



## THE JOURNEY: A Guide for Reflection

### Liberating Love

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“I could *do it* if you wouldn’t look so hard,” shouted a child’s voice from beyond the hedge of Rev. Bruce Marshall’s back yard. While he had no idea what they were trying to do, he knew exactly what the child was saying.

We *all* know that feeling.

Whether we experience it as a harsh glare, a fleeting glance, or a vacant gaze which consciously or unconsciously seeks to render us invisible, the dismissal of our worth and dignity registers deeply at the core of our being. As time goes by there doesn’t have to be anyone else around at all for internalized messages, that our way of being is somehow “less-than”, to trigger in us self-consciousness, anxiety, a loop of negative self-talk or worse.

If we’re fortunate though, there have been seasons in our lives when we’ve been sustained, healed or transformed by people in whose presence we’ve felt beautiful, understood, important and good, just as we are. We may even experience what Elizabeth Gilbert calls “an ocean of warm, affectionate, and outrageously unconditional love available to us all – and .... it is conveniently accessible from within. [No one] is excluded from this ocean of love; it is only a question of learning how to hear it, how to feel it, how to trust it.”

No matter what we think about its source, this form of love can be a powerful force in helping to free us from the damage done by “hard looks” and by the myriad forms of unaddressed bias in our society. We, in turn, can be Love’s Agents in the world when we show up for human dignity, for those in our midst who feel unlovable, unacceptable, unworthy.

Keeper of our Hearts – nurture the seeds of loving kindness in each of us so that whatever we do in love might help to liberate someone, somewhere, to be their full selves. In this work of a lifetime, may our courageous action increase the sum total of love, justice and mutual flourishing in the world that we might someday *all* be free.

In love and hope,  
Angela

## Questions to Live With



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1. How has love changed as you've gotten older? Is it softer? Quieter? Larger? Tougher? Sneakier? More central? More painful? More universal? More ordinary? More mysterious? More demanding?
2. What might it mean to regularly ask, "What would love do here?"
3. If Love could speak, what do you think it would want to say to you?
4. In what new way are you being called to use your personal, social, cultural or economic power in the service of love?
5. What has been your greatest act of love?
6. If these questions don't address how you need to explore liberating love this month, what is your question?

## For Inspiration

The longer I live, the more deeply I learn that love— whether we call it friendship or family or romance— is the work of mirroring and magnifying each other's light. Gentle work. Steadfast work. Lifesaving work in those moments when life and shame and sorrow occlude our own light from our view but there is still a clear-eyed loving person to beam it back. In our best moments, we are that person for another.

- James Baldwin

We accept the love we think we deserve.

- Stephen Chbosky

You never lose by loving. You always lose by holding back.

- Barbara De Angelis

Love liberates, It doesn't just hold- that's just ego. Love liberates. It doesn't bind. Love says, 'I love you. I love you if you're in China. I love you if you're across town. I love you if you're in Harlem. I love you. I would like to be near you. I'd like to have your arms around me. I'd like to hear your voice in my ear. But that's not possible now, so I love you. Go.

- Dr. Maya Angelou

Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.

- Martin Luther King Jr.

Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public.

- Cornel West

To invoke Love  
is to ask for a hug from a thunderstorm,  
spill tea in the lap of the infinite trickster...  
is to take the risk of inviting chaos to visit the  
spaces you spent so much time making tidy...  
is to allow for the possibility that your words  
and actions might become so empowered  
you can no longer believe in apathy,  
or the self-righteous idea that nothing can  
change.

- Rev. Sean Parker Dennison



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Though we cannot think alike, may we not  
love alike?

- John Wesley

Love is a choice you make from moment to  
moment.

- Barbara De Angelis

Where there is love there is life.

- Mahatma Gandhi

All ideologies end up killing people. If you  
separate love from nonviolence you turn  
nonviolence into an ideology, a gimmick.  
Structures that are not inhabited by justice  
and love have no liberating.

- Jean Goss

### *Touched by An Angel*

We, unaccustomed to courage  
exiles from delight  
live coiled in shells of loneliness  
until love leaves its high holy temple  
and comes into our sight  
to liberate us into life.

Love arrives  
and in its train come ecstasies  
old memories of pleasure  
ancient histories of pain.  
Yet if we are bold,  
love strikes away the chains of fear  
from our souls.

We are weaned from our timidity  
In the flush of love's light  
we dare be brave  
And suddenly we see  
that love costs all we are  
and will ever be.  
Yet it is only love  
which sets us free.

- Maya Angelou

Love makes your soul crawl out from its hiding  
place.

- Zora Neale Hurston

I am confused by people who say they love us  
but are never upset when we are treated  
unjustly. The two simply cannot co-exist. A love  
that's aloof isn't a love I have any use for. I  
need a love that is troubled by injustice.

- Austin Channing Brown

How you love yourself is how you teach others  
to love you.

- Rupi Kaur

Whenever I hear someone I love being hard on themselves—whether referring to something they did, how they look, or a habit they can't kick—I have a little rejoinder. I always say, "Don't talk about my friend like that."

- Suleika Jaouad

The Dalai Lama says that when we make a mistake, we need to ask, "Can I love this too?" Can I love all of me, even the peevish parts? Even the insecure bits, the anxious bits? Because I can love my niece even when she sticks her hand in my cup of coffee and gets mad and hollers at me for it. It's easy. I don't expect her to be perfect. Can I extend that understanding to myself? Can I love my anxiety too? My depression too? My desire to seem like I have my shit together even when I'm freaking out? Can I love all of me?

- Rev. Kate Landis

In this universe, love is the liberating force from the prison of judgment.

- Debasish Mridha

We can only learn to love by loving.

- Iris Murdoch

Love yourself. Then forget it. Then, love the world.

- Mary Oliver

There is a love Holding me.  
There is a love Holding you.  
There is a love Holding all.  
I rest in this love.

- Rev. Rebecca Parker

I feel that there is nothing more truly artistic than to love people.

- Vincent Van Gogh

It is essential that our love be liberating, not possessive. We must at all times give those we love the freedom to be themselves. Love affirms the other as other. It does not possess and manipulate another as mine.

- John Powell

### *Love After Love*

The time will come  
when, with elation,  
you will greet yourself arriving  
at your own door, in your own mirror,  
and each will smile at the other's welcome,  
and say, sit here. Eat.  
You will love again the stranger who was your self.  
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart  
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you all your  
life, whom you ignored  
for another, who knows you by heart.  
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf, the  
photographs, the desperate notes,  
peel your own image from the mirror.  
Sit. Feast on your life.

- Derek Walcott

The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference.

- Elie Wiesel

The chance to love and be loved exists no matter where you are.

- Oprah Winfrey



*Photo by Guy Moretta on Unsplash*

## Optional Spiritual Exercise

### A List of Loves

Besides people who have loved us, there's also the things we love! Both liberate us, just in different ways. To create a list of what you love is to remind yourself that life is friend not foe. It is to liberate yourself from the tangled and terrible idea that life is a game to be won or a set of threats to avoid. By stacking up all the things we find precious, we are reminded that this life of ours is also precious and generous at its core.

So give yourself that liberating gift this month by creating a giant list of all the things you love about life!

Many of us will spend an hour or a few days compiling our list and see how far we get. But for some, it might help to set a goal and then keep working until you hit your chosen number. Maybe a list of 50, or why not make your goal to list 100!

Here are a few places to turn for inspiration:

- [Alex Dimitrov's poem, Love](#)
- [Courtney Martin's spoken Poem, I Love](#)
- [A collection of various lists](#)

## 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 Themes

February – Justice & Equity | March – Transformation | April – Interdependence | May – Pluralism

## The Journey Team

Yvonne Raaflaub, *Curator* | Josée Thibault, *Layout Editor* | Mary Anne Roche, *Proofreader* | Margaret Kohr, *Coordinator of Journey Facilitators* | Angela Klassen, *Project Lead*