



Soul Matters

January 2017

*What Does It Mean To Be
A Community of Prophecy?*



What Does It Mean To Be A Community of Prophecy?

Our times ask us to exercise our capacity for prophetic witness, by Prophetic witness I mean our capacity to see what is happening, to say what is happening and to act in accordance with what we know.... Prophetic witness ...is the ability to name those places where we resist knowing what needs to be known.

-Rebecca Parker, UU theologian and minister

“I am not crushed. I am awake.”

- A liberal activist interviewed about the presidential election

Prophets are known for their condemnation. Images of an angry bearded man shouting and predicting God’s judgment come to mind. But for Unitarian Universalists, the prophetic voice has always been less about shouting “You’re evil!” and more about pointing out “We’re all asleep!” The prophetic message, for us, is not so much “Repent!” but “Wake up!”

Recent political events are relevant here. On election day, many of us realized we had been living in a bubble. We existed in an echo chamber but told ourselves we had a clear picture of the world. Whether it was class, condescension or comfort, something distorted many people’s view.

And so if election day was about realizing we were asleep in a bubble, the question on Inauguration Day becomes, Are we ready to wake up? And let’s be clear: this is not a politically partisan thing; liberals and conservatives both have a ton of waking up to do. One unemployed Michigan factory worker was quoted after the election saying, “I vote Republican because I won’t vote for anyone who doesn’t see and respect me.” On the other side of the political fence, black, Latino, Muslim and LGBT families are struggling with real fear about what’s been unleashed and what may be unleashed against them. And they are wondering if this country will wake up to and take their fear seriously.

Bottom line: we need prophetic communities now more than ever. As Rebecca Parker says, we need circles of brave and bold people who are willing “to see what is happening, to say what is happening and to act in accordance with what they know.” Which means that being a community of prophecy is not just about helping people wake up to each other’s realities and fears; there is also the matter of waking up to and being wide-eyed about the need for resistance. Most of the time, holy work is about finding common ground among differing world views. But sometimes, holy work is about prophetic judgment and knowing when some views need opposed. As that activist said, “I am not crushed. I am awake.”

So many ways to wake up. So many people who need us to do so. Sleep is no longer a luxury. In the end, maybe that is the most prophetic message of all.

Spiritual Exercises

Option A: Pick a Prophet

“The Prophetic role is such a tough one...It’s annoying and unsettling. It points out hypocrisy and the intentional self-deception we engage in. Who wants that? Enter the comedian...”

- **Pete Santucci**

So it turns out they want us to do more than laugh! Who knew that their main goal is to wake us up?! To unsettle our self-deception?! To honor that, this exercise invites you to open yourself to some edgy prophetic comedians and discover where you need a little unsettling. Your instructions:

1. Watch the video clips below.
2. Listen for the one that gets under your skin.
3. Beware of the ones that you agree with too easily or cheer too loudly; That’s a sign of the way you want to unsettle others, not the way you need unsettled.
4. Write down the sentence or two from your chosen clip that captures where your work seems to lay - that speaks to the self-deception that you most often slip into.
5. Find a way to put that sentence (and the video) in front of yourself frequently this month.
6. Come to your group ready to tell the story of how this made a difference in your daily living and woke you up.

Videos: *(A word of warning: The language that comedic prophets use is often explicit.)*

Pete Holmes - Not Knowing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQ4o1N4ksyQ>

Louis C.K. Hates Cell Phones...and avoiding loneliness: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5HbYSc1f1c>

Bill Hicks - It's Just A Ride: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KgzQuE1pR1w>

Joe Rogan – Society Trap: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRK8qhuniJQ>

Chris Rock on Racism, Wealth & America: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8BtHZWGB8c>

George Carlin - "Who Really Controls America": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYIC0eZYEtI>

Samatha Bee- Party of Inclusion: <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/mlceb4/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-hope-and-change-2---the-party-of-inclusion>

Larry Wilmore - 2016 White House Correspondents' Dinner: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IDFt3BL7FA>

Option B: Prop Up a Prophet

We can always be sure of one thing—that the messengers of discomfort and sacrifice will be stoned and pelted by those who wish to preserve at all costs their own contentment. This is not a lesson that is confined to the Testaments. ~ **Christopher Hitchens**

We owe prophets much. They inspire us, guide us and keep us on track. In short, they prop us up. So, this month, in gratitude, why not return the favor and prop them up? We need to remember that they regularly feel cast into the desert and fear being pelted, sometimes literally. We need to remind them that they are appreciated and not alone. This is especially true of the everyday prophets. The ones protesting when the rest of us stop showing up with our signs. The ones who challenge those who intimidate women walking into Planned Parenthood clinics. The ones who devote their lives to keeping homeless shelters going and challenging the rest of us to not forget the forgotten. The vegetarians and vegans who remind us that eating is a spiritual practice. The neighbors who forgo dinners or vacations so they can put solar panels on their house or afford the electric car, reminding us that it is possible to live in a new world now.

There are so many ways to prop these prophets up: Donate in their name. Send a letter of appreciation. Follow their lead and tell them you wouldn't have done it if not for them. Volunteer along side them for a weekend. Pick up your sign once again and stand by their side. Put on a pants suit and tell them you did it because of them.

We all need everyday prophets in our lives. This month, let's remember that they need us too. Find your own unique way of appreciating and propping them up!

Option C: Pick a Day and Make it Prophetic

This month is full of prophetic holidays. But too often our culture turns them into parties or excuses for another day off, or worse yet, ignores them all together. In one way of another, we allow these holidays to become small. This exercise invites us to not let that happen. Your assignment: Pick at least one of the major holidays of January and find your personal way of keeping it “large”-keeping it’s radical and prophetic potential alive.

New Year’s Day: Resolving to lose a few pounds is important, but one wonders if that alone is worthy of New Year’s potential. This quote by L. Ron Hubbard suggests it’s not: “The best way to [predict] any future is to cause one... The future isn’t a pattern laid out to abuse and bully you. The future is a beautiful playground.” So this year, ask yourself: Are your New Year’s resolutions too small? Are they really big enough to bring down your “bully”? Are they radical enough to make life feel like a playground again?

MLK Day: Parker Palmer writes, “Avoid the bad habit of domesticating the prophet of your choice, turning him/her into a cheerleader for your way of thinking and way of life.” These words tragically describe what so often happens each January to Martin Luther King Jr. His call for equality and justice is regularly reduced to an invitation to embrace diversity and ignores his demand to turn the economic social order on its head. Treating him as a “saint” ends up hiding how radical he was. So this year, what can you do to honor “the radical MLK”? Here is some inspiration:

- <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-dreier/martin-luther-king-was-a-1-b-6498740.html>
- <http://www.beacon.org/The-Radical-King-P1049.aspx>
- <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/08/22/bryan-stevenson-and-the-legacy-of-lynching>
- https://www.ted.com/talks/bryan_stevenson_we_need_to_talk_about_an_injustice

Inauguration Day: Regardless of whether you voted for Mr. Trump or not, his election taught all of us that we live in bubbles that distort the reality around us. It’s not just the pollsters that didn’t listen well; none of us seem to be good at listening to and understanding each other. So consider making this Inauguration Day about prophetic listening. For some of us, that means listening better to the unemployed Detroit factory worker. For others of us, it means making sure our fears as immigrants and minorities are heard. All of us, though, need to wrestle with how this election calls us to listen better and change our ways. So treat this Inauguration Day like it was one of those prophets of old; figure out how it is “judging us,” “warning us of danger” or “calling us to become something new.” Make at least one major commitment that represents what you figure out.

Roe v Wade Anniversary: UU theologian and minister, Rev. Dr. Rebecca Ann Parker, writes, “It is a mistake to see [the prophet] as an isolated, heroic individual. It is better to see him/her as the crest of a wave. “ No justice effort represents this more than the achievement of Roe v. Wade. The fight for women’s reproductive rights was – and is - definitely a driven by a prophetic wave rather than one single celebrated prophet. To honor that, consider stepping up your participation in the wave of reproductive rights.

One final note: Regardless of which holiday you focus on, pay attention this month to the thread that ties all of them together. Each in their own way asserts that we are prophets of our futures. Each declares that our destinies are not determined. All of them remind us that we are not puppets that life pushes around.

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 speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal of these questions is not to help you analyze what Prophecy means in the abstract, but to figure out what being a part of a community of Prophecy means for you and your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work"?

1. **Who has been a prophetic oracle to you? Whose voice has influenced, and thus, predicted your future? Is it still doing so?** (Every man is hero and an oracle to somebody, and to that person, whatever he says has an enhanced value. ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson)
2. **What are you willing to being driven into the desert for?** (The ones we call the prophets were the ones jailed and driven into the desert. ~Noam Chomsky)
3. **How is Beauty calling you to a new future?** (Beauty is the oracle that speaks to us all. - Luis Barragan)
4. **What would it look like for you to remember?** ("The biblical prophet didn't so much predict the future as to speak for God in a world that has gone askew by forgetting ...something essential." - Peter Santucci)
5. **Have you domesticated your prophets? Is your "cloud of prophetic witnesses" really just an echo chamber?** (Avoid the bad habit of domesticating the prophet of your choice, turning him into a cheerleader for your way of thinking and way of life. ~Parker Palmer)
6. **Which Martin Luther King Jr. do you celebrate?** (Martin Luther King Was a Radical, Not a Saint: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-dreier/martin-luther-king-was-a-1_b_6498740.html)
7. **Are your New Year's resolutions too small? Are they really big enough to bring down your bully?** (The best way to [predict] any future is to cause one... The future isn't a pattern laid out to abuse and bully you. The future is a beautiful playground... - L. Ron Hubbard)
8. **What New Year's resolution will make life feel like a playground again?** (The best way to [predict] any future is to cause one... The future isn't a pattern laid out to abuse and bully you. The future is a beautiful playground... - L. Ron Hubbard)
9. **How has the election of President Trump "mugged you with truth"?** ("You can tell the future?" "More like the future mugs me from time to time.... The oracle spirit kind of hijacks me once in a while, and speaks important stuff." ~Rick Riordan)
10. **On Inauguration Day, what would it take for you to believe in "maybe"?** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OX0OARBqBp0>)
11. **What's your wave?** (It is a mistake to see [the prophet] as an isolated, heroic individual. It is better to see him/her as the crest of a wave. -Rev. Dr. Rebecca Ann Parker)
12. **Is your prophetic engagement with or without love?** (If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. - 1 Corinthians 13:2)
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.

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 companion you on your journey this month, get your thinking started, and maybe open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be *a community of Prophecy*.

Prophecy

Greek - *prophēteia*: the gift of communicating and enforcing revealed truth; pró, "before" and phēmí, "make clear, assert as a priority, what is clarified beforehand. Hebrew – *nabi*: from a root meaning "to bubble forth, as from a fountain," hence "to utter."

Wise Words

Prophets help us connect the dots between the world as it is and the world as it might be.
~**Krista Tippet**

The biblical prophet didn't so much predict the future as to speak for God in a world that has gone askew by forgetting about God [and goodness]... And so, the prophets spoke both about God and for God, reminding their listeners that they've forgotten something essential.
~**Peter Santucci**

The ones we call the prophets were the ones jailed and driven into the desert.
~**Noam Chomsky**

We can always be sure of one thing—that the messengers of discomfort and sacrifice will be stoned and pelted by those who wish to preserve at all costs their own contentment. This is not a lesson that is confined to the Testaments.
~ **Christopher Hitchens**

The words of the prophets are
written on the subway walls
and tenements halls
and whispered
in the sounds of silence.
~**Paul Simon**

To see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion all in one. ~**John Ruskin**

To be a prophet requires living in and looking at the present, at what is really going on around you. ~ **Anne Carson**

The best way to know any future is to cause one. And that's why, you see, when you start consulting the oracle at Delphi, you've taken a step downhill. You have assigned cause for the future elsewhere. The future isn't a pattern laid out to abuse and bully you. The future is a beautiful playground that nobody happens to be combing. ~**L. Ron Hubbard**

The prophetic liberal church is the church in which all members share the common responsibility to attempt to foresee the consequences of human behavior (both individual and institutional), with the intention of making history in place of merely being pushed around by it. Only through the prophetism of all believers can we together foresee doom and mend our common ways.
~**James Luther Adams, UU theologian**
<http://www.uua.org/care/stories/what-is-your-ministry>

Avoid the bad habit of domesticating the prophet of your choice, turning him into a cheerleader for your way of thinking and way of life. Remember that all the great prophets were courageous and outrageous folks who railed against the powers-that-be, challenged self-satisfied posit, threatened the prevailing social order, and would find you falling short in some significant ways. ~**Parker Palmer**

Every man is hero and an oracle to somebody, and to that person, whatever he says has an enhanced value.
~**Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Beauty is the oracle that speaks to us all.
~**Luis Barragan**

This is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it.

~**James Baldwin**

The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.

~**Walter Brueggemann**

Having [been] in the Pentecostal church, there was an interesting perspective there about *prophecy*: rather than being “fore-telling,” prophecy was more a “truth-telling.” A “word of prophecy” cut to the quick in a situation, or an individual’s life, and was spoken in service of the higher order of “God’s will.” Think of pulling back the layers and veils of denial, disguise, avoidance, and so on. It could be utterly disarming, since the shields of one’s self-protection and strategies of self-justification were penetrated. I experienced it directly once – and looking back now I am fascinated by what it felt like, how my encounter with what was really, undeniably true in that situation left me feeling both exposed and relieved at the same time. ~**Chela Sloper, Soul Matters member**

“You can tell the future?”

“More like the future mugs me from time to time.” Rachel said, ... “The oracle spirit kind of hijacks me once in a while, and speaks important stuff.” ~**Rick Riordan**

Behind the lone prophet who speaks up, there is a group. ...it is always a mistake to imagine that lone prophets are really alone. ... We should think of Jesus this way as well. It is a mistake to see him as an isolated, heroic individual. It is better to see him as the crest of a wave, the sparkling foam breaking brightly from the force of a whole ocean moving and swelling up from underneath. I sense among Unitarian Universalists these days a deep desire to affirm

the ocean that is within and beneath the voices of individual conscience that we celebrate.

Rev. Dr. Rebecca Ann Parker, [CLF reflection](#)

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

~**1 Corinthians 13:2**

Songs

The Times They Are C-Changin.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7qQ6_RV4VQ

Holy War

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7E_5AU9guB4

Movies

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.

[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0811136/?ref =fn_al tt 1](http://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.

[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1013753/?ref =fn_al tt 1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1013753/?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/>

Predicting the Future & The Power of “Maybe”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OX0OARBqBp0>
http://www.noogenesis.com/pineapple/Taoist_Farmer.html

Prophets & Comedians

The Prophetic role is such a tough one... It's annoying and unsettling. It points out hypocrisy and the intentional self-deception we engage in. Who wants that? Enter the comedian...

- **Pete Santucci**

Prophecy in the Nostradamus sense, or that whole messenger-of-God thing, isn't what I mean when ascribing prophet status to Louis C. K. or Chris Rock or Doug Stanhope or their forebears. They aren't seers or priests. They're truth tellers.~ Scott Raab,
<http://www.esquire.com/entertainment/a24755/comedians-as-prophets-1013/>

Prophets and Comedians, Pete Santucci
<http://www.petesantucci.com/2016/06/06/the-importance-of-prophets-comedians-2/>

A PRYOR LOVE: *The life and times of America's comic prophet of race*
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1999/09/13/a-pryor-love>

Videos

(some contain explicit language):

Pete Holmes - Not Knowing:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQ4o1N4ksyQ>

Joe Rogan – Society Trap:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRK8qhuniJQ>

Bill Hicks - It's Just A Ride:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KgzQuE1pR1w>

Louis C.K. Hates Cell Phones...and avoiding loneliness:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5HbYSclt1c>

Chris Rock on Racism, Wealth & America
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8BtHZWGB8c>

Dave Chappelle Addresses Donald Trump's Election
<http://www.complex.com/pop-culture/2016/11/dave-chappelle-opening-monologue-snl>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IS0XiNdpk>

George Carlin - “Who Really Controls America”:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYIC0eZYEtI>

Samatha Bee- The Party of Inclusion
<http://www.cc.com/video-clips/mlceb4/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-hope-and-change-2---the-party-of-inclusion>

Larry Wilmore - 2016 White House Correspondents' Dinner:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1DFt3BL7FA>

Prophetic Glimpses of a New Day

The Prophet lays down an alternative reality to the one we live in which critiques the way we live our diminished, self-sized...lives.

~**Peter Santucci**

Instead of polishing the bombs of holy war
What if sex was holy and war was obscene
And it wasn't twisted, what a wonderful dream
Living for love, unafraid of the end
Forgiveness is the only real revenge
So we can heal each other and fill each other
We can break these walls between each other
Baby, blow by blow and brick by brick
Keep yourself open, yourself open
We can heal each other and fill each other
We can break these walls between each other
Baby, blow by blow and brick by brick
~ **Alicia Keys**, 'Holy War'

“When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time, they can seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall. Think of it--always.”
~**Mahatma Gandhi**

Videos and Podcasts

The Prophetic Imagination

by Walter Brueggemann

The people we later recognize as prophets are also poets. They reframe what is at stake in chaotic times.

<http://www.onbeing.org/program/prophetic-imagination-walter-brueggemann/475>

The Most Prophetic Three Minutes In Television History: Scene from The Newsroom

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ML3qYHWRIZk>

Charlie Chaplin's final speech in the film the great dictator:

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

Martin Luther King: I Have Been to the Mountaintop

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oehry1JC9Rk>

Books

A Prayer for Owen Meany by John Irving

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/4473.A_Prayer_for_Owen_Meany

The Radical King by Martin Luther King Jr

<http://www.beacon.org/The-Radical-King-P1049.aspx>

Reclaiming Prophetic Witness: Liberal Religion in the Public Square by Paul Rasor.

https://www.amazon.com/Reclaiming-Prophetic-Witness-Liberal-Religion-ebook/dp/B008MPCSI2/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1478548951&sr=1-1&keywords=reclaiming+prophetic+witness

Black Prophetic Fire by Cornel West

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/20588663-black-prophetic-fire>

The Fifth Sacred Thing by Starhawk

https://www.amazon.com/Fifth-Sacred-Thing-Starhawk-ebook/dp/B003EJDGLE/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1478549205&sr=1-3&keywords=starhawk+books

The Autobiography of Malcolm X

By Malcolm X and Alex Haley

https://www.amazon.com/The-Autobiography-Malcolm-Told-Haley/dp/0345350685/ref=as_li_tf_tl?tag=tetideas-20&ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0520271440&linkCode=as2

Articles and Videos

Martin Luther King Was a Radical, Not a Saint

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-dreier/martin-luther-king-was-a-1-b-6498740.html>

Searching for the Prophetic in Hip-Hop

While conscious hip-hop takes more of a propagandized, abstract approach and Christian hip-hop is concerned first and foremost with Christ, prophetic hip-hop bears witness to the human condition in graphic, uncompromising terms.

<http://www.popmatters.com/column/132380-searching-for-the-prophetic-in-hip-hop/>

Prophet Muhammad: The Social Reformer

Few individuals in any civilization have been able to accomplish religious, gender, educational, racial and conflict-resolution reforms all at once. Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam, reformed his society in all five respects which laid the foundation of the Arab and Muslim civilization.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amaarahmad/prophet-muhammad-the-social-reformer_b_3187443.html

And How are the Children?

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/and-how-are-the-children>

Sacred Economics

We have all been given a gift, the gift of life.

What we do with our lives is our gift back

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EEZkQv25uEs>

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