



Soul Matters

What does it mean to be
a people of JOURNEY?

Small Group

March 2019

What Does It Mean To Be A People of Journey?

We UUs love to tell our journey stories. And hear each other's journey stories. Whereas other religions have newcomers stand up and confess their fallen ways or declare a commitment to one way, we invite each other to talk about how our way is like no other.

It's a curious thing when you think about it. We welcome people to our fold not by asking them to commit to thinking exactly as the group does, but by having them declare how their journey is not like anybody else in the group. It's about space not similarity. We bind ourselves to each other not by sharing the same journey but by offering each other the room to discover the unique journey that fits us. It's about making room for people to write their own stories.

Or maybe it's about making room for people to *re-write* their stories.

It's become popular in our society to talk about spiritual journeys as a process of living into your full or true self. That's a helpful frame. And yet there's something deep within UUism that resists it. Historically, we've been the people that struggled not so much to find ourselves but to untangle ourselves from the religious identities we were given. Our spiritual journeys did not begin with a blank slate; they began with the hunger to wipe the slate clean and begin anew.

So we have this important awareness that spiritual journeys are not simply about finding your true self, but also about untangling from your old self. We agree with Albert Schweitzer who wrote:

"The path of awakening is not about becoming who you are. Rather it is about unbecoming who you are not."

Which means we are also sensitive to the fact that most spiritual journeys begin with a leaving, a separation, a decision to walk away. We know that the first step is often laced with mourning and isolation. We know that "unbecoming" is not easy work.

We also know that it isn't a one-time thing. We find ourselves routinely tangled up in all kinds of identities and journeys that aren't truly ours. "Unbecoming who you are not" is a journey we walk every day.

So what does all this mean for us this month? Well, first, it's an important reminder that we're not just here to help each other hold steady and persevere on our current paths; often our primary gift is to help each other find the exit ramps.

It also means remembering that being a people of journey involves tenderness. We are here not just to make room for each other's unique stories; we are also here to make room for each other's pain. Again, "unbecoming who you are not" involves bravely walking away, isolation and mourning. And so, if we are going to complete our journeys of unbecoming and becoming anew, we're definitely going to need pitstops of kindness and tenderness along the way.

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A:

The Most Surprising Part of Your Spiritual Journey

Depth of relationship is not just about doing things together. It's also about sharing our stories. To know each other is to know each other's journeys. And no matter how well we think we know someone, there's always a twist or turn of their life that we've never heard about.

So, this month, as a way of deepening your connection with your small group, share one leg of your spiritual journey that your fellow group members don't know about, and even may be surprised to learn. Most importantly make it something that helps more fully tell the story of who you are.

Be sure to share how that part of your journey continues to impact or shape you today. Also reflect on and talk about how you and your faith would be different today if that part of your journey hadn't happened. And who knows, as you think about that, you might even stumble upon some insights that surprise you.

Option B:

Your Journey in Six Words

Larry Smith is passionate about helping people share their life journeys. He created a website with numerous tools and prompts to make sharing easier. One prompt turned out to be everyone's favorite: Pair down your life journey to six words. It was inspired by Ernest Hemingway taking up a bar bet to write a novel in 6 words. Hemingway's response: "For Sale: Baby shoes, never worn." Besides making the telling of your journey easier, this six-word challenge helps people focus on, celebrate and hold on to the essence of their stories.

So, this month, take up the challenge for yourself. Below are some example six-word journeys and online resources to help you on your way.

Example Six-Word Journeys

Married by Elvis; divorced by Friday
Down for maintenance, be back soon.
Threw spaghetti on wall; some stuck.
Told to marry rich. Married Richard.
We're the family you gossip about.
The psychic said I'd be richer.
Eight thousand orgasms; one baby.
Tried surfing on a calm day.
Sixty. Single. Rich. Call me collect.
Wasn't born a redhead; fixed that.
Mom was "earthy"; Now I'm "green."
Son's autism broke and rebuilt me.
Tore up my own suicide letter.
Sixty. Still afraid of the dark.

Class clown; Class president; town drunk.
Forged through fire; sustained by friendships.
No future, no past. Not lost.
Life's GPS keeps saying, recalculating... recalculating.
Obama did, now so can I
The exits were entrances in disguise.
Play. Play. Play. Play. Play. Play.

Online Resources:

- **The Story of the Six-Word Project: Why it worked and why it matters**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jR1V7lxsOu0>
- **Video Meditation with Inspiring Six-Word Journeys**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBnP0DoGjRI>
- **Six-Word Story Writing Advice**
<https://eightladieswriting.com/2016/03/16/elizabeth-six-word-stories/>
- **Not Quite What I Was Planning: Six-Word Memoirs by Writers Famous and Obscure**
Rachel Fershleiser & Larry Smith
<https://www.amazon.com/Not-Quite-What-Was-Planning/dp/0061374059>

Option C: Follow Frederick Buechner on a Lent Journey

Lent begins this month for our Christian friends. Theologian, Frederick Buechner, offers a wonderful way to think about the purpose of Lent. He also shares some questions that lead us into a Lent-inspired journey of our own. So this month consider taking that journey, which promises to help you “hear something not only of who you are, but of both what you are becoming.”

“In many cultures there is an ancient custom of giving a tenth of each year's income to some holy use. For Christians, to observe the forty days of Lent is to do the same thing with roughly a tenth of each year's days. After being baptized by John in the river Jordan, Jesus went off alone into the wilderness, where he spent forty days asking himself the question what it meant to be Jesus. During Lent, Christians are supposed to ask one way or another what it means to be themselves.

When you look at your face in the mirror, what do you see in it that you most like and what do you see in it that you most deplore?

If you had only one last message to leave to the handful of people who are most important to you, what would it be in twenty-five words or less?

Of all the things you have done in your life, which is the one you would most like to undo? Which is the one that makes you happiest to remember?

Is there any person in the world or any cause that, if circumstances called for it, you would be willing to die for?

If this were the last day of your life, what would you do with it?

To hear yourself try to answer questions like these is to begin to hear something not only of who you are, but of both what you are becoming and what you are failing to become. It can be a pretty depressing business all in all, but if sackcloth and ashes are at the start of it, something like Easter may be at the end.”

- Frederick Buechner, from [Whistling in the Dark](#) and later in [Beyond Words](#)

Option D: Find Your Journey in Our Recommended Resources

Our recommended resources are full of wisdom about what it means to be a person of journey. 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 sanctuary. 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.

Possible All-Group Exercise

Map & Share Your UU Journey

As mentioned above, to know each other is to know each other's journeys. So, as a way of deepening relationship as a small group, consider setting aside some extra time in your meeting or holding a second meeting this month during which all members share their spiritual journeys with each other.

To help you map and tell your journey, we've listed a number of common "legs" along the spiritual journey. Spend the month thinking about your version of each. Some will come to you right away. Others may be experiences you've had but never quite fully recognized as part of your spiritual quest. There's also the gift of setting all the legs of your journey side by side and seeing it as a whole.

Come to your group ready to share your spiritual journey and what you learned from spending the time to map it out. Which item of on the list was harder to engage than you thought? What was not on your map before? What did you learn about the items that were not relevant? What legs of the journey did you add?

A Guide for Mapping Your Religious Road

- **The First Step** - *Who was most responsible for your first understanding of religion? What was unique about the first religious community that shaped you? How do you feel about that community today?*
- **Down the Road of Doubt** - *When did a crack in your faith first appear? Was it a moment of intellectual questioning or emotional disappointment?*
- **Partners on Your New Path** - *What mentors or fellow travelers helped light and shape your new path?*
- **Your First Spiritual Experience** - *What was the nature of your first spiritual experience? How does it still shape you today? When did your spirituality move from ideas rooted in your head to faith rooted in an experience?*
- **Your First UU Spiritual Experience** - *UUs place the interdependent web at the center of our faith. When was the first time you experienced a moment of transcendent connection that led you to feel as though who we are does not end at the barrier of our own skin?*
- **The Moment of Institutional Commitment** - *What led you to make an institutional commitment? How did it feel to publicly declare your religious group identity?*
- **The Turn Toward Practice** - *At some point on the spiritual journey our faith shifts forms, from a set of beliefs to a spiritual practice that engages and grounds our whole self. What was this shift like for you? What regular practice now grounds your spiritual self?*
- **Today's Journey** - *What was your most impactful spiritual moment of 2018?*

An Additional Resource:

Emerging Faith: A Unitarian Universalist Journey

Rev. Seth Carrier-Ladd

<http://www.uuchurchmuncie.org/emerging-faith-a-unitarian-universalist-journey/>

Your Question

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every single one. Instead, make time to meditate and reflect 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 it trying to get you to notice? Where is it trying to lead you?

1. How would you describe the current leg of your journey? Taking the first step? Down an alley? Climbing a hill? Coasting? Cruising? Sauntering? Lost? Hitchhiking it? Running on empty? Just filled the tank? Planning to get off at the next exit? Hoping that a rest area comes soon? Waiting for GPS to recalibrate? Off the map? Stuck in traffic? Sick of the commute? Thankful for the carpool? Standing at a fork in the road?
2. What friend has walked your journey with you the longest? How would you articulate the unique gift of long friendships?
3. What is the most important thing you've told your kids to pack for their journey?
4. Whose journey do you wish wasn't cut short? Who do you wish was still on the road with you? Have you figured out what treasures or clues they've left behind?
5. Could the story of your journey so far be told as an adventure story?
6. What is the most important thing you've learned about getting lost?
7. Whose journey needs your help? Is there someone that needs you to notice that they can't quite make their next step alone?
8. Do you believe in happy endings?
9. Are you close or far from home?
10. What if someone asked you "Where are you going?" instead of "Where are you from?"
11. Do you dwell on everything that you have lost? Or focus on everything that you have yet to find?
12. Are you sure your path is one of becoming who you really are. Or could it be about unbecoming who you are not?
13. What if the obstacles in front of us aren't in the way of our lives, but instead are our lives?
14. How are you called to make others' journeys possible?
15. What has been your favorite twist or turn on the road?
16. **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 your thinking started and open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of Journey.

Word Roots

Journey has its roots in the Old French *journée*, a day's length; a day's work, a day's travel. For instance, a day laborer was called a journeyman; we write our daily adventures in a journal. Looking at life as a journey, the idea of day becomes important. What part of my past do I carry forward into this day and what part do I leave behind? How do I set my compass for the travels of this day, moving into my own becoming?

Wise Words

It's time to change the question from "Where are you from?" to "Where are you going?"

[Chetan Bhatt](#)

If you can see your path laid out in front of you step by step, you know it's not your path. Your own path you make with every step you take. That's why it's your path.

Joseph Campbell

I felt in need of a great pilgrimage, so I sat still for three days, and God came to me.

Kabir

In my case Pilgrim's Progress consisted in my having to climb down a thousand ladders until I could reach out my hand to the little clod of earth that I am.

Carl Jung

The world cannot be discovered by a journey of miles, no matter how long, but only by a spiritual journey, a journey of one inch, very arduous and humbling and joyful, by which we arrive at the ground at our own feet and learn to be at home.

[Wendell Berry](#)

Where we had thought to travel outward,
we will come to the center of our own existence;
where we had thought to be alone,
we shall be with all the world.

Joseph Campbell

There are two questions that [a person] must ask [themselves]. The first is "Where am I going?" and the second is "Who will go with me?" If you ever get these questions in the wrong order, you are in trouble.

Howard Thurman

I don't mind getting lost now and then. Maps don't know everything.

[Ruth Feldman](#)

Not all those who wander are lost.

J.R.R. Tolkien

We get lost. The question is not whether we will get lost in life, but rather how we will move through it in faith. Will we dwell on everything that we have lost? Or will we focus instead on everything that we have yet to find?

[Rev. Erik Martínez Resly](#)

There is much that awaits us in our lostness. Much to be excavated examined, even exalted. In not yet knowing what will be, we are afforded the opportunity to appreciate what already is. The things hiding in plain sight. A frayed relationship, for example, may reveal our deeper needs. An unfulfilling career may motivate us to seek out a mentor. A misstart, or a misstep, may remind us of our own fragile humanity. It may claw open our hearts and sensitize us to the suffering of others.

[Rev. Erik Martínez Resly](#)

When you travel,
A new silence
Goes with you,
And if you listen,
You will hear
What your heart would
Love to say.

[John O'Donohue](#)

The desert journey isn't about embarking on a long and arduous struggle to find God at the end of the road. Desert spirituality is about looking for God right in the very midst of wrestling with ourselves.

Christine Valters Paintner

The path of awakening is not about becoming who you are. Rather it is about unbecoming who you are not.

Albert Schweitzer

As always when returning from a time away my counsel is: don't return entirely.

Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes

To get where you want to go you can't only do what you like.

Peter Abrahams

For a long time it had seemed to me that life was about to begin — real life. But there was always some obstacle in the way. Something to be got through first, some unfinished business, time still to be served, a debt to be paid. Then life would begin. At last it dawned on me that these obstacles were my life.

Alfred D'Souza

All journeys have a secret destination of which the traveler is unaware.

Martin Buber

The exits were entrances in disguise.

Shannon B.

Life is not a straight line
it's a downpour of gifts, please --
hold out your hand

Julia Fehrenbacher

Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Detour

Ruth Feldman

Full poem found at

<https://wordsoftheyear.com/2018/05/29/detour-by-ruth-feldman/>

"I took a long time getting here,
much of it wasted on wrong turns...
Super highways are so sure
of where they are going:
they arrive too soon."

Home

Warsan Shire

Full poem found at

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/home-433/>

Spoken and visual version:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nI9D92Xiygo>

"No one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well..."

Our Movable Mecca

Danez Smith

Full poem found at

<http://www.splitthisrock.org/poetry-database/poem/our-movable-mecca>

"we who were born into conundrum, came into the world as the world was leaving...
who asked for water & were given a border...
we know change is not concept but necessity...
we make heaven wherever we stand...
we are our own mecca..."

Having Come This Far

James Broughton

Full poem found at

http://www.sharonsinger.ca/poem.php?poem_id=390

"I've been through what my through was to be...
No longer do I hunt for targets
I've climbed all the summits I need to...
Now I give praise and thanks..."

Songs and Music

Loving Home

Kim Churchill

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbb_sloy1Ck&index=32&list=RDkkulrSP9Pi8

I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For - live U2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8lxLCQebnl>

Wayfaring Stranger

Rhiannon Giddens

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1Z4PAZX9Bs&index=2&list=RDz-6XGj16wrE>

I'm Gonna Walk It With You

Brian Clafin and Ellie Grace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8boCrXOp9M>

More "Journey Songs" are found on our *March Soul Matters* Spotify playlist. Click [here](#) to check them out! You can also explore the playlists from other months [here](#).

Videos & Online

Love after Love

Derek Walcott

A celebration of arrival and a reminder that the most important journey is that of "giving back your heart to itself."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSS5Y9az4il>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_3QbH_aNmC

David Whyte reads and reflects on Mary Oliver's The Journey

An audio meditation on the journey of leaving your life to save your life and finding your new voice. A reminder that sometimes leaving is an arrival.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQ3PC-84ImA>

What Makes a Hero - Joseph Campbell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hhk4N9A0oCA>

The Hero's Journey - Shots of Awe

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=35&v=JAY60dY-irY

Make a masterpiece of your life. Make the journey of your life one that you would gladly live again and again...

A Lyrical Bridge Between Past, Present and Future - TED Talk

David Whyte

https://www.ted.com/talks/david_whyte_a_lyrical_bridge_between_past_present_and_future?utm_source=31+days-of-idea&utm_campaign=3745bd94ad-31DAYS_2018_12_12&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_09cd6c5568-3745bd94ad-294797849

On the journey among the past, present and future, sharing two poems inspired by his niece's hike along El Camino de Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

Where is Home? - TED Talk

Pico Iyer

https://www.ted.com/talks/pico_ayer_where_is_home

On the joy of traveling and the serenity of standing still.

An Audio Journey Into a Rainforest

<https://soundcloud.com/onbeing/gordon-hempton-a-guided-walk>

The Loving Generation - Coming of Age

<https://www.topic.com/the-loving-generation/the-loving-generation-coming-of-age>

The journey of adolescence for biracial youth

Simulated dendrochronology of U.S. immigration (1830-2015)

https://web.northeastern.edu/naturalizing-immigration-dataviz/?utm_source=Topic+Newsletter&utm_campaign=257ed6176a-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_12_20_08_34&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_2210888e0b-257ed6176a-135173765

Video: <https://vimeo.com/91325884>

The journey of U.S. immigration told as the growth of a tree.

Bold & Untold (for Women's History Month)

<https://www.makers.com/bold-and-untold>

"The badass women in history you never knew about—until now"

Books

[The Warmth of Other Suns](#): The Epic Story of America's Great Migration

Isabel Wilkerson

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B003EY7JGM/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1

[Wisdom Walking](#): Pilgrimage as a Way of Life

Gil Stafford

[Wanderlust](#): A History of Walking

Rebecca Solnit

[The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry](#)

Rachel Joyce

[The Song of Achilles](#)

Madeline Miller

[Becoming](#)

Michelle Obama

[Everything Is Illuminated](#)

Jonathan Safran Foer

Movies

Selma

<https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/selma>

The epic march and journey of a movement.

Lady Bird

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/lady_bird

The journey of adolescence, and the journey of a daughter and mother's relationship.

Garden State

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/garden_state

The journey of returning home.

You Can Count on Me

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/you_can_count_on_me

A sister's life is turned upside down when her struggling, wandering younger brother returns to town. About a journey home, but mostly about the journey of returning to connection.

Into the Wild

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/into_the_wild

Freshly graduated from college with a promising and traditional future ahead, a young man walks out of his privileged life and into the wild.

Wild

https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2305051/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

One woman's 1,100-mile solo hike undertaken to recover from tragedy.

The Way

https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1441912/?ref_=nv_sr_3

"A father heads overseas to recover the body of his estranged son who died while traveling the "El Camino de Santiago" and decides to take the pilgrimage himself."

Get daily inspiration
on the monthly theme by liking our
Soul Matters Facebook inspiration Page:
<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

Find musical inspiration
on each theme by following our monthly
Spotify Lists:
<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/spotify-lists.html>

Find support for bringing the
monthly themes home and into your family life with
Soulful Home: A Guide for Families:
<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/soulful-home.html>



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