

All Souls Church Unitarian

Covenant Group Guide

July/August 2016

“Letting Go”

When I let go of what I am, I become who I need to be. When I let go of what I have, I receive what I need.

Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

We must be willing to let go of the life we've planned, so as to have the life that is waiting for us.

Joseph Campbell

The past has no power to stop you from being present now. Only your grievance about the past can do that.

Eckhart Tolle

In the end only three things matter: how much you loved, how gently you lived, and how gracefully you let go of things not meant for you.

Buddha

Train yourself to let go of everything you fear to lose.

Yoda, the Jedi master in *Star Wars*

Being able to let go, to give up, to renounce, to give generously — these capacities spring from the same source within us. . .They carry us to a profound knowing of freedom, and they also are the loving expression of that same state of freedom.

Sharon Salzberg, *Lovingkindness*

Adios

It is a good word, rolling off the tongue
no matter what language you were born with,
Use it. Learn where it begins,
the small alphabet of departure,
how long it takes to think of it,
then say, then be heard.

Marry it. More than any golden ring,
it shines, it shines.

Wear it on every finger
till your hands dance,
touching everything easily,
letting everything, easily, go.

Strap it to your back like wings.
Or a kite-tail. The stream of air behind a jet.
If you are known for anything,
let it be the way you rise out of sight
when your work is finished.

Think of things that linger: leaves,
cartons and napkins, the damp smell of mold.
Think of things that disappear.

Think of what you love best,
what brings tears into your eyes.

Something that said adios to you
before you knew what it meant
or how long it was for.

Explain little, the word explains itself.
Later perhaps. Lessons following lessons,
like silence following sound.

Naomi Shihab Nye
Words Under the Words

The River Delights to Lift Us Free

The current of the river swept silently over them all – young and old, rich and poor, good and evil, the current going its own way, knowing only its own crystal self. Each creature in its own manner clung tightly to the twigs and rocks of the river bottom, for clinging was their way of life, and resisting the current what each had learned from birth.

But one creature said at last, 'I am tired of clinging. Though I cannot see it with my eyes, I trust that the current knows where it is going. I shall let go, and let it take me where it will. Clinging, I shall die of boredom.' The other creatures laughed and said, 'Fool! Let go, and that current you worship will throw you tumbled and smashed across the rocks, and you will die quicker than boredom!' But the one heeded them not, and taking a breath did let go, and at once was tumbled and smashed by the current across the rocks.

Yet in time, as the creature refused to cling again, the current lifted him free from the bottom, and he was bruised and hurt no more. And the creatures downstream, to whom he was a stranger, cried, 'See a miracle! A creature like ourselves, yet he flies! See the Messiah, come to save us all!' And the one carried in the current said, 'I am no more Messiah than you. The river delights to lift us free, if only we dare let go. Our true work is this voyage, this adventure.'

Richard Bach, *Illusions: The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah*

The Extra Weight We Carry

Once upon a time there were three men. Each man had two sacks, one tied in front of his neck and the other tied on his back. When the first man was asked what was in his sacks, he said, "*In the sack on my back are all the good things friends and family have done. That way they're hidden from view. In the front sack are all the bad things that have happened to me. Every now and then I stop, open the front sack, take the things out, examine them, and think about them.*" Because he stopped so much to concentrate on all the bad stuff, he really didn't make much progress in life.

The second man was asked about his sacks. He replied, "*In the front sack are all the good things I've done. I like to see them, so quite often I take them out to show them off to people. The sack in the back? I keep all my mistakes in there and carry them all the time. Sure they're heavy. They slow me down, but you know, for some reason I can't put them down.*"

When the third man was asked about his sacks, he answered, "*The sack in front is great. There I keep all the positive thoughts I have about people, all the blessings I've experienced, all*

the great things other people have done for me. The weight isn't a problem. The sack is like sails of a ship. It keeps me going forward.

"The sack on my back is empty. There's nothing in it. I cut a big hole in its bottom. In there I put all the bad things that I can think about myself or hear about others. They go in one end and out the other, so I'm not carrying around any extra weight at all."

H. Norman Wright, *The Perfect Catch: Lessons on Life from a Bass Fisherman*

Trust and Surrender: A Practice in Beginning to Let Go

Trust and surrender seem to be at the heart of the spiritual practice of letting go. The paradox is that we cannot experience trust or surrender unless we are willing to let go in the small everyday experiences and in the larger, more life-shattering events. . . .

Although the trapeze artist lets go of everything at once, that is not the way in most of our ordinary lives. In fact, it is probably wise to proceed gradually, letting go of our grip gently, softly. Where do you need to begin? Letting go of your stuff? Fasting from habits and behaviors to create empty space in which the spirit can move?

At the heart of this practice, as in every other practice, is the willingness to pay attention to your inner and outer worlds. If you do not pay attention, you will continue to hold on to what you have always held close. . . .

Spend some time looking back and then forward. Courage is necessary to look at these issues, to accept what you see, and then to transform old patterns of holding on to a new willingness to let go.

To remind yourself of the power of letting go, practice tightening your fists and gently opening your fingers wide, closing and opening, closing and opening. Do this anywhere and anytime. The wisdom of your body will guide you to the next step in the practice of letting go, freeing you for a life not yet imagined.

Jane Vennard, *Grieving with Your Whole Heart: Spiritual Wisdom and Practice for Finding Comfort, Hope and Healing After Loss*

For Reflection and Discussion

1. In what ways are you challenged to let go? What are you needing to let go of?
2. What have you learned about letting go? What makes it hard? What helps? Do you know others whose struggles are similar to your own?
3. Consider creating a prayer or a practice that you helps you in your spiritual practice of letting go.
4. How does your experience of All Souls help with your spiritual practice of “letting go?”

Edited Collection by Mary Beth Hatem