenda
for the meeting, waging campaigns
to stock shelves with bread
I would like to see the nurses extend their string of victories
from the hospital bed to the nation's boardrooms
until we care for each other as if death were inevitable and mercy was the only thing
that made the rounds bearable

.....and then when the men with guns
come
we can say I'm sorry
but whether you win or lose
it's really never been my game sir
I have lost
and lost again a thousand wars of the heart
and those to whom I have waved the
white flag
those to whom
I have surrendered
the whole and holy of my life
will never
never
let me go

Don't Surrender

Babatunde Aremu

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poems/surrender/page-1/43579850/>

Season comes,
Season vanishes,
Its a cosmic design
If the wind is contrary
And the cloud is awry
Never beat yourself
When the present is blurred
If the future is bleak
When travail encircles
If you're caged and pigeon-holed
All around is vacuum
Don't surrender!
Even if you're pummeled
Like a gasping boxer
Never throw in the towel
Don't be quick to surrender
Persist, march on
Be like a Spartan soldier
Let the champion in you arise
Avoid self blame
Courageously up the game
No retreat, no surrender

First Lesson

Philip Booth

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/first-lesson/>

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.

Articles, Podcasts and Videos

Existential Bummer -Video

Jason Silva

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

Balancing impermanence's call to both
hold tight and let go

Soul Time, Sabbath Time

Karen Hering

<http://karenhering.com/soul-time-sabbath-time/>

Sabbath practice as letting time rest
without being counted.

Kenosis: Self Emptying

Richard Rohr

<https://cac.org/kenosis-2017-12-10/>

The first incarnation happened at the Big
Bang 13.8 billion years ago. *Every
created thing is the self-emptying of God
into multitudinous physical and visible
forms.* Two thousand years ago, God

revealed the human face of love through the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus taught us to follow him down the path of humility, servanthood, and surrender.

This is, as Cynthia Bourgeault writes, “the way of kenosis, the revolutionary path that Jesus introduced into the consciousness of the West.”

The Perennial Tradition

Richard Rohr

<https://cac.org/the-perennial-tradition-2015-12-20/>

The Perennial Tradition points to recurring themes and truths within all of the world’s religions. At their most mature level, religions cultivate in their followers a deeper union with God, with each other, and with reality—or *what is*. The work of religion is to *re-ligio*—re-ligament or reunite what our egos and survival instincts have put asunder, namely a fundamental wholeness at the heart of everything.

A Slow and Steady Surrender

Kaitlin Curtice

<https://onbeing.org/blog/kaitlin-curtice-a-slow-and-steady-surrender/>

I got married when I was 19 years old to a young man who loved to climb rocks and counted the mysteries constantly unfolding in the world around him. After working in post-war Bosnia and Uganda, he settled into a season of carpentry as he studied rocks and the rivers, taking daily adventures where he came to know the presence of God in a grounded, sacred way, a slow and steady surrender to his own soul and the soul of the world.

Seven Stages Of The Ego

Rumi, as told by Elif Shafak

<http://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=2300>

In the third stage, the person is more mature and the ego has evolved into the Inspired Nafs. It is only at this level, and not anytime before, that one can experience the true meaning of the word "surrender" and roam the Valley of Knowledge. Anyone who has made it this far will possess and display patience, perseverance, wisdom, and humility. The world will feel new and full of inspiration

Destiny is Within Us

Hawah Kasat

<http://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=2165>

Each moment of life, we set into motion a series of succeeding moments that will ultimately shape our future. It is my choice to either leave my destiny up to the universe or choose to shift my awareness and embrace the knowledge that *I am the universe*. When this happens, what we previously blame on an outside entity, or “destiny,” is actually something we understand as within us.

The choice is mine. The choice is yours. The choice is ours.

Don't Go Back to Sleep

Elizabeth Lesser

<http://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=1051>

I am fascinated by what it takes to stay awake in difficult times. I marvel at what we all do in times of transition -- how we resist, and how we surrender; how we stay stuck, and how we grow. Since my first major broken-open experience -- my divorce -- I have been an observer and a confidante of others as they engage with the forces of their own suffering. I have made note of how fiasco and failure visit each one of us, as if they were written into the job description of being human. I have

seen people crumble in times of trouble, lose their spirit, and never fully recover. I have seen others protect themselves fiercely from any kind of change, until they are living a half life, safe yet stunted.

Movies

The Willow Tree

<https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/17177/the-willow-tree>

A spiritual masterpiece on gratitude, transformation and surrender to God.

The Amish

<https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/22325/the-amish>

A fresh and incisive survey of this religion and its fascinating practices designed to strengthen faith and community.

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_diving_bell_and_the_butterfly_2007

The astonishing true-life story of Jean-Dominic Bauby -- a man who held the world in his palm, lost everything to sudden paralysis at 43 years old, and somehow found the strength to rebound -- first touched the world in Baub

Suffragette

(In honor of March being Women's history month)

<https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/suffragette>

The story of bringing the balance of equality for women in early-20th-century Britain

10 Great Women's History Films

(In honor of March being Women's history month)

<https://nonfics.com/10-great-womens-history-films-to-watch-this-or-any-month-648177884dc0>

Romero

(In honor of Archbishop [Oscar Romero's](#) death on March 24, 1980)

<https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/romero>

The fight to balance a world of violence and injustice with the witness of love and sacrifice.

Selma

<https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/selma>

Books

The Essential Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi

<https://www.goodreads.com/search?q=the+essential+gandhi>

Peace Like a River

Leif Enger

Narrated by an asthmatic 11-year-old named Reuben Land, is the story of Reuben's unusual family and their journey across the frozen Badlands of the Dakotas in search of his fugitive older brother

Learning to Fall: The Blessings of an Imperfect Life

Phillip Simmons

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/55003.Learning_to_Fall?ac=1&from_search=true

The Ecstasy of Surrender: 12 Surprising Ways Letting Go Can Empower Your Life

Judith Orloff

<https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/26163>

A checklist of intuitive clues including gut feelings, goose bumps, flashes of insight, and intuitive empathy.

Kama Sutra: Including the Seven Spiritual Laws of Love

Deepak Chopra

<https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/15899>

Surrender is the result of relinquishing the ego's last claims to separation. Surrender and non-attachment open the door to the miraculous, because miracles exist outside the realm of I, me, and mine. Many people mistakenly equate attachment with love when in fact attachment deprives us of love.

This packet has been created by Andrea Johnson using the Soul Matters Model of Small Groups. For use at Unity Unitarian Church only.



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