

Soulful Songs and Stories



With a song and your stories, we co-create a soft place for hard conversations and a brave space for personal and spiritual growth.

Hi Soulful Song Lovers and Story Tellers,

This is the second of Friday emails that we're sending out about songs, stories, storytelling, community, or personal/spiritual growth until we meet again. Nothing here that's mawkish, and nothing biblical that isn't metaphorical. Here are pieces that we hope will inspire and uplift, and keep you champing at the bit for the resumption of Soulful Songs & Stories. In the meantime stay informed of the pandemic via trusted sources, take care of yourself, and stay in touch.

Following are three stories from within stories. The first is the “What is Real?” section of *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams, written in 1922. It's a clear and simple explanation of the role of vulnerability in giving and receiving love. Long before COVID-19, people were hiding behind masks, behind roles, titles, and personas. As James Baldwin said in *The Fire Next Time*, “Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without—and know we cannot live within.”

The next is “The Grand Inquisitor” section of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, nearly two years in the writing (1879–80). This is a more complex metaphor illustrating how tyrants (even church tyrants) portray freedom as something to be feared—so we willingly give it up, and how people in authority want to control us under the guise of “saving us from ourselves.”

In a similar vein, the last piece is Derrick Bell's retelling a section of Nikos Kazantzakis's *The Last Temptation of Christ* that pits spirit against structure. Here's Baldwin again: “Freedom is not something that anybody can be given; freedom is something people take and people are as free as they want to be. One hasn't got to have an enormous military machine in order to be un-free when it's simpler to be asleep, when it's simpler to be apathetic, when it's simpler, in fact, not to want to be free, to think that something else is more important.” (*Nobody Knows My Name*)

Here are some soulful songs to go with these stories:

“**In The Light of Love,**” Deva Premal & Miten: <https://youtu.be/2EEFSBozyEo>

“**Oh Freedom,**” Aaron Neville: <https://youtu.be/BR7jeYCAoco>

“**Deep Peace,**” Richard Stoltzman/Judy Collins: <https://youtu.be/IqSZlheQ1Jw>

Bill Douglas/Jane Condon Grimes: <https://youtu.be/pg7sZ-zdGuw>

Being REAL and being FREE are a large part of why we share our stories with each other. May these songs and stories tide you over until we meet again.

Namasté,

Alice and Steve



“FREE WILL? -- I THINK THEY NEED MORE STRUCTURE THAN THAT.”

Becoming Real

“What is REAL?” asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. “Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?”



“Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real.”

“Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit.

“Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are Real you don’t mind being hurt.”

“Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,” he asked, “or bit by bit?”

“It doesn’t happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in your joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are Real you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand. But once you are Real you can’t become unreal again. It lasts for always.”

Margery Williams (1881–1944)

The Velveteen Rabbit, or How Toys Become Real (1922)

Read the whole story: www.j.mp/velveteen2

The Grand Inquisitor

from *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Background: *The tale is told by Ivan with brief interruptive questions by Alyosha. In the tale, Christ comes back to Earth in Seville at the time of the Inquisition. He performs a number of miracles (echoing miracles from the Gospels). The people recognize him and adore him at the Seville Cathedral, but he is arrested by Inquisition leaders and sentenced to be burnt to death the next day. The Grand Inquisitor visits him in his cell to tell him that the Church no longer needs him. The main portion of the text is devoted to the Inquisitor explaining to Jesus why his return would interfere with the mission of the Church.* —Wikipedia



Instead of seizing people's freedom, You gave them even more of it! Have You forgotten that peace, and even death, is more attractive to people than the freedom of choice that derives from the knowledge of good and evil? There is nothing more alluring to people than freedom of conscience, but neither is there anything more agonizing. And yet, instead of giving them something tangible to calm their consciences forever, You came to them with words that were unfamiliar, vague, and indefinite; You offered them something that was quite beyond them; it even looked as if You didn't love them, You who came to give them Your life! Instead of ridding people of their freedom, You increased their freedom, and You imposed everlasting torment on people's soul. You wanted to gain people's love so that they would follow You of their own free will, fascinated and captivated by You. In place of the clear and rigid ancient law, You made people decide about good and evil for themselves, with no other guidance than Your example. But did it ever occur to You that people would disregard Your example, even question it, as well as Your truth, when they were subjected to so fearful a burden as freedom of choice? In the end, they will shout that You did not bring them the truth, because it is impossible to have left them in greater confusion and misery than You did, leaving them with so many anxieties and unsolved problems. You see, then, You Yourself sowed the seeds of destruction for Your own kingdom, and no one else is to blame. And think now, was this the best that You could offer them?

We have corrected your work and have now founded it on miracle, mystery, and authority. And people rejoice at being led like cattle again, with the terrible gift of freedom that brought them so much suffering removed from them.

Under us it will be different. Under us they will all be happy and they will not rise in rebellion and kill one another all the world over, as they are doing now with the freedom You gave them. Oh, we will convince them that they will only be free when they have surrendered their freedom and submitted to us. And that will be the truth, will it not? Or do You think we will be deceiving them? They will find out for themselves that we are right, for they will remember the horrors of chaos and enslavement that Your freedom brought them. Freedom, free-thinking, and science will lead people into such confusion and confront them with such dilemmas and insoluble riddles that the fierce and rebellious will destroy one another; others who are rebellious but weaker will destroy themselves, while the weakest and most miserable will crawl to our feet and cry out to us: "Yes, you were right. You alone possessed His secret, and we have come back to you. Save us from ourselves!"

And then we shall give them tranquil, humble happiness, suitable for such weak creatures. Oh, we shall have to convince them, finally, that they must not be proud, for, by overestimating them, You instilled pride in them. We shall prove to them that they are nothing but weak, pathetic children, but that a child's happiness is the sweetest of all. They will grow timid and cling to us in fear, like chicks to a hen. They will admire us, be terrified of us, and be proud of the strength and wisdom that enabled us to subdue a herd of many millions. They will tremble abjectly before our wrath; they will become timorous; their eyes will fill with tears as those of children.

They will tell us the secrets that most torment their consciences, they will tell us everything, and we shall solve all their problems, and they will trust our solutions completely, because they will be rid of the terrible worry and the frightening torment they know today when they have to decide for themselves how to act.

Structure v. *Spirit*

In Nikos Kazantzakis's novel *The Last Temptation of Christ*, in a scene following the Last Supper, Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to die. They weep and wail, urging him not to leave. One of them, though, Jacob, quickly reconciles himself to Jesus' death and promises that the disciples will ensure that his words shall not perish.

“We'll establish them firmly in new Holy Scriptures, we'll make laws, build our own synagogues and select our own high priests.”

Jesus is horrified. “You crucify the spirit, Jacob,” he shouted. “No, no, I don't want that!”

Jacob tries to reassure him. “This is the only way we can prevent the spirit from turning into air and escaping.”

“But it won't be free any more; it won't be spirit!”

“That doesn't matter.” Jacob responds. “It will look like spirit. For our work Rabbi, that's sufficient.”

The “sufficiency” that looks like spirit has served as the structure that the church has used for its survival and growth as an institution. All too often, though, as Kazantzakis observed, the structure has replaced the spirit it was supposed to support and enhance.

Derrick Bell, “Evolving Faith,”

Ethical Ambition: Living a Life of Meaning and Worth

Derrick Bell Jr. (1930–2011) was an American lawyer, professor, and civil rights activist. In 1971, he became the first tenured African-American professor of law at Harvard Law School, and he was a visiting professor at NYU School of Law from 1991 until his death.

