

November 2020 Holding Nothing Back



What does it mean to be called together spiritually to hold nothing back?

Definitions (from Lexico by Oxford)

1. Hold back (phrasal verb – that’s a new one) –
 - a. Hesitate to act or speak
 - b. Keep or sustain in a specified position.
2. Hold something back –
 - a. Refuse or be unwilling to make something known.
 - b. Prevent or restrict the progress or development of someone or something.
 - c. Synonyms: suppress, keep back, hold in, bite back, fight back, choke back, stifle, smother, subdue, rein in, repress, restrain, check, curb, control, keep in check, keep under control, keep a tight rein on.
 - d. Antonyms: release, disclose.

Aggregated by the authors:

3. Hold Nothing Back – Reveal, disclose or expose everything with or without regard to consequences.

Thanks to the November packet writing team: Anne & Tom Perry, Mary Hammele, Pam Adams, Kristi Reisch, Sue Roark-Calnek, Chris Farnum and all the reviewers on the Packet Writing Team (join by contacting Rev. Margalie Belizaire).

Dear Friends,

This month's theme invites us to "Dance like nobody's watching; love like you've never been hurt. Sing like nobody's listening; live like it's heaven on earth." Not sure who said it first, but it's an invitation to hold nothing back. Let everything go. Toddlers and young kids do the dancing and singing piece spectacularly. Our dog does the love thing joyfully every time we come home. What would it look like to live like it's heaven on earth? Is that the beloved community? We can each dance and sing by ourselves, but we need others to love and a community to live like it's heaven on earth. According to Howard Zinn, ". . . to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory."

Social media spaces seem to encourage people to tell all. That can be marvelously cathartic. However, we've all heard stories of people who posted photos of a drunken party only to be asked about it in a job interview. We've heard about the young teens and preteens who bully a peer to suicide. Disclosing personal information, one's own and others', can result in unintended consequences that can be life altering.

So, holding nothing back is a two-sided coin. On the one hand,

- Holding something in can eat away at one's psyche. Holding in the horrors of war has contributed to many veterans' depression and suicide.
- Holding something back can taint a later disclosure. Were the allegations in Bob Woodward's book Rage held back to influence voters during the political campaign? Do people question its truth as a result?
- Holding something back can make the repercussions of delayed revelations worse. When the facts of Daniel Prude's death (ruled a homicide by the Medical Examiner) were kept from the public for months, the damage to city and police leadership was arguably worse than had they taken accountability at the time. In addition, the protests could have focused on the homicide, without having to deal with the cover-up.

On the other hand,

- Holding nothing back but revealing it over time can be a useful strategy. In The Burglary: The Discovery of J. Edgar Hoover's Secret FBI by Betty Medsger (2014), a group of Philadelphia area activists burglarized the Media, Pennsylvania FBI office in 1971, making off with all the files. At a secluded rural location, they discovered they had a treasure trove of national documents. They released the files, including plans for rounding up protesters and placing them in concentration camps, gradually to multiple 'friendly' journalists. Their strategy increased the odds that the story would be in the news for an extended time.
- Holding nothing back in a state of ecstatic transformation can be scary, even dangerous, leading to unintended consequences. The 1890s Lakota Ghost Dance meant to unite the people with their ancestors triggered the terrible Wounded Knee massacre by US troops.
- Holding nothing back brings up wonderful images – the runner who goes long enough to get runner's high, the cyclist grinding up the mountain to sail gloriously down the other side, the slalom skier on the fine edge of speed vs crash, the evangelical Christians speaking in tongues, the Sufi whirling meditation that aims for perfection.

This month we may try "holding nothing back" while exploring its inherent contradictions.

Anne J. Perry, Minister of Food

Says "eat with gusto, hydrate fully & be ecstatically merry"

First Unitarian Church of Rochester, NY

When selecting or writing these exercises, we look for a variety of experiences, some that will be easy and comfortable, some challenging, that draw on different practices or modes of accessing the sacred. We assume that participants will have a variety of life experiences, different mobility and access needs, and cultural norms, and we write with that in mind.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Select one of the exercises below to practice and come prepared to discuss the experience and your thoughts and feelings about it with your group.

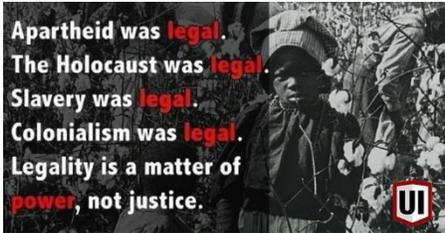
Option A: “Dance like nobody's watching . . . Sing like nobody's listening.” Every morning for the next two weeks, turn on some loud rhythmic music and dance like no one is watching or play your favorite sing-along music and sing as loud as you can. You can even do these exercises while seated. Do this for at least 15 minutes each day. If you did it for longer would you be more likely to ‘lose’ your ego in the experience? What did you learn from this experience? Did you loosen up? Did this change how you felt for the rest of the day? If singing and dancing are not your thing, go for a bike ride, climb the highest hill you can find and sail down the other side. Or go to a grassy hillside and roll down the hill.

Option B: “love like you’ve never been hurt . . . live like it’s heaven on earth.” Begin this exercise by writing a list of the hurts you’ve experienced in a loving relationship. Have these hurts held you back? Do they still hold you back? What would it mean to love like these hurts hadn’t happened? If you could wipe them away, would you be closer to living like it’s heaven on earth? Take a few minutes each day to write down what it means to live like it’s heaven on earth. What can you do to get closer to this? What can we do as UUs to get closer to this?

Option C: Participate in Social Justice Activity. Many of us would like to ‘hold nothing back’ by participating in protests. But we can’t for a variety of reasons including COVID. What else can we do? There are many creative/artistic ways to help, such as making yard signs, painting makeshift shields, writing letters to politicians, providing snacks for the medics at First Universalist and/or helping with fundraising. Join the Elders and Allies group (see Connections newsletter) to be notified of opportunities for participation other than marching and take on a task that is outside your comfort zone. Giving up all your worldly possessions is probably too much to ask, but we can give more time than seems reasonable or give financially until it hurts. If you don’t currently have a social justice activity that you are involved in on a regular basis, November would be a good month to establish a relationship with an organization seeking volunteers, such as Foodlink, St. Joseph’s Neighborhood Center, the YWCA of Rochester and Monroe County, House of Mercy, Habitat for Humanity or another organization you are familiar with. Does volunteering help you feel more involved and connected? Reflect on your experience of beginning involvement.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions aren't "homework" that need to be covered entirely. Instead, simply pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The questions often lead not to answers, but more questions.

1. Poet Mark Nepo suggests . . . "A Question to Walk With: Recount a time when you held some of who you are back and how that affected you. Recount a time when you held nothing back and how that affected you. Describe what holding nothing back means to you now."
<https://www.dailygood.org/story/1458/mark-nepo-holding-nothing-back/>
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/hold-nothing-back_b_2974742
2. The photo on the front of this packet is from a civil disobedience action in front of Rochester City Hall in the wake of revelations that officers from Rochester Police Department had responded to a mental health crisis with what has been perceived as inhumanity and callous indifference, placing a naked man in handcuffs with a spit hood placed over his head in chilly March conditions. Is this type of action more or less effective than a mass march with crowds of citizens carrying signs? What are you willing to risk when protesting for social justice? How far will you go to hold nothing back?
3. It has been said that, "what is legal is not always right and what is illegal is not always wrong." How does this statement resonate with you when considering where you stand on issues of morality? Looking at the accompanying image, what would you add to that list in today's environment and what would you risk in order to fight those 'legal' wrongs?

Apartheid was **legal**.
The Holocaust was **legal**.
Slavery was **legal**.
Colonialism was **legal**.
Legality is a matter of **power**, not justice.


4. Every parent has the experience of their kids holding back information. Who spilled the cereal all over the floor? When you were that kid, how did you feel? Were there consequences for 'tattling' on your sibling? As a parent, did you hope that one of the kids would rat out the perp or were you hoping they would stand together against authority?
5. Parents sometimes hold back information to protect their children from imagined or real consequences, or to maintain family lore. When and why have you held back information from your children? What was the result short and long term? Did you/do you think it was/is the right decision?
6. At some time in your life, have you seen someone bullying another? Were you the target of the bully or an observer? How did you respond? Did you hold back and say nothing or step in to defend the victim? How do you respond when the targets are our Black neighbors, and the bullies are police and politicians?
7. Parker J. Palmer in Let Your Life Speak says, "Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent." Are your passions and values aligned? Do your values tell you to do one thing and your passions another? How can the chef who is passionate about fine dining align that with her values of equity and justice? (Note: you can create your own example.)

GROWING OUR SOULS

These questions are the same each month and invite us to connect this work of spiritual deepening ...

1. How will our discussion today cause you to be different in the world?
2. Within our church community, where can you help to make changes related to this topic?
3. How does this discussion relate to other activities in which you are engaged at church (e.g., parenting, religious education, social justice, worship, music)?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

READINGS FOR CHALICE LIGHTING

Chalice Lighting:

May the flame we now kindle
Inspire us to use our power
To heal with love
To help with compassion
To bless with joy
And to seek liberation
In the fullness of community

Extinguishing the Chalice:

Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Holding nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits you."
-- John O'Donohue

QUOTATIONS

"Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming "Wow! What a Ride!"

— Hunter S. Thompson

"True faith means holding nothing back; it bets everything on the hope of eternity."

– Francis Chan, preacher and author

"To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness.

What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places – and there are so many – where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction.

And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory."

-- Howard Zinn, How Lovely the Ruins

<https://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=321>

"There is a heady sense of manhood that comes from advancing from apathy to commitment, from timidity to courage, from passivity to aggressiveness. There is an intoxication that comes from standing up to the police at last."

— David T. Dellinger, From Yale to Jail: The Life Story of a Moral Dissenter (1993)

"Civil disobedience is urged not to destroy the United States but because the government is now poorly organized to achieve democracy. The aim of such a movement always will be to improve the nature of the government, to urge and counsel resistance to military Jim Crow in the interest of a higher law--the principle of equality and justice upon which real community and security depend."

— Bayard Rustin, Down the Line (1971)

"An individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for the law"

— Martin Luther King Jr.

"One has not only a legal, but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws."

— Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from the Birmingham Jail"

"It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right."

— Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience"

"Saints have no moderation, nor do poets, just exuberance."

— Anne Sexton

"Everything in moderation, including moderation."

— Oscar Wilde

"Moderation in all things, especially moderation."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

"We're taught and trained to hold it all inside, to not feel the beauty of the innocence of letting it out when and how we feel it. And we do; we do for the fear of avoiding the stigma of weakness, until it breaks us from the inside, slowly and silently, and there is "little" or "nothing" left of us."

— Ufuoma Apoki, Nigerian author

"When I write, I hold nothing back. I write like he'll never read it. Because he never will. Every secret thought, every careful observation, everything I've saved up inside me, I put it all in the letter. When I'm done, I seal it, I address it, and then I put it in my teal hatbox."
– Jenny Han, author of young adult fiction.

"He who loves, flies, runs, and rejoices; he is free and nothing holds him back."
– Henri Matisse, French artist

FROM UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

Hymn in *Singing the Journey*

Building a New Way <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfoJ2DBfPrA>

Prayer for While in the Struggle

. . . Spirits, we ask for guidance
Send us strength and endurance
Help us to give our all to this
And hold nothing back
For precious lives depend on it . . .

Rev. Margalie Belizaire, <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/prayer-while-struggle>

POETRY EXCERPTS

The Final Poem

. . . *Magisterial in the white wicker rocker*
Robert Frost at rest after giving
a savage reading

holding nothing back, his rage
at dying . . .
Reaching for the knob of his cane

he rose, and flung this exit line:
Make every poem your final poem.

-- Maxine Kumin <https://poetrysociety.org/award-winners/2006-frost-medalist>

For A New Beginning

"In out of the way places of the heart,
Where your thoughts never think to wander,
This beginning has been quietly forming,
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

. . .

Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Holding nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits you."

-- John O'Donohue

<https://www.familyconstellationwork.net/blog/holding-nothing-back-learning-to-find-ease-in-risk>

Leap before You Look

The sense of danger must not disappear:
The way is certainly both short and steep;
However gradual it looks from here;
Look if you like, but you will have to leap

. . .

A solitude ten thousand fathoms deep
Sustains the bed on which we lie, my dear.
Although I love you, you will have to leap;
Our dream of safety has to disappear..

-- WH Auden, "Selected Poems" (1940)

http://web.mit.edu/cordelia/www/Poems/Leap_Before_you_look.html

Roll the Dice

If you're going to try, go all the way.
Otherwise, don't even start.

. . .

You will be alone with the gods, and the nights will flame with fire.
DO IT. DO IT. DO IT. All the way
You will ride life straight to perfect laughter. It's the only good fight there is.

- Charles Bukowski

Video (read by Tom O'Bedlam) 1:58

<https://youtu.be/36CYMdFmDeQ>

FROM SACRED TEXTS

"It is better to live your own destiny imperfectly than to live an imitation of somebody else's life with perfection."

– The Bhagavad Gita

"He holds nothing back from life;
therefore he is ready for death,
as a man is ready for sleep
after a good day's work."

-- Tao Te Ching, 50

Sufi Ritual Dance or Sema Ceremony

We may have heard this referred to as 'whirling dervishes'.

"The Mevlevi (also spelled as *mawlawi*) Ritual dance or *sema* consists of several stages with different meanings:"

"*Naat-i Sherif*, is a eulogy to the Messenger of Islam and all Prophets before him, who represent love."

"*Taksim*, an improvisation on the reed flute or *ney*. This expresses the divine breath, which gives life to everything."

"*Devr-i Veled*, accompanied by *peshrev* music; this is a circular, anticlockwise, procession three times around the turning space."

"During the *Sema* itself there are four *selams*, or musical movements, each with a distinct rhythm. At the beginning, during and close of each *selam*, the *semazen* testify to God's existence, unity, majesty and power"

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160306104925/http://whirlingdervishes.org/whirlingdervishes.htm>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sufi_whirling#/media/File:Whirlingdervishes.JPG

"Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. . . Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin . . . Be not therefore anxious for the morrow: for the morrow will be anxious for itself. . ."

-- Matthew 6:25-34

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+6%3A25-34%2CLuke+12%3A22-32&version=ASV>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew_6:28

"From the very start, therefore, human beings sought ecstasy. In traditional societies, religious ritual catered for these yearnings, orchestrating them, giving them shape and helping people to integrate transcendent experience into their daily lives. To this end, they employed the techniques of what we now call art: dance, music, painting, drama and song. Before the advent of the printed book, the CD or the public museum, most people could experience art only under the auspices of religion."

-- Karen Armstrong, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2003/may/23/health.lifeandhealth>

"What I now realize, from my study of the different religious traditions, is that a disciplined attempt to go beyond the ego brings about a state of ecstasy." Per Armstrong, "ecstasy" from "ek stasis," standing (or leaping) away from our ordinary state.

-- Karen Armstrong, <https://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0330/p16s01-bogn.html>

PODCASTS, SONGS, ARTICLES, FILMS, & BOOKS

TED2014: **Embrace the Near Win**

"Coming close to what you thought you wanted can help you attain more than you ever dreamed you could. . . . Even if we created utopias, I believe we would still have the incomplete. Completion is a goal, but we hope it is never the end."

-- Sarah Lewis (art historian and critic)

https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_lewis_embrace_the_near_win (11:41)

Songs

Ella's Song *For Ella Baker*

Lyrics and music by Bernice Johnson Reagon

Performed by Sweet Honey in the Rock

"We who believe in freedom cannot rest

We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes

Until the killing of black men, black mothers' sons

Is as important as the killing of white men, white mothers' sons . . ."

Sweet Honey in the Rock version:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2T216XqiO0>

Resistance Revival Chorus version:

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

American Reckoning (from 2020)

Bon Jovi

“America’s on fire

There’s protests in the street

Her conscience has been looted

And her soul is under siege

Another mother’s crying

As history repeats

I can’t breathe ...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FacRmfBh0sE>



Holding Back the Years

Simply Red

“Holding back the years

Thinking of the fear

I’ve had for so long

When somebody hears

Listen to the fear that’s gone

Strangled by the wishes of pater

Hoping for the arms of mater

Get to me the sooner or later . . .”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yG07WSu7Q9w>

Humor:

What do you call a group of alligators? For the answer, please check your favorite look up app.

While it’s sometimes tricky to find the applicable poems, we appreciate Earl Pickles’ spin on it, especially since he figured out how to include bacon:

