

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,

Songs and Stories about spiritual capitalism and why less is more.

I believe all great spirituality is about letting go. Yet many associate letting go with Buddhism more than with Christianity. Sadly, Christianity seems to have become more about “saving your soul” or what some now call “spiritual capitalism.”

In our consumer culture, even religion and spirituality have very often become a matter of addition: earning points with God, attaining enlightenment, producing moral behavior. Yet authentic spirituality is not about getting, attaining, achieving, performing, or succeeding—all of which tend to pander to the ego. It is much more about letting go—letting go of what we don’t need anyway, although we don’t know that ahead of time.

The great Dominican mystic Meister Eckhart (1260–1328) said, “God is not found in the soul by adding anything, but by a process of subtraction.” Sadly, like so many things that we call [religious], we find that if we scratch right beneath the surface, it’s just our local religious culture. Thankfully, there is a real longing today to clarify what is [holy] and what is historical or denominational accident.

—**Franciscan friar Richard Rohr**, <https://cac.org/less-is-more-2020-12-13>

When people ask, “Do you believe in God?” I want to answer, “Only late at night”—and that’s no use, is it? With something as big as God you don’t get to say “sometimes.” This is my problem with religious systems: they take a small feeling about the absolute—one of sweetness or hope or even of moral joy—and they turn it into a big, authoritarian hoo-ha. I can’t be bothered with all that. I do worry, however, that secular thinkers refuse to understand how religion feels, and that refusal is not just shortsighted, it is also, in itself, interesting. —**Anne Enright**, *The New York Review of Books*, Feb 20, 2021

“I Can See Clearly Now,” Jimmy Cliff/Bobby McFerrin

https://youtu.be/pO_LV-yInc8?t=14 2:16

If the doors of perception were cleansed, every thing would appear as it is—infinite. We have closed ourselves up, till we see all things through narrow chinks of our cavern. —**William Blake**, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790)

My best piece of writing advice came from the poet-scholar Chiyuma Elliott. She said very gently, “At the end of a poem, leave the door open.” I’ve spent every day of my writing life since learning all the ways you can leave a door open: unlocked, cracked, off the hinges. There are so many ways. —**Destiny O. Birdsong**

Close some doors today. Not because of pride, incapacity, or arrogance, but simply because they lead you nowhere. —**Paulo Coelho**

God breaks the heart again and again and again until it stays open.

—**Hazrat Inayat Khan**

“Let Us Break Bread Together,” African American Spiritual/Orrin Evans Trio, Morgan Guerin on sax (also attached)

<https://livesessions.npr.org/videos/orrin-evans-let-us-break-bread-together> 2:50

“How I Have Longed,” Medical Mission Sisters Goretta Group & Thunderbirds (Trinidad)

Come to me, my little one / and you will be refreshed / and I will give you rest.

<https://youtu.be/KEujllMXNLk> 3:36 (lyrics in second comment on YouTube)

I know that my freedom depends on my willingness to step outside my comfort zone—the habits and beliefs that have been ingrained in me through socialization and trauma. Any time I can do that, I have more trust that I am actually choosing rather than being run by my past and my fears. Put differently, I would say that the most reliable forms of freedom are internal: It is my choices in how I respond to life, much more than what life brings to me, that I experience as freedom. —**Miki Kashtan**, “Starting a New Year: Why I Embrace Discomfort,” *Tikkun Daily*, Jan 1, 2016

We mistakenly believe that our individualistic spiritual path will lead to true enlightenment. We believe that our non-conscious racial biases will lessen if we just listen to enough podcasts about race. We believe that reading books about global inequality will absolve us of our responsibility as privileged Westerners. We believe that world peace will come if we just do lovingkindness meditation at the local sangha surrounded by people who are racially and economically similar to us. **Though helpful, these spiritual practices ultimately require very little of us and fall quite short of mutual indwelling.**

In order to achieve true enlightenment and begin to participate in the healing of this broken and divided world, we must divest ourselves of our individualistic conditioning. This requires deep physical relationships with people who are different from us. This spiritual practice teaches me by requiring me to leave my cultural comfort zone, get outside of my academic and analytical head, open myself up to being impacted by someone else’s reality,

alter my social geography, learn to embody (and not just talk about) practices of liberation and advocacy, and put my money and time where my mouth is. —**Christena Cleveland**

<https://onbeing.org/blog/christena-cleveland-true-connection-requires-our-bodies-and-our-minds>

“There is More Love Somewhere,” Bernice Johnson Reagon

(founder of the a cappella group, Sweet Honey in the Rock) <https://youtu.be/ETOZoveL8c8> 2:18

“Can you make the connection for me between the Gospel + race + justice?” I only get asked this question at predominately white, Christian institutions. The Black church doesn’t ask this question, because by the time we get to the second book of the Bible there is a whole story dedicated to God freeing the enslaved. And this is important. I want you to understand that while you may be “wrestling” with the connections, there are people of color in this room and far beyond who have never known any other kind of Gospel except one that easily and obviously encompasses social justice.

I’ve come to fully realize that there is another question I receive without fail from nice white people in corporations, nonprofits, schools, and churches that I need to start addressing differently: “How can I overcome my fear of speaking up?”

You are afraid of not being invited, of not being favored, of not being liked because there are benefits for being liked. You are afraid of challenging the system, the supervisor, the policy, the conversation because you have participated in the destruction of others and now you are afraid that you, too, will be destroyed. If you are afraid, then you know there is danger in speaking out. And if you know its dangerous, you have either been complicit or you have been a willing participant in allowing others to face that danger alone.

Your weaponizing of niceness is so complete that you get mad at us, when we reject your niceness. You are mad when you apologize privately for something done publicly and your apology is rejected. You are mad when no one makes you feel better for confusing the only two people of color in your department for the fourth time. You are mad because **we see your niceness for what it is—a desire to believe you are good, even as you uphold a system that oppresses.** —**Austin Channing Brown**, “Dear Nice White People,” Feb 17, 2021

<https://austinchanning.substack.com/p/dear-nice-white-people>

“Up Above My Head”

Rhiannon Giddens <https://youtu.be/XrvR9ZoqsYw?t=109> 3:26

Sister Rosetta Tharpe <https://youtu.be/JeaBNAXfHfQ> 2:54

There is a myth in this country, a fable some people cherish because it makes them feel good and demands no moral or intellectual heavy lifting. That myth holds that we are done with race and have been for a very long time, that we overcame, learned our lesson, reached the Promised Land, and built luxury condos there.

—**Leonard Pitts Jr.**, *Miami Herald*, June 18, 2015, www.j.mp/pittsnas

You can write all the principles and checks you want, but if your heart is not in a holy place, it don’t mean a thing.

For the average white person in America, even and perhaps especially the average white liberal person who thinks they are on the right side of racial issues, the privilege is too entrenched. The work and humility required to fully understand systemic racism in this country holds no realistic appeal. Most white people go straight to their own sense of guilt and then don't know how to manage their feelings from there, as we've seen play out over and over again in the "woke" era of 2020. —Rebecca Carroll, LitHub, Feb 23, 2021 <https://lithub.com/what-it-means-to-be-a-black-mother-in-white-america>

“Revolutionary Love,” Ani DiFranco

*I will see no stranger / only parts of myself, I don't yet know
I'll see right through evil / to a wound, too scared to show
I have the power to stay open / I have the power to be
the one that I've been waiting for / the one who sets me free*
<https://youtu.be/SgchuBzz2AY> 7:09

I want to leave enough room in my heart / For the unexpected, / For the mistake that becomes knowing, / For knowing that becomes wonder, / For wonder that makes everything porous, Allowing in and out / All available light.

—**Carrie Newcomer**, *A Permeable Life: Poems & Essays*, 2014, ISBN 0615902758

It's worth pondering how many subjects related to women's experience have been marginalized, derided, ridiculed, or altogether displaced. For hundreds of years women have been raised within misogynist, patriarchal religions that openly discriminate against them to some degree. They take part in cultures that are never fully theirs, or that are even in outright opposition to them. From youth, women are drip-fed doctrines that position them as inferior, weaker, less capable, or in some other way handicapped. They grow up in a mist of ubiquitous misogyny, often veiled and not fully self-aware, which is intrinsic to culture, language, images, interpersonal relations, history, and economics. It is only in the last few decades that the real story of women, marginalized into near nonexistence, has patiently tried to break free. And when it emerges into the appropriated world, it can find itself at a loss for words. —**Olga Tokarczuk**, “Eccentricity as Feminism,” *The Paris Review*, Jan 25, 2021 <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2021/01/25/eccentricity-as-feminism>

“All of Me,” G.Marks and S. Simons/

Wendell Harrison Quintet <https://youtu.be/gom6RTBAQfs> 3:23

Perplexity, I realized, was working like an X-ray of my soul, exposing much of my so-called spirituality as a vanity project of my ego, an expression of my arrogant desire to always be right, my desperate and fearful need to always be in control, my unexamined drive to tame the wildness of life by naming it and dominating it with words. The doubt of Perplexity, the mystics helped me see, was just the fire I needed to purge me of previously unacknowledged arrogance.

—**Brian D. McLaren**, *Faith After Doubt*, 2021, ISBN 1250262771

if each day falls / inside each night / there exists a well where clarity is imprisoned. / we need to sit on the rim / of the well of darkness and fish for fallen light / with patience.

—**Pablo Neruda**, “Seeking Clarity” (excerpt)

Maybe the journey isn't so much about becoming anything. Maybe it's about un-becoming everything that isn't really you, so you can be who you were meant to be in the first place. —**Paulo Coelho**

“Fight in the Sky,” We Banjo 3

'Cause there is a light in the sky / Open up your weary eyes
Follow the voices, hear the sounds / Find your truth, you're homeward bound

<https://youtu.be/N2StkxaUwRM> 3:59

Life in Lubbock, Texas, taught me two things: One is that God loves you and you're going to burn in hell. The other is that sex is the most awful, filthy thing on earth, and you should save it for someone you love. —**Butch Hancock**

“Puritanism:” The haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy. —**H.L. Mencken**

“Sexual Healing,” Marvin Gaye

live: <https://youtu.be/rjLSiASsUIs?t=15> 3:50 w/lyrics: https://youtu.be/eA4_O3oeJCw 4:04

“In Spite of Ourselves,” John Prine/Keb' Mo' & (wife) Robbie Brooks Moore <https://en-gb.facebook.com/kebmo/videos/559268684712339> 3:03

Pick a Prayer

Lord, we know that you tell us to flee from sexual immorality. We know that our bodies are not our own, but they are a dwelling place for your spirit, to fill us up and to purge us of our unrighteousness. We know that we have taken part in sexual immorality with our thoughts, with the way that we dress, our entertainment, TV shows magazines, the hope of a fling, sex before marriage, pornography, advertisements, adultery, acting on same sex attraction. Lord, sexual sin is all around and we are guilty by commission and omission. Break our hard hearts and help to see the death and destruction that sexual immorality causes. Jesus, I ask you to cleanse me of my sexual sins now; cleanse my body, my soul, and my spirit, cleanse my heart and mind and will, cleanse my sexuality. I renounce every claim I have given Satan to my life or sexuality through my sexual sins. Those claims are now broken by the cross and blood of Jesus Christ. —**Matt Baldwin**, “Repentance For Sexual Immorality Prayer” (excerpted)

We thank you for giving us sex and sexuality, whether homo or heterosexual, bi or trans, and for not making us uptight. We thank you for wonderful masturbatory fantasies. We ask that you grant us sex partners, lovers, wives and husbands that know where our G-spots, clitoris, and the sweet spot on our penis are. Grant us long loving foreplay with deep wet kisses followed by huge orgasms and loving cuddles after. Grant us the courage and wisdom to communicate openly and honestly with our partners. We ask that you give us the wisdom to understand and appreciate our partner's kinks or lack thereof. Whether foot worship or spanking, ropes or talking dirty, help us to appreciate their full sexuality and lead us not into temptation of judgment and scorn for others when their sexual preferences are not ours. —**Dr. Darrel Ray**, “A Pastafarian Sexual Prayer” (excerpted)

"Dans För Två," Tvärvägen (Henrik Öhberg)

<https://youtu.be/oZF-uqh8whQ> 3:13

"The People's House," John Williams/Chicago Symphony Orchestra (Lincoln Soundtrack)

<https://youtu.be/7zVOKnIvo-Y> 3:43

"Allegro vivo," Francois Francoeur/Lynn Harrell, Cello & Victor Asuncion, Piano

<https://youtu.be/DC3SqDtrpJ4?t=38> 2:23

"Just a Closer Walk With Thee," Doreen Ketchens/Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra

https://youtu.be/EC8_zcGEZjc?t=46 7:55

"Won't You Celebrate With Me," Lucille Clifton (h/t Abigail Hastings)

https://youtu.be/XM7q_DUK5wU?t=27 00:57



So God, why do you come with so much baggage?

This is your shit, not mine!



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