

Universalist Unitarian Church of Halifax

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Letting Go



Definition

“Letting go” means consciously deciding to release something that you have been holding on to... be that physical or emotional, it involves a loss.

synonyms: release, discard, set free, surrender, liberate

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What does it mean to be a people who can let 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 grips, 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!

To let go is not to quit. Indeed to let go is to commit to something particular! The letting go is of whatever holds you back. To let go is to find that central and ultimate value in life worthy of your commitment, and then to surrender all else to win it.

Soul Matters Minister

Our Spiritual Exercise

Option A: Learn to Fly: The Parable of the Trapeze

Is life calling you to let go and leap into something entirely new? This six-minute video will help you decide:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWvV5N4hOGc>. Here are your instructions:

- Set aside reflective time and use this video as a meditation. Don't rush it. Watch it three days in a row or multiple times over two weeks.
- Linger with the questions it asks: What new trapeze bar has your name on it? What is your next new story? What is the new aliveness coming to get you? Are you ready to jump? Are you ready to honor and savor the transition zone? And see it as the space of real living?



Option B: Spiritualize One Space in Your Life

The international bestseller, *The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, helps us see cleaning up clutter in a new light. It's not about eliminating mess; it's about letting in joy and creating space in which our spirits can breathe. The author's challenge to all of us is this: "Anything that doesn't 'spark joy' is to be touched, thanked and ceremonially sent on its way!" This month take up the challenge:

- Read the article about her book (and maybe read the book as well!): <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/nov/27/top-tips-to-joyfully-declutter-your-home-from-marie-kondo>
- Pick one "space" in your life and declutter it in the way she recommends. This space can be something as big as a living room or as small as a desk drawer or the back seat of your car.
- Take before-and-after pictures.
- What does it feel like to have one space full of the things that "spark joy" and prop you up.

Option C: 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.



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



Option D: 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 your church community, keep an eye out for the dynamic that Channing names.
- Find a way to challenge that dynamic.

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. *(Editor's note: and that our kids will not want!)

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 steadying hands.

Claudia Everest, UU Milford, NH



Let it go

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.

Danna Faulds

Your Question



No need to treat these questions like “homework.” You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply find the one that “hooks” you most and let it lead you where you need to go.

1. Are you living in (and holding on to) a story about yourself that isn't letting you grow?
2. Are you looking at (and holding on to) 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. Are you writing hurts in stone and kindness in sand? The parable of Mussa and Nagib (see Videos p. 8) reminds us that when someone hurts us, we should write it in the sand so the winds of forgiveness can blow it away; but when someone is kind to us, we should write it in stone so we will never forget. Do you follow this wisdom or do you have it backwards?
5. Has letting go of “God” numbed you to “the “love that never lets us go”?”
6. Do you judge or celebrate those who have let go of God? Has your holding on to God led you to honour or look down upon those who have let God go?
7. Is doing your duty driving you farther and farther from yourself?
8. Is staying in control controlling you? Is it time to let go of always being in charge?
9. Is trying to look a certain way stopping you from seeing yourself?
10. A Task Team approved by the Board of our church is reviewing our options related to the building that we have occupied for some 56 years. The questions raised go beyond our connection to the building and include the community's preservation of (read holding on to) our historical architectural heritage. Can you identify with the issue of letting go, raised by this situation?

Happiness is letting go of what you think your life is supposed to look like and celebrating it for everything that it is.

Mandy Hale

Recommended Resources

As always, this is not required reading. These pieces are simply meant to get your thinking started, and maybe to open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to “be a people of blessing”.

Wise Words

Skipping a Stone on Water

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.

Charles Darling

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.

Philip Booth

from *Gestalt at Sixty*

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.

May Sarton

Instructions

Give up the world; give up self;
finally, give up God.
Find god in rhododendrons and rocks,
passers-by, your cat.
Pare your beliefs, your absolutes,
Make it simple; make it clean.
No carry-on luggage allowed.
Examine all you have
with a loving and critical eye, then
throw away some more.
Repeat. Repeat.
Keep this and only this:
what your heart beats loudly for
what feels heavy and full in your gut.
There will only be one or two
things you will keep,
and they will fit lightly
in your pocket.

Sheri Hostetler



Let go or be dragged. — Zen proverb

Articles



Autumn: Reflections on the Season

From spiritualityandpractice.com

Naming the Days Feature by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat

The autumn equinox marks the arrival of the season of fall, traditionally seen as a period of changes leading to the dark of winter. In *Holidays and Holy Nights*, Christopher Hill points out that for Christians who observe the liturgical year, autumn is actually the beginning of the cycle. In an excerpt, he suggests that "the

dynamics of the fall of the year have the sweep of a great symphony or an epic poem."

That may explain why so many poets have reflected on this season. *The Heart of Autumn* contains 38 examples selected by Robert Atwan from such poets as Robert Bly, May Sarton, Carl Sandburg, Robert Penn Warren, Archibald MacLeish, and others. The excerpt from this book is "Leaves" by William Virgil Davis, a poem that conveys the mysterious qualities of fall.

What spiritual lessons and practices are suggested by the coming of autumn? Here are three areas for your meditations.

1. BALANCING DARKNESS WITH LIGHT

On the autumn equinox, day and night are of equal length. This signals the need to balance light and darkness within us. Far too often, we fear the dark and adore only the light. Joyce Rupp, a Catholic writer and poet who is one of our Living Spiritual Teachers, challenges us in *Little Pieces of Light* to befriend our inner darkness: "I gratefully acknowledge how darkness has become less of an enemy for me and more of a place of silent nurturance, where the slow, steady gestation needed for my soul's growth can occur. Not only is light a welcomed part of my life, but I am also developing a greater understanding of how much I need to befriend my inner darkness."

Buddhist Gary Thorp in *Caught in Fading Light* tells a wonderful teaching story about accepting all situations where we are left in the dark without answers:

"Once, when the Zen master Tokusan was still a student, he visited his teacher, Ryutan, just before sundown. They sat on the floor of Ryutan's hut, casually drinking tea and discussing Zen until deep into the night. At last, Ryutan said, 'Maybe it's about time you went home.' Tokusan bowed to his teacher and walked to the door. 'It's completely dark outside,' he said. Ryutan lit the lantern and said, 'Why not take this?' Just as Tokusan was about to take the lamp from his teacher's hands, Ryutan blew out the flame. Tokusan suddenly knew everything there was to know."

Thorp comments: "Sometimes there is no remedy for our situation than to begin from a point of absolute darkness. Turning off a television set and extinguishing a lantern have certain similarities; they are both abrupt and transition making, and can leave us in a different world. In darkness, we are always on our own."

2. LETTING GO

As we watch leaves fluttering to the ground in the fall, we are reminded that nature's cycles are mirrored in our lives. Autumn is a time for letting go and releasing things that have been a burden. All the religious traditions pay tribute to such acts of relinquishment. Fall is the right time to practice getting out of the way and letting Spirit take charge of our lives.

In *Kinds of Power* James Hillman, the elder statesman of contemporary depth psychology, challenges us to learn from others about this: "For what the actor tries to achieve on stage is to 'get out of the way' so that the character he or she is portraying can come fully out. So, too, the writer and the painter; they have to get out of the way of the flow of the work onto the paper and the canvas."

Buddhist teacher Sharon Salzberg, another of our Living Spiritual Teachers, writes in *Lovingkindness* about one of the offshoots of letting go: "Generosity has such power because it is characterized by the inner quality of letting go or relinquishing. Being able to let go, to give up, to renounce, to give generously — these capacities spring from the same source within us. When we practice generosity, we open to all of these liberating qualities simultaneously. They carry us to a profound knowing of freedom, and they also are the loving expression of that same state of freedom." Fall, then, is the perfect season to give generously of your time and talents to others.

3. ACKNOWLEDGING IMPERMANENCE

Autumn reminds us of the impermanence of everything. We have experienced the budding of life in spring and the flowerings and profusions of summer. Now the leaves fall and bare branches remind us of the fleeting nature of all things. Jewish rabbi and writer Harold Kushner in *The Lord Is My Shepherd* suggests that when we contemplate fall's changes, we grow more appreciative of all the beauties that surround us:

"The poet Wallace Stevens once wrote, 'Death is the mother of beauty.' What those words say to me is that we cherish the beauty of a sunrise, of a New England autumn, of a relationship, of a child's hug, precisely because those things will not be around forever and neither will we be around to enjoy them."

Fall also brings home to our consciousness death and the challenge to live every day to the fullest. Susan Jeffers in *Embracing Uncertainty* gives us a spiritual practice to facilitate this twofold movement:

"I was once told that certain spiritual masters in Tibet used to set their teacups upside down before they went to bed each night as a reminder that all life was impermanent. And then, when they awoke each morning, they turned their teacups right side up again with the happy thought, 'I'm still here!' This simple gesture was a wonderful reminder to celebrate every moment of the day."

Finally, Cynthia Kneen, in *Awake Mind, Open Heart* shares an open heart practice to carry with you into the fall.

"When you are brave and have an open heart, you have affection for this world — this sunlight, this other human being, this experience. You experience it nakedly, and when it touches your heart, you realize this world is very fleeting. So it is perfect to say 'Hello means good-bye.' And also, 'My hope, hello again.' "

More Articles

Letting go of shame to embrace joy: an article engaging Brene Brown's wonderful book, *The Gifts of Imperfection*.

<http://www.yourtango.com/2015278444/dont-let-people-shame-your-goofy-open-hearted-happiness>

Don't Let People Shame You For Being Your Goofy, Open-Hearted Self.

Letting go of who one used to be

<http://www.npr.org/2015/07/25/425655861/in-wondering-who-you-are-a-man-wakes-up-and-doesnt-know-his-wife>

Are we letting go of capitalism?

http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/17/postcapitalism-end-of-capitalism-begun?CMP=share_btn_fb

Without us noticing, we are entering the postcapitalist era. At the heart of further change to come is information technology, new ways of working and the sharing economy. The old ways will take a long while to disappear, but it's time to be utopian.

Everything I've ever let go of has claw marks on it. — **Unknown**

Books

Life Lines: Holding On (And Letting Go) by Forrest Church

In this eloquent, personal, hopeful book, writer and minister Forrest Church explores the lifelines that can sustain us in times of trouble: deeper connections to neighbor and stranger, a better understanding of human limits, and a larger view of our place in the universe.

Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End by Atul Gawande

In *Being Mortal*, bestselling author Atul Gawande tackles the hardest challenge of his profession: how medicine can not only improve life but also the process of its ending.

After the Sucker Punch: a Novel by Lorraine Devon Wilke

"They buried her father at noon, at five she found his journals, and in the time it took to read one-and-a-half pages her world turned upside down... he thought she was a failure... She tries to "just let it go," as her sister suggests, but..."

Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss by Pat Schwiebert & Chuck DeKlyen
(written for children, but helpful for all ages)

A listing of books for children and families about letting go:

https://www.amazon.com/gp/registry/wishlist/2TTP2FRYCZKA/ref=cm_wl_sortbar_v_page_2?ie=UTF8&page=2



Songs

"Weightless" by The Becca Stevens Band

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qk_qfA9Ylxg

"Throw It Away" by "Abbey Lincoln

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2O03vuk3r4>

Letting Go - Steffany Gretzinger

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_7XIKVgRGY

A beautiful theist expression of surrender & letting go

A Frozen Father (A bit of fun)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ud6B_NXoNc

Videos & Podcasts

The Parable of the Trapeze by Danaan Parry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hwv5n4hogc>

RadioLab with Oliver Sacks: “Memory and Forgetting”

<http://www.radiolab.org/story/91569-memory-and-forgetting/>

We let go of Oliver Sacks as he died this summer, but his wisdom about letting go lives on.

SLIP | @PhillipChbeeb & Renee Kester <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qk00gbDwGqM>

What happens when the most beautiful memories from our past end up doing the most damage to our future?

“Letting Go of God” by Julia Sweeney

http://www.ted.com/talks/julia_sweeney_on_letting_go_of_god?language=en

The Parable of Mussa and Nagib

<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/tales/session5/123298.shtml>

Movies & Television

Toy Story 3

Growing up, letting go and holding on to the blessings of our childhoods.



Griefwalker

A documentary about the leader of a palliative care team who has been at the deathbed of hundreds of people.

Amish Grace

A drama about forgiveness and faith after the 2006 shooting at an Amish schoolhouse.

Wild

Based on the book by Cheryl Strayed.

127 Hours

A man lives in self-imposed isolation from the people who love him in order to seek out his own individualistic adventures. An accident and the loss of a piece of himself allows him to embrace connection.



Join the Soul Matters Facebook page to engage in the theme with participants from around the US, Canada and Europe: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/soulmatters/>

Our theme for December is “Expectation”.