

Y'all. This last week. This last month. This past year. As long back as you or your ancestors have been feeling the hurt. As long back as your people have been surviving. As much as this hurts, remember that you are here. You are alive in this moment.

You may wish you weren't. When my soul hurts like this, on some level there is a cry of, "Let me not be here." It's the flight response. Let me not be here. There are so many ways to not be here. Some of them just magnify the hurt. Some of them help us through the hurt - on Saturday I held my sweetie as we prayed and lit candles for our Jewish and black friends and read Psalms. Holding onto love can help us be both here and not here.

I wrote a lovely reflection for this podcast. It was about elections. I rather liked it. I'm gonna put it in the transcript at the end if you want to read it.

Instead, I am reminded that this week is a historically thin place. I'm recording this on Halloween, a holiday that has been occupied by capitalism. But Halloween, Samhain, is an ancient tradition, an ancient recognition of the end of harvest and the turning towards winter. And for millenia, a recognition that in this time we are particularly close to those we love who have become ancestors, who have entered the great cloud of witnesses. All Saints Day is a pagan, earth-bound irruption into the other-wordly focus of Christendom. If Jesus were born a Celt, he would have celebrated it. He joins us in this thin place this week. In this moment. He is alive with us in the mourning.

Maurice Stallard

Vickie Jones

Irving Younger

Melvin Wax

Rose Mallinger

Bernice Simon

Sylvan Simon

Jerry Rabinowitz

Joyce Fienberg

Richard Gottfried

Daniel Stein

Cecil Rosenthal

David Rosenthal

May their memories be a blessing. Hear now the Mourner's Kaddish.

Exalted and hallowed be God's great name in the world which God created, according to plan. May God's majesty be revealed in the days of our lifetime and the life of all Israel — speedily, imminently, to which we say: **Amen.**

Blessed be God's great name to all eternity.

Blessed, praised, honored, exalted, extolled, glorified, adored, and lauded be the name of the Holy Blessed One, beyond all earthly words and songs of blessing, praise, and comfort. To which we say: **Amen.**

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and all. To which we say: **Amen.**

May the One who creates harmony on high, bring peace us and to all. To which we say: **Amen.**

Fade Music In (NoEnemies "Building Up A New World" track)

This is The Word Is Resistance, a podcast exploring what our sacred texts have to teach us about surviving, resisting, and thriving in our current context of white supremacist violence. My name is John Bergen, I use he/him/his, and I'm recording this on Samhain in Philadelphia.

The music you hear is a live recording of a song gifted to the freedom movement by Dr. Vincent Harding, "We are Building Up a New World." The group you hear singing is "No Enemies," a multi-racial group of activists and musicians in Denver, CO who come together for "movement choir practice" to bring singing back into direct actions and other movement spaces. This particular "choir practice" is from December 2014, being led by Minister Daryl J. Walker. We are deeply grateful to the Freeney-Harding family for letting us use the song for this podcast.

This podcast is a project of SURJ-Faith. SURJ, or Showing Up for Racial Justice, organizes white people to take bold action against white supremacy. This podcast aims to resources us in that work, which means it is for everyone but geared towards white people working to build our resistance muscles. We welcome your feedback and especially appreciate feedback from and accountability to listeners of color.

"Building Up A New World" verse 2

Amidst the hurt, I want to take a minute and appreciate what might be the most brilliant piece of direct action currently happening, and explore what we can learn from it. I'm talking about the migrant caravan currently making its way through Mexico.

I'm quoting here from a Vox article on the caravan [written](#) by Dara Lind on October 25th:

On October 12, 2018, a group of about 160 Hondurans set forth from the town of San Pedro Sula — which in the first half of the decade was often referred to as the "murder

capital of the world” — in hopes of arriving to present themselves for asylum in Mexico or the United States.

Seventy-five miles and two days later, the caravan was more than 1,000 strong, according to the estimates of Associated Press reporters. By October 15, the AP estimated about 1,600 Hondurans had amassed at the border with Guatemala....

The government of Guatemala attempted to close the Guatemalan-Honduran border to the caravan on October 15; after a standoff of several hours, Guatemalan officials backed down. The caravan continued to grow as it crossed Guatemala, and arrived about 3,000 strong at the Mexican-Guatemalan border on October 19, when the members slept overnight on a bridge at the border after being driven back by Mexican riot police with pepper spray.

Mexico has begun slowly admitting caravan members to ask for asylum: as of October 24, the Mexican government said it had processed 1,743 applications. But many have decided to stop waiting and swim across the river to enter without papers. On October 21, a surging group of migrants — thousands bigger than the group that had waited on the bridge — agreed to continue onward from Chiapas, Mexico, to the US.

Good direct actions do a few things. First, they show don't tell. Lunch counter sit-ins in the 1960s demonstrated their demand very simply: We want to be served at this lunch counter. So we are sitting at this lunch counter until you serve us. Blockades of ICE detention centers demonstrate their demand: We don't want you to deport people, so we are sitting in the road so that you don't deport people. The visual tells the story.

As I write this, a group of people, moving as one, are approaching the southern border of the United States demanding entry. Through their action they demand very simply: We want safe entry into the United States, so here we are as a big group demanding entry into the United States.

Second, good direct actions force their target to make a choice. Ideally, they make it easier for their target to do the right thing than it would be to keep doing business as normal. They raise the cost of not doing good, and force a choice. The Lectionary text for this coming Sunday starts the story of the Book of Ruth. Ruth is a book of choices - in the first chapter, Naomi's family makes a choice to escape famine in Judah and live in the land of Moab. Naomi's husband dies and she has to make a choice. She allows her sons - her sons from the tribe of Judah - to marry Moabites (Orpah and Ruth). Her sons die - men don't do well in this book - and when Naomi returns to Judah her daughters-in-law have to make a choice. And Ruth chooses to go with her. And the book continues with many more moments of choice, but the end result is that the book gives its

readers a choice. It tells us that one descendant of this Moabite woman is King David. It tells us that one descendant of this Moabite woman is Jesus of Nazareth. And so it stands against all the ethno-centrism of the Bible and all the ethno-centrism of our tradition and asks us to choose whether we will welcome in our ancestor the foreigner Ruth.

And soon the caravan will reach the southern border of the United States and force a choice. Already they have forced a choice and revealed much about the fear that lies behind nationalist posturing. The lack of vision that lies behind moderate Democrats who fear that this caravan is “playing into Republican hands.” And still they continue to march, and continue press this choice: Who is welcomed? Who, on this stolen native land, where our southern neighbors live under the effects of US colonialism, is welcomed? And what do Americans really stand for? Do we believe what Jesus said, that the greatest commandment is “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Will we love our neighbors as ourselves? There is no other commandment greater than these.””

Already they have transformed the conversation in Mexico, where they have been greeted by crowds of local people offering food and other forms of support. Mexicans eager to demonstrate that their government, which initially refused to allow the caravan to enter the country, does not speak for them. The marching makes the question clear.

Third and finally, good direct actions set us free. As Mark Lewis-Taylor writes in *The Executed God*, his book on resistance to mass incarceration,

Demonstrators engaging in bodily confrontation offer to citizens who practice it a partial antidote to the fear generated by a dominating system’s theatrics of terror. If it is true that imperial power maintains itself in great part by creating spectacles of force that evoke fear in the public, it is crucial that a counter-theatrics to state terror offers some antidote for the way this fear takes up residence in the body, in one’s physical being. Wisely crafted dramatic action, which involves your body creatively going up against imperial force alongside other bodies doing the same, actually helps rid the gut of the terror the state seeks to implant there. Protestors cannot do this all the time, and often one must know how to protect one’s body from imperial security forces as well as to put it at risk. But when performed it can help people break free from the somatic weight of psychic and social terror in which an imperial ethos often steepes us. I am not sure that those most directly and daily steeped in fear and targeted by state terror—thinking especially of black and brown bodies—should automatically default to direct action and civil disobedience against state force. But even among them, deliberate and well-planned nonviolent action can be a way to creatively absorb state violence. Precisely in the

creativity of the encounter, there is a taking back of agency against state violence. In this way, one might say that nonviolent direct action against illegitimate state force, (even if only facing up to police phalanxes or being handcuffed) creates in members a kind of “anti-body” against the state’s calculated imposition of fear and terror. (Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America*, 295-296)

I have no doubt that those who are currently caravanning north have already been forever changed by their action. Just as those who “come out” as undocumented are transformed by enacting a bravery they may not know they have. Just as all of us are when we take a leap of faith for justice. Good direct action sets us free. It refocuses us on what is important, it clarifies the question before us, it demonstrates our demands.

Take a deep breath.

Breath out. We are here for liberation.

Take a deep breath.

Breath out. We can be set free.

Take a deep breath.

Breath out. God has given us the gift of choice, the choice of how to act and answer the questions before us.

Take a deep breath.

Breath out. Keep your eyes on the prize. Keep moving forward. Keep praying for our Jewish siblings and our siblings of color. Keep your hearts and prayers with the caravan and with direct action for liberation everywhere. Amen.

“Building Up A New World” verse 3

A friend Dm’d me recently to say she was thankful for me in this hell of a time. I appreciated the care in that message, and definitely resonated with the wording. This is indeed a hell of a time. When discerning what I was going to talk about this week, I made a conscious choice to talk about something that gives me hope. It was hard not to talk about the repeated policy attacks on trans and non-binary people undertaken by the Trump Administration. Multiple times in the past two weeks, the federal government has said to trans and non-binary people “We don’t value you. We don’t want you to exist.” This is heart-breaking.

If there is one thing I have heard consistently from trans friends it's that cis folks shouldn't be out 'fighting for' trans people. Instead we have to begin by recognizing that the full welcome of trans and non-binary lives into our communities liberates all of us. The struggle for trans liberation pushes all of us to interrogate our own genders and live into a world where our rights and our survival are not bound up in how well we fit into a few narrow boxes in the vast field of genders and sexualities. As Sylvia Rivera said, 'Our armies are rising and we are getting stronger.'

So this week, for our call to action, let our armies continue to rise and get stronger. Its time to have that conversation with friends or family or community members who don't quite get why we're so upset about attacks on Jewish people, people of color, and trans people. Reach out to your friends who are hurting the most and remind them we love them. Bring them groceries, walk their dog, give them a hug. Ask them what they want. If you have financial resources, give to trans liberation organizations that aren't in the mainstream. The Sylvia Rivera Law Project (<https://srlp.org/>) does amazing work supporting trans and gender non-conforming people in prisons. Donate to them or download their resources and share them with people you know who need them (many of their resources are New York-specific, but not all of them are!) The STAY Project (www.thestayproject.com) supports young people in Appalachia, especially youth of color and LGBTQ youth, to build relationships and skills that help them stay in their communities and become leaders in social movements.

Also, read up on resources on how to confront antisemitism. Share them with your friends. I'm going to quote from my friend and fellow organizer Sam Shain (check out her great blog on how to use databases for justice, at <https://thedataarealright.blog/>). She offered three resources, links are in the transcript:

1. "[The Past Didn't Go Anywhere: Making Resistance to Antisemitism Part of All of Our Movements](#)" (2007 zine from April Rosenblum)
2. [Understanding Antisemitism](#) (white paper from JFREJ)
3. [On Antisemitism](#) (a book from Jewish Voice for Peace) (for folks who want to tackle an entire book, some chapters written by friends of mine!)

Thank you for joining me today. As always, let us know how it goes by commenting on our Soundcloud or Facebook pages.

You can find out more about SURJ at showingupforracialjustice.org, and our podcast lives at Soundcloud; search for "The Word Is Resistance." You can interact with us there, if you have questions or need help with action ideas. Transcripts are available on our website, which include any references, credits, and copyright information. Thanks to our sound editor, Maxwell Pearl, for putting this together.

Blessings to all of you as you continue in the work of being transformed, of transforming the movement and transforming the world.

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Unused election bit:

Its election season. In case you have spent the last six months in a sensory deprivation chamber or focused exclusively on rewatching the Great British Bake-Off to calm your nerves, you probably already knew this. No judgement if you've been doing either of those things, just jealousy on my part. But yes, the midterm elections (and a pile of local elections) are coming up in less than a week. Everybody take a deep breath.

It is amazing all the negative emotions that fill this season. For progressive and radicals, there are particular negative feelings - frustration at a lack of political candidates that represent our values, anger at the lies being tossed around, disgust at the focus on electoral politics over movement-building, a lack of faith in the power of elections to affect real change, fear that in the next week the story will be that this election is a referendum on fascism and the answer is "yes, please." For many people, there is the anger at being denied the right to vote because of incarceration, of not being a citizen, of fascist voter suppression.

For nearly everyone, there is an existential exhaustion that dominates this season. Last night I was sitting at a hookah lounge in my neighborhood, vaguely watching a basketball game. The owner, an Egyptian immigrant who can't vote and isn't particularly political, would change the channel every time a political advertisement came on, regardless of the party or platform it espoused. He would rather watch ads for weight loss medication than be told that this or that politician was the answer to his problems.

I've got a particular beef with elections. My tradition - the Mennonites - has for much of our history held a deep theological opposition to engaging in politics. Reflections on our experiences of persecution at the hands of political elites, and our readings of the Gospel, pushed us to form alternative communities that tried to have as little to do with formal politics. We took to farming and mutual aid, and for my ancestors living under the Russian Empire at the turn of the 20th century, it was considered sinful to even sign up for alternative civil service. Taking a position maintaining a forest instead of joining the army meant that someone else who would otherwise have the forestry job would now be joining the army. My grandparents were the first generation in our family to vote.

Even today, many Mennonite churches have a particular concern about electoral politics. We will talk about issues, about values, but not about candidates or votes. We take the division between church and state very, very seriously.

But elections are important. They have the unfortunate impact of serving not as a thermometer for the feelings of voters but as a thermostat for the national political culture. And US elections impact us psychologically because they boil immensely complex political questions to a simple decision, what often feels like a Yes or No vote. Fascism - Yes or No? Neoliberalism - Yes or No? Vicious white supremacist nationalism, or imperialism with a human face?

Yikes.

Take a deep breath.

Breath out. God is bigger than elections.

Take a deep breath.

Breath out. Our movements are bigger than elections.

Take a deep breath.

Breath out. You will survive.

Take a deep breath.

Breath out. This is not the only thing that is happening. Let's look somewhere else.