



# *Soul Matters*

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**What does it mean to be  
a people of HEALING?**



# What Does It Mean To Be A People of Healing?

*Jewish teaching includes frequent reminders of the importance of a broken-open heart, as in this Hasidic tale: A disciple asks the rebbe: "Why does Torah tell us to 'place these words **upon** your hearts'? Why does it not tell us to place these holy words **in** our hearts?" The rebbe answers: "It is because as we are, our hearts are closed, and we cannot place the holy words in our hearts. So we place them on top of our hearts. And there they stay until, one day, the heart breaks and the words fall in.*

*- Parker J. Palmer*

Oh how we want to escape our pain. Worry, loss, death, exhaustion, anxiety, Covid claustrophobia, political instability, the unraveling of our democracy, racial harm. It's all overwhelming. We want to stitch up our protective coverings as soon as we can so our exposed and tender nerves can rest. We want the pain behind us as soon as possible.

But what if the work is to travel toward it? What if proximity to pain not distance from it is the real route to healing?

This seems to be what Parker Palmer is trying to tell us. And what our faith is tries to teach us.

Here's what else Palmer has to say: "When the heart is supple, it can be "broken open" into a greater capacity to hold our own and the world's pain: it happens every day. When we hold our suffering in a way that opens us to greater compassion, heartbreak becomes a source of healing, deepening our empathy for others who suffer and extending our ability to reach out to them."

This doesn't just reframe pain; it also helps us reimagine our relationship with vulnerability. Maybe vulnerability isn't the cause of our pain but the first and needed step toward healing our pain. Maybe vulnerability isn't so much the problem as the ticket that allows us to get on healing's train.

This is what all the great spiritual traditions teach. Forget eliminating your pain; lean into it. Don't run from it as fast as you can; befriend it. Hold it in your frightened hands until you realize it's more malleable than you thought. Until you realize your strong and courageous hands can shape it, can take its sharp edges and mold them into pathways that connect you with other people's pain, can transform it from a weapon that has wounded you into a bridge that connects you to others.

It's then that we realize that pain can be more than a cage cutting us off from the world. It can be a tool that makes room, that carves open an entirely new space to live in. A space where we are more deeply connected to each other than we imagined possible.

This of course doesn't mean the hurt goes away. But it does mean we end up feeling larger, and more whole. And maybe that is the most important healing of all.

# Our Spiritual Exercises

## Option A

### *Share Your Apt Words*

In 1671 [John Milton](#) wrote, “apt words have power to swage / The tumors of a troubled mind / And are as balm to festered wounds.”

So what words have healed you? What poem, book or music lyric helped you hold on? Gave you hope? Led you to a new you? As a way of testifying to the truth of Milton’s quote, spend some time this month revisiting the words you once held on to in order to hold yourself together. And maybe it’s not about *revisiting* for you. Maybe your work is *to find* your current “healing words” – the words you need *right now* to deal with today’s wounds and worry. Whichever it is, remember that healing words aren’t always easy or immediately comforting. Sometimes the words we need to hear the most are the ones that are hard to hear or grab us by the shoulders and shake us awake.

Bring that healing poem, quote, book or music lyric to your group and be ready to share your story of the healing it offered - or is offering - to you.

**But here’s the catch:** before you share them with your Soul Matters group, share them with someone you love!

Odds are you are not the only one who needs those words. So help someone find healing by sharing with them the words you found. Consider giving it some gravitas by writing them in a letter! That’s right, go old school with this one. Don’t just type it into the cold pixels of your computer and hit send. Instead, sit down and let your chosen words leak lovingly from pen to paper. Allow that old process to slow you down and force you to take the time not just to pass on the inspiring words, but also why those words are healing you right now, and why you thought it might offer healing to them.

## Option B

### *Complete the Sentence*

Often we hunger for healing but don’t know what it will take to make our way there. The goal is elusive. The path is unclear. This exercise invites us to plot our way toward today’s healing by remembering what past healing required.

In their insightful poem, [Minds Journal](#) offers an example of what it means to be clear about the particular healing paths you’ve traveled:

#### **I Knew I Was Healing When...**

I knew I was healing when:

I started responding rather than reacting

I enjoyed time alone

I saw my parents as people with their own unresolved trauma

I set boundaries + when people didn't respect them,  
I knew they were clearing space for those who did  
I was ok with being misunderstood

By teasing out exactly what it took in our past, we are empowered to better identify what we need for healing today.

So for this month's exercise, complete the sentence for yourself and make your own list/poem. Take a morning (or a week) to think about your own past healing journeys and complete the sentence, "I knew I was healing when..."

After coming up with 4-5 complete sentences, your mind will naturally drift toward a new sentence: "I will know I am starting to heal when..." Work with that new challenge. Completing *that sentence* won't fix everything, but it will shift everything. The gift of clarity is no small thing. Knowing the destination makes the healing path possible.

## Option C

### ***Let Lectio Divina Lead You to Healing***

Like last month, we were invited to engage our monthly theme by engaging an ancient Christian spiritual practice called lectio Divina, translated literally as "divine reading." Learn more about it [here](#) and [here](#). The basic idea is to deeply listen to a text by reading it multiple times, through a different reflective lens each time. You can also think of it as bringing different discernment questions to the text, with each question inviting you to listen to the text in a new way. Our favorite three questions are:

- • What FEELINGS arise?
- • What MEMORIES does it stir?
- • What MESSAGE does it have for you personally? ("words of comfort or challenge")

Here are three "healing texts" to choose from:

- Even This Is Enough, by Rev. Vanessa Southern  
<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/even-enough>
- Love After Love, by Derek Walcott  
<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/love-after-love/>
- A Blessing For One Who Is Exhausted, by John O'Donohue  
<http://www.dailygood.org/story/734/a-blessing-for-one-who-is-exhausted/>

Find the one that calls to you the most, then read it three times. With the first reading guided by the question: "What FEELINGS arise as I listen to the words?" And the second reading guided by "What MEMORIES does it stir?" Ending with a third reading guided by "What MESSAGE does this have for me? What word of comfort or challenge is it trying to offer me?" (On this third reading it often helps to listen for which single word or phrase pops out at you, and then apply the question to that word/phrase.)

## Option D

### ***Wrestle with the Call of Reparations***

Reparations: Some argue racial healing requires it; others declare it unrealistic. But no matter where one stands, all of us can at least admit that the refusal to make space for the discussion drives us even farther from healing.

Besides asking “Where do you stand?” maybe the equally important question is, “Why is America so afraid of the discussion?” Once you dive in, the answer is hard to miss: The reparations debate challenges us with hard questions: What does apology without accountability mean? How can personal reconciliation occur without structural repair? How much of our comfort are we will to sacrifice to heal others’ pain? Are you willing to look honestly at the casualties of your comfort and success? Can we disagree about the efficacy of reparations and still consider each other allies?

With these challenging questions in mind, this exercise invites you to explore the diverse articles below not simply with the question of “What’s my opinion?” but also “Where is my resistance coming from?” “What scares me about this topic?” and “How is the conversation itself trying to help me heal?”

Come to your group ready to share what the below articles taught you about yourself.

- [The Case for Reparations](#), Ta-Nehisi Coates ([related article](#))
- [The centuries-long fight for reparations](#)
- [Blacks Deserve Reparations—But Not for Slavery](#), Jonathan Rauch
- [The Impossibility of Reparations](#), David Frum
- [Why I Changed My Mind On The Reparations Debate](#), Julie Wittes Schlack
- [7 Key Questions in the U.S. Slavery Reparations Debate](#)
- [America Has Tried Reparations Before. Here Is How It Went.](#)
- [A Change of Heart on Reparations](#)
- [Collective Liberation](#) - Sacred Design Lab
- [Reparations and Healing](#), a sermon by Rev. Ashley Horan
- [UUs lead as riot survivors receive payments in Tulsa](#) - UUWorld Article



## **Option E**

### ***Find Healing in Our Recommended Resources***

Our recommended resources are full of wisdom about what it means to be a people of and a person of healing. Engaging these resources and finding the one that especially speaks to you is a spiritual practice in and of itself.

So, if none of the above exercises call to you, engage the recommended resources section of this packet as your spiritual exercise for the month.

Set aside some regular time throughout a week to go through them and meditate on them until you find the one that most expands or deepens your understanding of healing. After you've found it, consider printing it out and carrying it with you or pinning it up so you can continue to reflect on it throughout the weeks leading up to your group meeting. Come to your group ready to share where the journey led you.

## **Option F *(new!)***

### ***Turn to a Trusted Friend***

Engaging our recommended resources can be a spiritual exercise. Engaging the reflection questions ("Your Question Section") with a friend can also be one. You still need to read the list of questions yourself and do your own spiritual discernment work with them. But after that, you can also create your own additional spiritual exercise by inviting someone close to you to read over the list and *tell you which question they think is "your question."* It's one thing for you to decide which of the questions you need to wrestle with; it's quite another to have *another person* tell you which one you need to wrestle with! Whether they pick the same question as you did or an entirely different one, you will surely get some insights.

# Your Question

*Don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every single one. Instead, make time to meditate on the list and then pick the one question that speaks to you most. The goal is to figure out which question is "yours." Which question captures the call of your inner voice? Which one contains "your work"? What is that question trying to get you to notice or acknowledge?*

*Often it helps to read the list to a friend or loved one and ask them which question they think is the question you need to wrestle with!*

1. Who first healed you by *not* trying to fix you?
2. What's something you know now about healing that you didn't know when you were younger?
3. Are you still letting old stories tell you who you are?
4. Is it time for you to trust people again?
5. Do you need to heal your relationship to pleasure and play?
6. Have you been running on empty for so long that you no longer notice?
7. Is your body simply breaking down? Or is it also secretly trying to tell you that things can't keep going on as they are?
8. What might your life look like with that negative person no longer in it?
9. Has keeping the secret finally become too painful?
10. Are you trying to forget when healing wants you to remember?
11. Do you need to be reminded that you *made* a mistake, not *are* a mistake?
12. Is it possible to see pain as an invitation not just an enemy?
13. **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. Or maybe the question or call you need to hear is waiting in one of the quotes listed below. Consider looking there!

# Companion Pieces

## Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. We will not analyze these pieces in our group. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get you thinking and open you up to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of Healing.

### Word Roots & Definitions

From the Old English word 'hale,' meaning 'wholeness, being whole, sound or well.'

In English, the words *heal* and *whole* have a common origin (stemming from Proto-Germanic *\*hailaz*), along with the verb *hail* "greet". The Croatian adjective *cio* (*cijeli* in its definite form) "whole" is the root of *iscijeliti* "to heal" (also the dated *cjelovati* "to kiss", from *cjelov* "kiss", which comes from the belief that kissing has healing properties).

[source](#)

### Wise Words

Nobody escapes being wounded. We all are wounded people, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. The main question is not "How can we hide our wounds?" so we don't have to be embarrassed, but "How can we put our woundedness in the service of others?"

[Henri J. M. Nouwen](#)

When we work with our pain and our suffering, and make of it a raft that leads to the far shore, we're not doing this just for ourselves. How many of us have vowed that we will not pass the dysfunction we experienced on to our children and grandchildren? When we deal with our own brokenness, then we break that painful cycle..

*Rev. Frank Clarkson*

When the heart is supple, it can be "broken open" into a greater capacity to hold our own and the world's pain: it happens every day. When we hold our suffering in a way that opens us to greater compassion, heartbreak becomes a source of

healing, deepening our empathy for others who suffer and extending our ability to reach out to them.

[Parker J. Palmer](#)

Wounding and healing are not opposites. They're part of the same thing. It is our wounds that enable us to be compassionate with the wounds of others. It is our limitations that make us kind to the limitations of other people. It is our loneliness that helps us to find other people or to even know they're alone with an illness. I think I have served people perfectly with parts of myself I used to be ashamed of.

[Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen](#)

In this culture, we do avoidance of pain really, really well. Part of the reason for this is that when we feel pain, we think it is our pain. Or even that we are the pain and the pain is us.

[Rev. Karen Johnston](#)

Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion.

*bell hooks*

You can hold yourself back from the sufferings of the world, that is something you are free to do and it accords with your nature, but perhaps this very holding back is the one suffering you could avoid.

*Franz Kafka*

We think that the point is to pass the test or overcome the problem, but the truth is that things don't really get solved. They come together and they fall apart. Then they come together again and fall apart again. It's just like that. The healing comes from letting there be room for all of this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy.

[Pema Chödrön](#)



There is no coming to consciousness without pain. People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own Soul. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.

*Carl Jung*

It's not forgetting that heals. It's remembering.

*Amy Greene*

Most of us do not take these [painful] situations as teachings. We automatically hate them. We run like crazy. We use all kinds of ways to escape -- all addictions stem from this moment when we meet our edge and we just can't stand it. We feel we have to soften it, pad it with something, and we become addicted to whatever it is that seems to ease the pain.

[Pema Chödrön](#)

My heart is moved by all I cannot save: so much has been destroyed I have to cast my lot with those who age after age, perversely, with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world.

*Adrienne Rich*

Today, psychologists have a favorite word, and that word is maladjusted. I tell you today that there are some things in our social system to which I am proud to be maladjusted. I shall never be adjusted to lynch mobs, segregation, economic inequalities, "The madness of militarism," and self-defeating physical violence. The salvation of the world lies in the maladjusted.

*Martin Luther King Jr.*

It is no measure of health to be profoundly adjusted to a sick society.

*Jiddu Krishnamurti*

Two people can keep each other sane...

Three people are a delegation,  
a committee, a wedge...

With six you can... hold a fund raising party.

A dozen make a demonstration.

A hundred fill a hall.

A thousand have solidarity...

It goes on one at a time,

it starts when you care

to act, it starts when you do

it again after they said no,  
it starts when you say We...

[Marge Piercy](#)

Then it hits me. Maybe we're the pieces,  
What?

Maybe that's it. With what you were talking about before. The world being broken. Maybe it isn't that we're supposed to find the pieces and put them back together. Maybe we're the pieces. Maybe, what we're supposed to do is come together. That's how we stop the breaking.

*David Levithan*

If you see what needs to be repaired and how to repair it, then you have found a piece of the world that God has left for you to complete. But if you only see what is wrong and what is ugly in the world, then it is you yourself that needs repair.

*Lubavitcher Rebbe*

I knew I was healing when:

I started responding rather than reacting;

I enjoyed time alone;

I saw my parents as people with their own unresolved trauma;

I set boundaries + when people didn't respect them,

I knew they were clearing space for those who did,

I was ok with being misunderstood.

[Minds Journal](#)

To live in this world

you must be able

to do three things:

to love what is mortal;

to hold it

against your bones knowing

*your own life depends on it;*

and, when the time comes to let it go,

to let it go.

[Mary Oliver](#)

Don't cling to a mistake just because you spent a lot of time making it.

*unknown*

Life becomes easier when you learn to accept an apology you never got.

*Robert Brault*

Think about the word destroy. Do you know what it is? De-story. Destroy. Destory. You see. And restore. That's re-story. Do you know that only two things have been proven to help survivors of the Holocaust? Massage is one. Telling their story is another. Being touched and touching. Telling your story is touching. It sets you free.

*Francesca Lia Block*

I've had a lot of problems in my life, and most of them never happened.

*Mark Twain*

You will lose someone you can't live without, and your heart will be badly broken, and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss of your beloved. But this is also the good news. They live forever in your broken heart that doesn't seal back up. And you come through. It's like having a broken leg that never heals perfectly – that still hurts when the weather gets cold, but you learn to dance with the limp.

*Anne Lamott*

When others mess up, we blame their character. When we mess up, we blame the context. No relationship gets mended until we grant others the same grace we grant ourselves. Until we widen our view and notice that there are circumstances wounding us both, the painful gap between us will never heal.

*Rev. Kaaren Anderson*

You will love again the stranger who was your self...  
Give back your heart  
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you  
all your life, whom you ignored  
for another...

[Derek Walcott](#)

You have traveled too fast over false ground;  
Now your soul has come to take you back.  
Take refuge in your senses, open up...  
Become inclined to watch the way of rain  
When it falls slow and free.  
Imitate the habit of twilight,  
Taking time to open the well of color...  
Draw alongside the silence of stone  
Until its calmness can claim you...

[John O'Donohue](#)

If your body won't do what it used to, for right now let it be enough.

If your mind won't stop racing or can't think of the word, let it be enough.

If you are here utterly alone and in despair, be all that here with us.

If today you cannot sing because your throat hurts or you don't have the heart for music, be silent...

The world won't stop spinning on her axis if you don't rise to all occasions today.

Love won't cease to flow in your direction,  
your heart won't stop beating,  
all hope won't be lost...

[Rev. Vanessa Southern](#)

Pleasure reminds us to enjoy being alive and on purpose... Pleasure—embodied, connected pleasure—is one of the way we know when we are free. That we are always free. That we always have the power to co-create the world. Pleasure helps us move through the times that are unfair, through grief and loneliness, through the terror of genocide, or days when the demands are just overwhelming. Pleasure heals the places where our hearts and spirit get wounded. Pleasure reminds us that even in the dark, we are alive. Pleasure is a medicine for the suffering that is absolutely promised in life... Pleasure is the point. Feeling good is not frivolous, it is freedom.

[Adrienne Maree Brown](#)

Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about.

*Wendy Mass*

## Music

We create two different playlists for each of our monthly themes: one in Spotify and another in YouTube. We organize these lists as a journey of sorts. So consider listening from beginning to end and using the lists as musical meditations. Follow the links below to connect with this month's "healing songs."

Click [here](#) for the Spotify playlist on [Healing](#)

Click [here](#) for all [Spotify playlists](#).

Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on [Healing](#).

Click [here](#) for all the [YouTube playlists](#).

## Videos & Podcasts

### And the People Stayed Home

*Kitty O'Meara*

A poem about hope (and healing) in Coronavirus times

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=94&v=oi1INrtc0pQ&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=94&v=oi1INrtc0pQ&feature=emb_logo)

### How to Narrate Your Life Story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Brpk26Oq4aE&v=en>

### Trauma, Healing & Collective Power

<https://soundcloud.com/generativesomatics/trauma-a-healing-collective-power>

Spenta Kandawalla, Prentis Hemphill and Staci K. Haines, hosted by adrienne maree brown. We had a conversation about trauma, oppression, healing and organizing for structural change. We dug into the connections between personal, collective and structural transformation, and between healing and building collective power.

### The Star Spanglish Banner

*Angelica Maria*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZFGXbO7y7I>

### Why These Native Americans Observe A National Day Of Mourning Each Thanksgiving

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OW0s8ToCyU8>

### The Doctrine of Discovery: Why the Europeans considered the "New World" given by God to them

<https://vimeo.com/71915411>

### Clouds, Trees, Streams

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

### Let Nature Heal You

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfGCy3PJ2SA>

### Healing Through a Haircut

Meet Josh Coombes, hairdresser for the homeless.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/magazine-36918094>

## Articles

### Relinquishing (and healing from) the Patriarchy

*adrienne maree brown*

<https://radicaldiscipleship.net/2020/07/13/relinquishing-the-patriarchy-2/?fbclid=IwAR0nI1x4dVrJwOwIFqfzUa9BxH7ZU3EH-Aq2yJt7eKpP9Vxco8Pyq-3nZe-Q>

### How Racism Damages White People

*Aaron Wilson-Ahlstrom*

<https://debbyirving.com/how-racism-damages-us-as-white-people/>

### Everyone's History Matters: The Wampanoag Indian Thanksgiving story deserves to be known

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/blogs/national-museum-american-indian/2017/11/23/everyones-history-matters-and-wampanoag-indian-thanksgiving-story-deserves-be-known/>

## Books

### Healing the Heart of Democracy

*Parker Palmer*

### **My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies**

*Resmaa Menakem*

Video review:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3ZGJ9hpRXo>

OnBeing Interview:

<https://onbeing.org/programs/resmaa-menakem-notice-the-rage-notice-the-silence/>

### **Dying of Whiteness: How the Politics of Racial Resentment is Killing America's Heartland**

*Jonathan M. Metzl*

Article about the book:

<https://www.vox.com/2019/3/19/18236247/dying-of-whiteness-trump-politics-jonathan-metzl>

## Movies

- [Thunder Road](#)
- [The Rider](#)
- [Minding the Gap](#)
- [When They See Us](#)
- [Wild](#)
- [The Prison Within](#)

## More Monthly Inspiration from Soul Matters!

### Our Facebook Inspiration Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

### Our Instagram Page:

Find us as “soul\_matters\_circle”

### Music Playlists:

Click [here](#) for links to the [Spotify playlists](#) for each month.

Click [here](#) to check out the [YouTube playlists](#).



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SHARING CIRCLE

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