



Soul Matters

January 2016

*What Does It Mean To Be
A People of Resistance?*

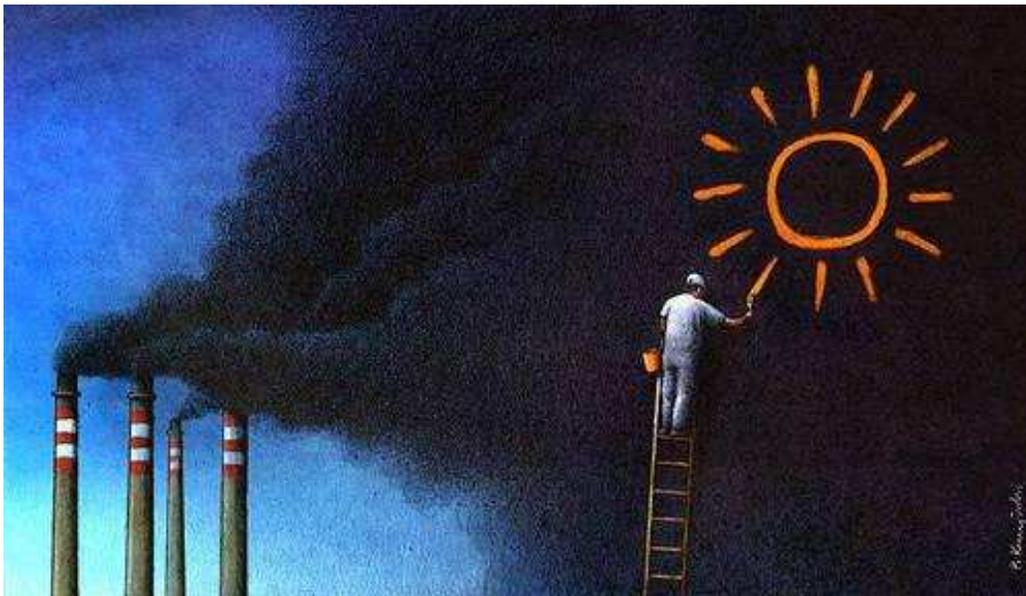


Image from weheartit.com

What Does It Mean To Be a People of Resistance?

...it starts when you care to act,
it starts when you do it again
after they said no,
it starts when you say We
and know who you mean, and each
day you mean one more.
--Marge Piercy, *from The Low Road*

Yes, this month's theme is among the most complex of them all. But it also may be the most simple.

The complexity is clear:

Sometimes being a people of resistance involves struggle and requires us to disobey; other times it asks us to just be ourselves and not hide who we really are. Sometimes it involves defeating the enemy; other times it is a matter of noticing that treating them as the enemy defeats us all.

Sometimes being a person of resistance is about fighting all the way to the top; other times it's about picking yourself up off the floor and taking one tiny step. Sometimes it depends on the will to never let them win; other times it hinges on the wisdom to follow the path of least resistance.

It certainly takes the form of speaking our truth. But more often than not, it's about the harder task of speaking the truth in love.

We all know being a people of resistance involves refusing to comply and demanding change, which requires great courage. But sometimes the most courageous thing is to stop resisting and accept that things just aren't going to work out the way we hoped.

Bottom line: being a people of resistance is tricky business and takes multiple forms.

But beyond this complexity lies the simplicity of Marge Piercy's words. In all cases, she reminds us, being a people of resistance starts when we say *we*.

January puts this in stark relief. Think about all those New Year's resolutions that try to overcome our personal inertia. Who of us ever accomplishes that without help? Without someone holding us accountable or cheering us on?

Martin Luther King Jr. Day makes it just as clear. Although we celebrate him as a great leader, he himself preached that change requires a movement. Simply put, none of us resists alone.

Or maybe it's better to say that none of us *have* to resist alone. We all know what it is like to *want* to resist. Think of all those voices we hear in our heads and feel in our hearts: I'm not going to take it anymore. I will not go along. I will not submit. I refuse to conform. I will no longer be numb. I will not give up. I will not forget. I will not go to sleep. I will ignore it no longer. I will not turn a blind eye. And yet, we also know that those voices are hard to hear and hold onto by ourselves. The blessing, of course, is that we don't have to hold on alone.

It is one thing to be told, "Resist!" It is quite another to be told, "Resist together!" But often what we need most is simply to be reminded that we don't have to resist alone.

May this be the gift we give each other this month. Let's help each other remember to start by saying "We!" It may be as simple as that.

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A: **Give Thanks!**

Who made resistance possible for you? Who stood beside you as you stood against the status quo? Who helped remind you that the arc really can be bent? Who invited you into a vision of an entirely new day? Who made you feel like a one of a kind rather than a misfit? Who helped you resist the pressures to follow the herd?

Someone stood beside you. Someone picked you up for the protests. Someone taught the class that opened your eyes. Someone wrote the poem that inspired you. Someone's sacrifice moved your heart. Someone's courage rubbed off on you. Someone told you that you were precious. Someone made you feel like you aren't in the fight alone.

Thank them! That's it. Your assignment: Find a way to thank them and tell them how they made your resistance possible. Let them know what a gift it was.

Option B: **Get Going ... But Not On Your Own**

This is the month of New Year's resolutions. This year don't just pick a resolution; pick a partner! Honoring the spiritual practice of accountability, tell a trusted friend about your resolution and then ask them to help hold you to it. Choose whatever accountability strategy that works best for both of you. Maybe ask them to text you once a day to remind or encourage you. Instead of running alone, ask them to run with you for the month. Maybe your resolution is to get back to writing. If so, ask them to be your editor.

And don't just ask them to hold you accountable. Ask them to help you reflect on the experience itself. Sit down for at least one conversation before your small group meeting to talk with your "resolution partner" about how it felt to be held accountable and to hold one accountable. What did it teach you - and them - about the power of resisting *together*?

Option C: **Give It Some Thought**

This exercise invites us into internal work. Authored by one of our Soul Matters ministers, the following poem challenges us to face those "impenetrable places" in a new way. Instead of pushing against or running away from those inner "steel doors" right away, it asks us to just "stay there" and "breathe."

In that spirit of sitting still, use this poem as your guide and companion this month. Weave it into your daily meditation or reflective practice. Pay attention to the way a new line will stand out each day. Come to your group ready to share the journey, where it took you and what it taught you about the resistance we wrestle with inside.

Resistance

By Peter Friedrichs, Soul Matters Minister

Press the tender flesh of your knowing
Against the steel door of your fear.

Stay there, breathing,
as its icy skin draws out the heat
of your racing heart.

Feel its resistance
to the yes of your hopes,
the imminent expiration
of your dreams.

You could have avoided this pain.
You could have stayed safely cradled,
blind, in the womb of your ignorance.

But in the silence of a moonless night
something called you here,
to this impenetrable place.

At the edge of sleep, or death,
you heard a sound
from beyond this door:

A prisoner, past all hope of release,
tapping his bent spoon
against the cell wall
that divides you,
desperate to be heard and known.

This is your life calling.
And now, having heard its cry,
you have no choice but
to find a way through.

Option D: Give It a Rest

In his book *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*, Walter Brueggemann invites us to resist our culture of busyness and anxiety. To him, striving is one of our greatest spiritual diseases. Resisting it needs to become one of everyone's core spiritual practices. Here are his Sabbath "instructions":

- You do not have to do more.
- You do not have to sell more.
- You do not have to control more.
- You do not have to know more.
- You do not have to be younger or more beautiful.

Pick one of these as your challenge or guide. Make it your mantra for the month. Find as many ways as you can to honor its goal of giving you rest and release. Report to your group what this counter-cultural act of resistance was like for you.

(List taken from this review of Brueggemann's book: <http://tinyurl.com/hjoned>)

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 "hooks" you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal of these questions is not to help you analyze what resistance means, but to figure out what being a person of resistance means for you today. So, which question is calling to you?

1. What would happen if you saw praise, joy or the creation of beauty as your primary form of resistance? What if the world needs your praise as much as your picket signs? What if it needs the creation of beauty as much as the elimination of injustice?
2. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." How is life asking you to end your silence?
3. Is it really an insurmountable and futile challenge? Or just a matter of taking the next small step in front of you?
4. The psychiatrist Carl Jung wrote, "What you resist, persists." So, is it possible that your resistance is the source of the struggle you are in? Would the fight end if you stopped fighting? Would the wall fall down if you *stopped* pushing on it?
5. Has the habit become bad? Is it time to be honest about how your habit controls you more than you control it?
6. If you were put on trial for being countercultural, would you be convicted?
7. Is it possible that your refusal to give up and give in may be a way of avoiding the pain?
8. Is labeling them the enemy defeating both them *and you*?
9. Are your efforts to save the world leaving room to savor it?
10. What would happen if you saw your justice work not as saving the world or bending the arc of the universe towards justice, but simply as "being a pest"? (Inspired by the Dalai Lama, who wrote: "If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito.")
11. 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 or dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started, and maybe open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be *a people of resistance*.

Resistance

Definition: the refusal to accept or comply with something; the attempt to prevent something by action or argument.

From the Latin verb *resistere*, “to hold back.”

Synonyms: defiance, refusal, struggle, obstruction, opposition

Wise Words

from The Low Road

Two people can keep each other sane, can give support, conviction, love, massage, hope, sex.

Three people can join to form a committee, a wedge. ..

A dozen make a demonstration.

A hundred fill a hall.

A thousand have solidarity and your own newsletter,

ten thousand, power and your own paper, a hundred thousand, your own media, ten million, your own country.

It goes on one at a time,
it starts when you care
to act, it starts when you do
it again after they say no,
it starts when you say We
and know who you mean, and each
day you mean one more.

--Marge Piercy

full poem here: <http://tinyurl.com/jdkwgje>

Resistance is thought transformed into feeling.
Change the thought that creates the resistance,
and there is no more resistance.

— Robert Conklin

A certain amount of resistance is good for anybody. It keeps you awake. — **Joan Didion**

Change is never painful. Only resistance to change is painful. -- **Buddha**

I choose love because the burden of hate is too heavy to carry. — **Martin Luther King**

It seems to me that I have greater peace and am close to God when I am not “trying to be a contemplative,” or trying to be anything special, but simply orienting my life fully and completely towards what seems to be required of a man like me at a time like this.

— **Thomas Merton**

There are times when disobedience heals a very ailing part of the self. It relieves the human spirit’s distress at being forced into narrow boundaries. For the nearly powerless, defying authority is often the only power available. -- **Malidoma Patrice Somé, *Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman***

Change means movement. Movement means friction. Only in the frictionless vacuum of a nonexistent abstract world can movement or change occur without that abrasive friction of conflict. -- **Saul Alinsky**

The moment we begin to fear the opinions of others and hesitate to tell the truth that is in us, and from motives of policy are silent when we should speak, the divine floods of light and life no longer flow into our souls.

-- **Elizabeth Cady Stanton**

In his 1963 book, *Strength to Love*, Dr. King wrote, "The trailblazers in human, academic, scientific, and religious freedom have always been nonconformists. In any cause that concerns the progress of mankind, put your faith in the nonconformist!" We Unitarian Universalists strive to be not only counter-cultural but radically transformative of culture as well. Welcome to the resistance: here we insist that all are welcome, all are inherently worthy and equally filled with human dignity. Here we buck conformity and call each to live as a human being not as a market niche, not as a label, not as an illness, not as a stereotype. Welcome to the resistance. Stand up and be counted among those who are human in community. Together we can change the world.

-- **Rev. Douglas Taylor, Soul Matters Minister**

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.

-- **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

In these downbeat times, we need as much hope and courage as we do vision and analysis. We must accent the best of each other even as we point out the vicious effects of our racial divide and the pernicious consequences of our maldistribution of wealth and power. We simply cannot enter the future at each other's throats, even as we acknowledge the weighty forces of racism, patriarchy, economic inequality, homophobia and ecological abuse on our necks. We are at a crucial crossroad in the history of this nation. And we either hang together by combating these forces that divide and degrade us or we hang separately.

-- **Cornell West from "Race Matters"**

If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito.

-- **The Dalai Lama**

Here's to the crazy ones.

Here's to the crazy ones.

The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers.

The round pegs in the square holes.

The ones who see things differently.

They're not fond of rules.

And they have no respect for the status quo.

You can praise them, disagree with them, quote them, disbelieve them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They invent. They imagine. They heal. They explore. They create. They inspire. They push the human race forward. Maybe they have to be crazy.

How else can you stare at an empty canvas and see a work of art?

Or sit in silence and hear a song that's never been written?

Or gaze at a red planet and see a laboratory on wheels?

While some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius.

Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.

-- **Advertisement for Apple Computer, snitched - without attribution - from the writings of Jack Kerouac**

from Still I Rise

Out of the huts of history's shame

I rise

Up from a past that's rooted in pain

I rise

I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,

Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear

I rise

Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear

I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,

I am the dream and the hope of the slave.

I rise

I rise

I rise.

by Maya Angelou

full poem here:

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/still-i-rise>

I've long liked the analogy of electricity to community connection. The only way to have electricity work is to make a complete circuit. So when we hold hands in a circle, I ask everyone to make sure we've made a complete circle - including everyone in the room- so that the "electricity" can flow. Each Sunday we sing "draw the circle wide -- no one stands alone. The analogy may also account for why it is hard for a community to be truly welcoming of a newcomer. The circle must be disrupted - at least for a moment - to include someone new. -- **Rev. Barbara McKusick Liscord, Soul Matters Minister**

Videos & Podcasts

"Help" on Radiolab

How can we resist the proverbial devil on our shoulder: smoking, addiction, stagnation? In this podcast, "Radiolab looks for ways to gain the upper hand over those forces inside us--from unhealthy urges, to creative insights--that seem to have a mind of their own."

<http://www.radiolab.org/story/117165-help/>

"Rethinking Non-Violent Resistance"

The participants on this podcast discussed "what we mean when referencing non-violent resistance and wondered together what Dr. King and others really had in mind when he preached non-violence?" They weave together religion, justice, and resistance in real and thought-provoking ways. There's lots here to think about!

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-raushenbush/rethinking-nonviolence-resistance_b_7170224.html

On resisting the war on poor and working families by Robert Reich

http://front.moveon.org/war_on_the_poor_reich/#.VmiuPGQrKtg

On disruptive leadership (blocks or resistance to being a leader)

<http://www.npr.org/programs/tes-radio-hour/261084166/disruptive-leadership>

On global non-violent civil resistance

"Then I analyzed the data, and the results blew me away. From 1900 to 2006, nonviolent campaigns worldwide were twice as likely to succeed outright as violent insurgencies."

<http://rationalinsurgent.com/2013/11/04/my-talk-at-tedx-boulder-civil-resistance-and-the-3-5-rule/>

Articles & Online

"Holy, Holy, Holy! Praise as Resistance" by Trevor Malkinson

The author states: "But it somehow never occurred to me that I could also voice this positive dimension, this praise for creation, as a form of political resistance." Be sure to listen to the Allen Ginsberg reading "A Footnote to Howl" linked to at the end of the article. (This is slightly "not safe for work" due to a little bit of R-rated language.)

<http://tinyurl.com/q9gk9nu>

"Humanism in Context" by Rev. Tom Schade

After tracing some UU history and general religious trends, the author imagines UU congregations as places of "cultural resistance." He ends with these questions: "Is your congregation an outpost of a culture of resistance to the mainstream culture? Is that really part of who you are and why you exist? And if so, how and why? What are you resisting? How do you show it? How is it creating new life and new possibility for you and the people of your community?"

<http://www.tomschade.com/p/humanism-in-context-you-know-i-am-very.html>

An Experiment in Love: Martin Luther King, Jr. on the Six Pillars of Nonviolent Resistance

This is an overview of King's profoundly insightful 1958 essay "An Experiment in Love." In this essay, King "examines the six essential principles of his philosophy of nonviolence, debunks popular misconceptions about it, and considers how these basic tenets can be used in guiding any successful movement of nonviolent resistance."

<http://tinyurl.com/hgmw9en>

Henry David Thoreau's essay "Civil Disobedience"

If a law "is such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another," he declares, "then I say, break the law." This essay makes it clear that "this stance is not a matter of whim but a demanding moral principle."

<http://tinyurl.com/jgt66j6>

White Debt

An article about resisting the reality of white privilege: <http://tinyurl.com/obpgt3p>

"How to Overcome Immunity to Change" by Jessie Scholl

For those looking for some practical guidance on how to make real and lasting changes, "two prominent researchers share a step-by-step plan that can help you break through old patterns and finally make the shifts that matter."

<https://experiencelife.com/article/how-to-overcome-immunity-to-change/>

Movies & Television

The Stanford Prison Experiment

Could you resist the temptation to be your worst self? Movie review and a link to the movie trailer: <http://tinyurl.com/h6j4n5r>

Frida

A biography of artist Frida Kahlo, who channeled the pain of a crippling injury and her tempestuous marriage into her work.

www.imdb.com/title/tt0120679/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Ghandi

The life of the lawyer who became the famed leader of the Indian revolts against the British rule through his philosophy of nonviolent protest.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0083987/>

Shut Up and Sing

A documentary on the Dixie Chicks in the wake of singer Natalie Maines' anti-George W. Bush statement at a 2003 concert.

www.imdb.com/title/tt0811136/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Selma

A chronicle of Martin Luther King's campaign to secure equal voting rights via an epic march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in 1965.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1020072/>

Milk

The story of Harvey Milk, and his struggles as an American gay activist who fought for gay rights and became California's first openly gay elected official.

www.imdb.com/title/tt1013753/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Songs

"Ella's Song" by Sweet Honey in the Rock

"We who believe in freedom cannot rest / We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes"

www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2T216XgiO0

"32 Flavors" (live version) by Ani DiFranco

Resist being turned into a follower and claim your uniqueness.

<https://vimeo.com/50543127>

"Resistance" by Muse

In a dystopian world, "love is our resistance."

www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPE9uSFFxrl

Books

NEW this month!

“Justice and Spirit” online book club

Skinner House, a publishing house of our Unitarian Universalist Association, has started an online book club that follows the themes of Soul Matters. This month’s book selection about resistance is *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* by Jeanne Theoharis.

For more information and to sign up, go to:

<https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/173731-justice-and-spirit-unitarian-universalist-book-club>

For those who like to plan ahead, the book selections based on Soul Matters themes for the rest of this church year are:

February - Desire: *Listening Against the Stone*

March - Liberation: *The Third Reconstruction*

April - Creation: *When God Isn't Green*

May - Blessing: *Blessing the World*

The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance by Dorothee Soelle

In this book Soelle argues mysticism is exactly what is needed to resist the destructive forces of injustice, materialism, and violence. She calls us to a life of both contemplation and action.

<http://tinyurl.com/zdtkate>

Spiritual Defiance: Building a Beloved Community of Resistance by Robin Meyers
from the book review: “In this provocative and passionate book, [Meyers] explores the decline of the church as a community of believers and calls readers back to the church’s roots as a community of resistance. Shifting the conversation about church renewal away from theological purity and marketing strategies that embrace cultural norms, and toward ‘embodied noncompliance’ with the dominant culture, Meyers urges a return to the revolutionary spirit that marked Jesus’s ministry.”

<http://tinyurl.com/pd3a7ya>

All the Light We Cannot See: A Novel by Anthony Doerr

A Pulitzer Prize winning novel “about a blind French girl and a German boy whose paths collide in occupied France as both try to survive the devastation of World War II.” This book “illuminates the ways, against all odds, people try to be good to one another.”

<http://tinyurl.com/zsrckm6>

Past Skinner House Unitarian Universalist Common Reads about resistance:

- 2014-15: [Reclaiming Prophetic Witness](#)
- 2013-14: [Behind the Kitchen Door](#)
- 2012-13: [The New Jim Crow](#)
- 2010-11: [The Death of Josseline](#)

A list of books for children and families about resistance:

<http://amzn.com/w/3KK6K5KR518RI>

If you’ve enjoyed this packet and are not a part of Soul Matters or a Unitarian Universalist congregation, please learn more about how to join us at www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com

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