

## THE JOURNEY: A Guide for Reflection

### Freedom

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It's been well over a year since semi-trucks rolled up Wellington Street to park (and honk) for days on end on Parliament Hill. Protesters unfurled banners and placards demanding greater freedoms—some with choice words meant to provoke and offend. I'm not so sure these demonstrations advanced the cause of freedom in any way. And I'm not so sure I, to this day, understand exactly what freedoms the protesters were seeking.

One of the classic frameworks around freedom is the distinction between freedom from and freedom to—rather, to be without obstacles or constraints on one's actions (a negative freedom) versus to be empowered to direct one's own destiny (a positive freedom). The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor distinguished these as an “opportunity concept,” meaning one has opportunities to choose among many different options, and an “exercise concept,” meaning people have the power to make a free choice based on what they actually desire. This distinction can be subtle at times. And it can appear to be without a difference, when both can describe the same situation. In the case of the truckers, many of them were seeking freedom from what, to them, was an unacceptable level of government control throughout the pandemic; and many of them were seeking freedom to do that they wanted, on their own terms, without regard to risks their behaviour might have for the well-being of the wider community.

As you move into this month's topic, I encourage you to look at those places in your life where you might be yearning for more freedom. How would you describe it? Is it freedom from or freedom for that you're seeking? And does that distinction matter in your situation?

I wish you well in your “free and responsible search for truth and meaning” this month!

In faith and love,  
Shawn

## Questions to Live With

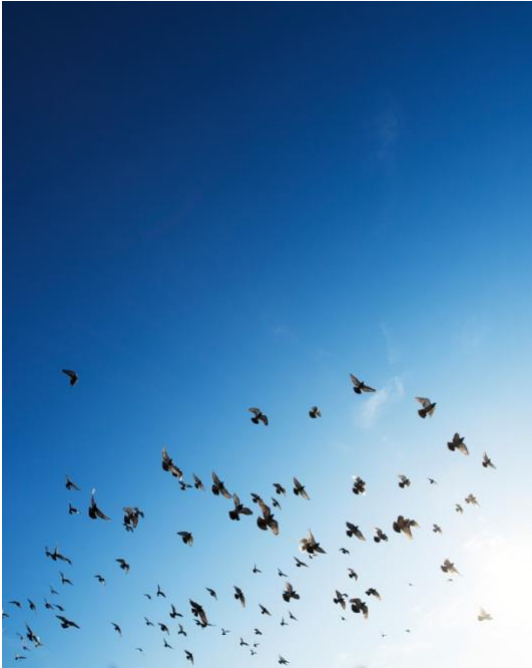


Photo by Rowan Heuvel on Unsplash

1. Has freedom for you been in one big leap, or a slow and steady process? Are you trying to make it one big leap when it needs to be slow and steady? Or, are you trying to take it slow and steady, when you really need to take the leap?
2. Would living more simply bring you greater freedom?
3. Has age left you feeling freer, or less free?
4. Thomas Merton writes: "I have an instinct that tells me that I am less free when I am living for myself alone." Is living for yourself making you less free?
5. When have you been freed by love?
6. If not one of these questions, what is your question about "freedom" for this month?

## For Inspiration

Just living is not enough... one must have sunshine, freedom, and a little flower.

- Hans Christian Andersen

At one time people believed that a town had to be planned by a planner who made a plan or blueprint. It was said that if the order of the town is not created from above, there will just not be an order in the town. And so, even in spite of the most obvious evidence of all the beautiful towns and villages built in traditional societies without master plans, this belief has taken hold, and people have allowed themselves to give up their freedom.

- Christopher Alexander, architect

From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

No one outside ourselves can rule us inwardly. When we know this, we become free.

- Buddha

If we don't believe in freedom of expression for people we despise, we don't believe in it at all.

- Noam Chomsky

Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

- Viktor Frankl

Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes.

- Mahatma Gandhi

## Caged Bird

A free bird leaps  
on the back of the wind  
and floats downstream  
till the current ends  
and dips his wing  
in the orange sun rays  
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks  
down his narrow cage  
can seldom see through  
his bars of rage  
his wings are clipped and  
his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze  
and the trade winds soft through the sighing  
trees  
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright  
lawn  
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of  
dreams  
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream  
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

- Maya Angelou

## One Art

The art of losing isn't hard to master;  
so many things seem filled with the intent  
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster  
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:  
places, and names, and where it was you  
meant to travel. None of these will bring  
disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or  
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,  
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.  
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture  
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident  
the art of losing's not too hard to master  
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.

- Elizabeth Bishop

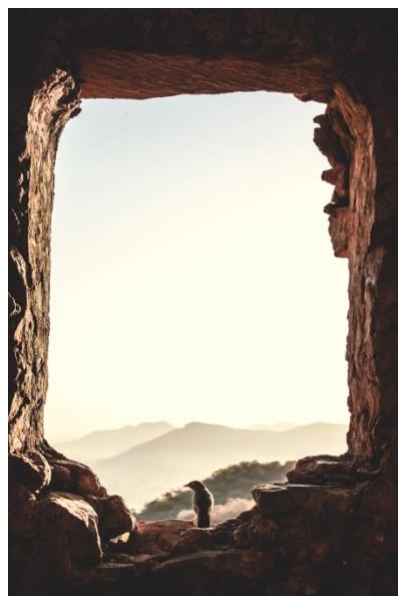


Photo by Abhishek Koli on Unsplash

## Tanager

If only I had not listened to the piece  
on the morning radio about the former asylum  
whose inmates were kept busy  
at wooden benches in a workshop  
making leather collars and wristbands  
that would later be used to restrain them.  
And if only that had not reminded me,  
as I stood facing the bathroom mirror,  
of the new state prison whose bricks had been  
set  
by prisoners trucked in from the old prison,  
how sweet and free of static my walk  
would have been along the upland trail.  
Nothing to spoil the purity of the ascent —  
the early sun, wafer-white,  
breaking over the jagged crest of that ridge,  
a bird with a bright-orange chest  
flitting from branch to branch with its mate,  
and a solitary coyote that stopped in its tracks  
to regard me, then moved on.  
Plus the cottonwood fluff snowing sideways  
and after I stood still for a while,  
the coyote appearing again in the distance  
before vanishing in the scrub for good.  
That's the kind of walk it might have been.

- Billy Collins

A friend is someone who gives you total  
freedom to be yourself.

- Jim Morrison

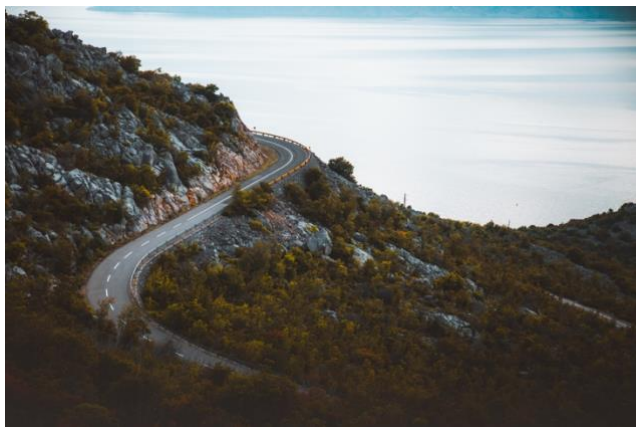


Photo by Taneli Lahtinen, on Unsplash

## A Certain Peace

It was very pleasant  
not having you around  
this afternoon

not that i don't love you  
and want you and need you  
and love loving and wanting and needing you

but there was a certain peace  
when you walked out the door  
and i knew you would do something  
you wanted to do  
and i could run  
a tub full of water  
and not worry about answering the phone  
for your call  
and soak in bubbles  
and not worry whether you would want  
something  
special for dinner  
and rub lotion all over me  
for as long as i wanted  
and not worry if you had a good idea  
or wanted to use the bathroom

and there was a certain excitement  
when after midnight you came home  
and we had coffee  
and i had a day of mine  
that made me as happy  
as yours did you

- Nikki Giovanni

Even Socrates, who lived a very frugal and  
simple life, loved to go to the market. When his  
students asked about this, he replied, I love to  
go and see all the things I am happy without.

- Jack Kornfield

The truth will set you free, but first it will piss you  
off.

- Gloria Steinem

## If We Do Not Venture Out

If, on a starlit night,  
with the moon brightly shimmering,  
We stay inside and do not venture out,  
the evening universe remains a part of life  
we shall not know.

If, on a cloudy day,  
with grayness infusing all  
and rain dancing rivers in the grass,  
We stay inside and do not venture out,  
the stormy, threatening energy of  
the universe remains  
a part of life we shall not know.

If, on a frosty morning,  
dreading the chilling air before the  
sunrise,  
We stay inside and do not venture out,  
the awesome cold, quiet, and stillness of  
the dawn universe remains  
a part of life we shall not know.

If, throughout these grace-given days of  
ours,  
surrounded as we are by green life and  
brown death, hot pink joy and cold gray  
pain and miracles—always miracles—

If we stay inside ourselves and do not  
venture out  
then the Fullness of the universe  
shall be unknown to us  
And our locked hearts shall never feel the  
rush of worship.

- Marni Harmony  
(adapted from the original)

The only real prison is fear, and the only  
real freedom is freedom from fear.

- Aung San Suu

## Jewellery

I wear it more to be its captive  
than to captivate; I want  
to be the prisoner of gold,  
to hear my voice break through  
the chain which holds my song  
in check, or watch the tendons  
flicker under  
the band about my wrist  
which makes my gestures  
conscious and restrained;  
the circular earrings  
familiar as my name  
have tamed my mind  
as the single ring  
has tamed my hand.

You have made a glittering prison  
of all my jewellery,  
you knew I never wanted  
to be free.

- Gwendolyn MacEwen

For to be free is not merely to cast off  
one's chains, but to live in a way that  
respects and enhances the freedom of  
others.

- Nelson Mandela

Better to die fighting for freedom than be  
a prisoner all the days of your life.

- Bob Marley



Photo by Denny Müller on Unsplash

## The Canada Poem (last stanza)

there was no hope for me after that  
the world had come up and flashed me  
and shown me that there was more to it  
than the brutal isolation of that house  
and that magic existed in the open  
spaces  
between buildings and people bent on  
making something more out of something  
less  
and all the runaway dreams -  
they tried of course, to bend me to their  
rules  
to discipline the Indian right out of me  
and with every whack of the belt or band  
the bruises they made sure were  
hidden well beneath my clothing  
they'd look me sternly in the eye and say  
"you'll never run away again" and I  
would almost laugh out loud because  
of course  
I'd already left a thousand times  
by then

- Richard Wagamese



Mohawk Institute in Brantford, photo courtesy of Toronto Life

## Why Are You Here?

for Sayeh (Shadow)

Poet  
from the forest-covered mountains  
you celebrated the land that jailed you  
When the radio broadcast your patriotic  
song  
your jail guards and cellmates asked,  
"Why are you here?"

In the "rose-coloured dawn" of exile  
a world away from your world  
you lauded "peace and freedom"  
and the mirror asked,  
"Why are you here?"

Now  
at your burial  
in "The House of Hope"  
thousands sing your words  
and no one asks,  
"Why are you here?"

- Bānoo Zan

### *About the Poem*

*This poem responds to the funeral. After he was jailed in Iran for his political views, he left the country and lived in exile until the end of his days. His body was returned to Iran for burial. At his funeral, thousands sang his songs. Words in quotes, except the question "Why are you here?", are taken from the patriotic song by Ebtehaj titled Iran, the "House of Hope".*

## Optional Spiritual Exercise

### Help Someone Else Escape

Sometimes it's not we who need a moment of escape, but someone we care about. Stepping away, renewing oneself, taking a break are not gifts that some people are good at giving to themselves. Sometimes they need a friend to encourage them or make them do it. So, maybe life is calling you to help someone else escape.

If so, here is your task:

1. Spend some time identifying someone in your circle of concern that is carrying a burden, weight, or responsibility from which they need a brief time of escape.
2. Then do something to give them that gift, to leave them feeling, at least for a time, carefree. You can be direct about it or sneaky. Sometimes gifts like these require a surprise or even anonymity. It might be important for you to drag them into it. Then again, it might be important for them to never know you are behind it. Your assignment is simply to orchestrate it, to make it happen.
3. Come back to your group prepared to share the gift that this moment of freedom gave them...and you.

## Join Us

### Join a Journey Group

Journey Groups are a great way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with small group of people for a couple of hours each month. Groups meet online on Zoom and are scheduled at different times during the month.

For more information, visit our website [firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/](https://firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/) or look for the link in *First Light*.

## Upcoming Services | Sundays at 10:30 a.m.

May 7 | The Ordination of Nicole McKay  
Rev. Debra Faulk, Guest Preacher  
Rev. Lynn Harrison and Rev. Shawn Newton

May 14 | Matterhood  
Rev. Lynn Harrison

May 21 | CUC National Service  
We will join with UUs from across Canada for this service that is part of the CUC Symposium in Ottawa. The service will be available on: <http://bit.ly/NationalWorshipMay16> and on the [CUC's YouTube Channel](#).

May 28 | Coming of Age Again  
Coming of Age Sunday  
Rev. Shawn Newton and this year's Coming of Agers

June 4 | Flower Communion  
Celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this beloved ritual  
Rev. Shawn Newton

June 11 | The Journey Was the Destination  
Rev. Shawn Newton's final service at First Unitarian

June 18 | Reflections on the Path Ahead  
Interim Ministry Search Committee

June 25 | Arrivals and Departures  
Rev. Lynn Harrison

## The Journey Team

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