



Soul Matters

**What does it mean to be
a people of BELONGING?**



Small Group

October 2019

What Does It Mean To Be A People of Belonging?

You hardly knew
how hungry you were
to be gathered in,
to receive the welcome
that invited you to enter
entirely...
Tentative steps
became settling in...
You began to breathe again...
You learned to sing.

But the deal with this blessing
is that it will not leave you alone,
will not let you linger...
this blessing
will ask you to leave,
not because it has tired of you
but because it desires for you
to become the sanctuary
that you have found...

- [*Jan Richardson*](#)

Jan Richardson starts off her poem by mentioning hunger. It's also a perfect way to begin framing this month's theme of belonging. We've all felt it. Just saying the word "belonging" conjures it up: The hunger to be included; the longing to be let in. No one likes standing outside the circle. No one likes leaning against the locked door listening to everyone laughing inside. From the time we are little, belonging is the thing we seek. It's the hoped for Holy Grail at the end of our journeys.

Or is it just the beginning of our journey?

You have to love the way Richardson surprises us with that twist. One minute she's wrapping us in comforting words about settling into belonging and the next she's shaking us awake and telling us to get up and go. And maybe what she's really waking us up to is the fact that there are two types of belonging, only one of which is a blessing.

To use her language, if you find yourself being invited to linger rather than leave, warning bells should go off. Be weary of those who welcome you with a club jacket and soft couch. They may have let you in, but soon they will enlist you to help with the work of keeping others out.

Instead, as all the true sages and sacred traditions tell us, the true blessing of belonging isn't that you get to come inside the circle; it's that you get to participate in expanding it.

Which means maybe our question this month is different than one we might expect. Instead of "Where can I find belonging?" maybe it's "How can I become belonging for others?"

May that be the question and the type of belonging this month that - to use Richardson's words - "will not leave any of us alone."

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A : Whose Are You?... All in One Place

We all know that belonging is not just about place, but people as well. Quaker teacher, Douglas Steer gets at this beautifully:

“The ancient question, ‘Who am I?’ inevitably leads to a deeper one: ‘Whose am I?’ – because there is no identity outside of relationship. You cannot be a person by yourself. To ask “Whose am I” is to extend the question far beyond the little self-absorbed self, and wonder: Who needs you? Who loves you? To whom are you accountable? To whom do you answer? Whose life is altered by your choices? With whose life is your own bound up, inextricably, in obvious or invisible ways?”

It’s such a powerful and important truth: we are who we belong to. But it’s also a hard truth to remember. The world around us doesn’t help. Its focus is on becoming not belonging. It wants us to wake up every morning and ask, “Am I succeeding?” not “Who needs me?” “Who loves me?” or “With whose life is my own bound up?”

So this month why not engage in a bit of course correction? Why not see what happens when who we belong to is front and center at the start of every day?

This exercise is designed to help with this. Here are your instructions:

1. Clear off a space on a table, dresser, desk or shelf in your house.
2. Over a few days or a week populate that space with pictures of people who come to mind when you ask yourself “Whose am I?” Find or print out the pictures. Add as many as feels right. Push yourself to think beyond the obvious answers: your family, your church community, etc. Treat the question as a meditation practice. Asking it each day will lead you to unexpected pictures: a mentor from your past, an unknown boy on the other side of the world suffering because climate change caused by us, those who have been excluded from our faith because of white-centered structures. Or maybe it will take you beyond people, to a pet from your childhood or that park you walk in every Saturday of the Fall.
3. Once the space is filled with your chosen pictures, spend another week or two using it as an altar of sorts. Pause briefly before it every morning. Or maybe more than briefly.
4. Pay attention to how bringing your network of belonging changes your days. Journal about it. Discuss it with your partner or friend.
5. Come to your group with a report of how placing belonging at the center of your attention altered your days.

Note: *You don’t have to do this exercise by yourself. Consider doing it with your partner or with your children as well.*

Option B:

Belonging to the Earth

When talking about belonging, one soon meanders around to the idea that we all share the earth as our home, as the one place to which we all belong. And yet that fact rarely sinks into our daily consciousness. It is a concept stuck in science books rather than a truth that sits at the center of our spirituality. *Earthrise* is a short documentary that helps us change that. It's an award-winning short video that tells the story of the Apollo 8 astronauts and the first image captured of Earth from space in 1968. It's a story about "escaping" earth to realize how deeply we belong to it, and to each other.

Don't just watch it; turn it into a spiritual exercise by watching it after the sun has gone down and talking a walk afterward. Think of it as a "night walk meditation" and use it to deepen your experience of watching the film. Let the video and night walk take you where it will. Come to your group ready to share the one moment from the film or from your walk that affected you most deeply.

Here's the link to the video: <https://emergencemagazine.org/story/earthrise-film/>

Option C:

Find Your Place in the Work of Belonging

Belonging always comes with blindsides. When we receive a generous welcome it's hard for us to imagine and notice the ways in which that open door doesn't work the same for everyone. Our faith is slowly waking up to the fact that we haven't been and aren't the "welcoming congregations" we aspire to be. This is especially true when it comes to race and systems of white supremacy. The gap between our intentions and impact remains painfully large. The work is urgent and large.

This exercise is intended to help you find your place in that large work. Below are a number of resources and discussions that speak to the work our faith is doing around de-centering whiteness. As we know, the work needs to be systemic, but in the midst of systemic work there is also personal work to be done. Identifying "your work" is as important as participating in "our work." So during this month where we are all trying to "be belonging" for others, not just find belonging for ourselves, use the resources below to better identify and deepen "your work." Come to your group ready to share what surprised you about your exploration and what commitments it led you to make.

- "In this Delicate Turning" Sunday Morning Worship, GA 2019: <https://www.uua.org/ga/off-site/2019/worship/sunday> (Music from centering begins at 1:04:44 and sermon begins at 1:09:43, but we encourage you to watch the entire service)
- "Othering and Belonging" by Rev. Darrick Jackson – found in the UUA published book, [Centering - Navigating Race, Authenticity, and Power in Ministry](#)
- "The black hole in the white UU psyche" - UU World article by Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed: <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/black-hole-white-uu-psyche>
- What it means to be white - [Robin DiAngelo](#) - The VUU #144 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzeebSMZYxl>
- Dialogue about the White Supremacy Teach-In (The VUU) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tC0lsuHbSc>
- Our Anti-Racism Work: Creating Accountability in our UU world (The VUU) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QM_tCPZMnc8
- Keep Talking, Start Doing: Ten Ways to Deepen your Congregation's Multiculturalism Journey: <https://www.uua.org/multiculturalism/introduction/deepen-your-journey>
- Congregational Stories and Best Practices: <https://www.uua.org/justice-programs/stories>
- Ta-Nehisi Coates on Reparations
 - https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/?fbclid=IwAR3uCYRyMuDF-G5nhBe82yCBs4b1N0KlbqwlgnE-pCvY0gWu31_izCWl7rs
 - https://www.democracynow.org/2019/6/20/ta_nehisi_coates_reparations_america_slavery?sfns=mo&fbclid=IwAR3MLACzMdQ7BvjgFt0sTvy4xpgliAW0PMGX7zpqSi-HNfjlxbaDRneB6E
 - <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/06/ta-nehisi-coates-testimony-house-reparations-hr-40/592042/?fbclid=IwAR1s4tXWZzzxFvsJey3OyhcCWb3bVXNbWvirxWDr8FEry3Ahu7nk4dAlmaY>

Option D: Share Your Belonging

This exercise is simple and hard (at least for us UUs) at the same time: **Invite somebody to church!**

At the heart of this exercise is a deep religious truth: True belonging is something you give, not just get. If we don't share the belonging, we've found, it becomes a cage not a home. And why would we want to keep it to ourselves anyway? Yes, it's awkward to invite people to church. Nobody wants to seem like they are pushing their religion on someone. But at the same time, the gift of finding belonging comes with a deep sense of gratitude. And gratitude naturally leads to generosity. The best way to say thanks for a gift is to share it. In the end, it's all one big reminder that being a people of belonging is inexorably intertwined with being a people of gratitude and a people of generosity.

So lean into all three this month by uttering and completing these two simple sentences: "I think you'd enjoy my church because _____. Want to join me this week?"

Option E: Find Belonging in Our Recommended Resources

Our recommended resources are full of wisdom about what it means to be a people of and a person of belonging. 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 belonging. 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.

Your Question

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every single one. Instead, make time to meditate 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"? And what is that question trying to get you to notice or acknowledge? And don't forget, often it helps to read the list to a friend or loved one and ask them which one they think is the question you need to wrestle with!

1. How would your days and heart change if you told yourself (and really believed): "I'm already home. I've already arrived"?
2. For you, what is the opposite of belonging?
3. We all have experiences of self-doubt. We all wrestle with "imposter syndrome" and the voice in our heads that says, "I don't really belong here and will soon be found out." Who was the first person that met you in that place of doubt and helped you get out?
4. What if you haven't really just been exiled or kicked out of the group, but instead put on a path to true belonging?
5. Who is sitting just outside your circle and needs welcomed in?
6. Does your "belonging work" lie in making room for your grief?
7. Have you ever had to sacrifice belonging for integrity? How about right now? Is your current source of belonging asking you to compromise your integrity?
8. Is it time to shift the question from "Who am I?" to "Whose am I?" How would your living and loving be different (and better) if it was a bit less about becoming and a bit more about belonging? What if "Am I succeeding?" was replaced with "Who needs me?" "Who loves me? With whose life is my own bound up?"
9. Have you ever found belonging in silence?
10. Have you ever found your better self in the middle of a forest?
11. Who taught you that it is safe to show your whole self? That every part of you belongs?
12. Did you find your place of belonging or create it?
13. What if belonging happens when you finally say to yourself "I'm enough"? What if belonging isn't the moment you find your people but instead the moment you stop trying to prove yourself? What if the whole game is about finally belonging to yourself?
14. **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 belonging.

Word Roots

The word 'belonging' holds together the two fundamental aspects of life: Being and Longing, the longing of our Being and the being of our Longing.

[John O'Donohue](#)

We have this word, belong. We use it to mean, "being part of." But the old English prefix be- has the semantic consequence of intensifying as it goes. So belonging means something closer to "the deepening of longing." That's how you belong—not by finally arriving, but by having longing for arrival quickened, by being willing to long after life by living

Stephen Jenkinson

Wise Words

Home is where I want to be, but I guess I'm already there.

Talking Heads, "[This Must Be the Place](#)"

Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak with passion without having the words catch in our throats. Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter, voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power. Community means strength that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done. Arms to hold us when we falter. A circle of healing. A circle of friends. Somewhere where we can be free."

Starhawk, from [Dreaming the Dark](#)

The moment we cease to hold each other, the moment we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us, and the light goes out.

James Baldwin

Where you belong is where you choose to constantly choose to show up.

Karina Antonopoulos

When you recover or discover something that nourishes your soul and brings joy, care enough about yourself to make room for it in your life

Jean Shinoda Bolen

I believe every inch of America is sacred, from sea to shining sea. I believe we make it holy by who we welcome and by how we relate to each other. Call it my Muslim eyes on the American project. "We made you different nations and tribes that you may come to know one another," says the Qur'an.

Eboo Patel

I'm on my way to a job where I am the only black person in my office. I work with people who either don't know or don't care about Alton Sterling or Philando Castile. They are going to ask me "How are you this morning?" and the simple truth is that I can't be honest. I can't say that I'm scared and angry and that I want to take a mental health day. I can't say that I and people like me subconsciously fear for our lives on a daily basis. I can't say how I am this morning because it will make them uncomfortable and offended. The offensiveness of my pain is why we have to remind America over and over again that Black Lives Matter: because if you lack empathy for our tears it's likely that you lack respect for our lives.

[Shane Paul Neil](#)

The me that shows up in mostly white UU spaces isn't inauthentic but is guarded and not my full self.

Rev. Marisol Caballero

"Who you affiliate with, not what you affiliate with, is the name of the game," explains one interviewee in this Moishe House report on engaging Gen Z by Danya Shults. Think Instagram influencers instead of denominations and single-issue campaigners over political parties.

[Casper ter Kuile](#)

The ancient question, "Who am I?" inevitably leads to a deeper one: "Whose am I?" – because there is no identity outside of relationship. You cannot be a person by yourself. To ask "Whose am I" is to extend the question far beyond the little self-absorbed self, and wonder: Who needs you? Who loves you? To whom are you accountable? To whom do you answer? Whose life is altered by your choices? With whose life is your own all bound up, inextricably, in obvious or invisible ways?

Douglas Steer

Our society teaches us to ask, "What do I want?" Our religion invites us to ask, "Whose am I?" Two very different questions that lead to two very different lives. One question walks us down the path of accumulation and clinging. The other points to the way of community and connection. One says we find fulfillment in "success." The other says we find ourselves in belonging. So friends, which question will we allow to lead us? Every single sacred tradition says our choice is a matter of life and death.

Rev. Scott Tayler

In the absence of belonging, there is always great suffering.

[Brené Brown](#)

There are invisible lines
connecting everything
together,
and I am particularly fond
of the one that connects
me to you.

Gabriel Andreasm, "Heart Lines" ([StoryPeople](#))

Anam cara in the Celtic world was the "soul friend."... With the anam cara you could share your inner-most self... you are understood as you are without mask or pretension. The superficial and functional lies and half-truths of social acquaintance fall away, you can be as you really are. Love allows understanding to dawn, and understanding is precious. Where you are understood, you are at home. Understanding nourishes belonging.

[John O'Donohue](#)

Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountain is going home; that wildness is necessity; that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life.

John Muir

I didn't climb the tree because I [was] angry at the corporations and the government. I climbed the tree because when I fell in love with the redwoods, I fell in love with the world. My feeling of 'connection' is what drives me, instead of my anger and feeling of being disconnected.

[Julia 'Butterfly' Hill](#), on her 738-day vigil to protect redwoods from logging

It's only when you hitch your wagon to something larger than yourself that you realize your true potential.

Barack Obama

The child does not yet know what belongs and what does not: therefore for her all things belong. The ear of the child is open to all music. Her eyes are open to all arts. Her mind is open to all tongues. Her being is open to all manners. In the child's country, there are no foreigners.

Kenneth L. Patton, This World, my Home

We belong to every part of our lives and every part of our lives belongs to us. Even the failures. The cruelty. The betrayals. The addictions. The cowardice. Until we embrace those scared and tender parts with the kindness and forgiveness, we so generously give to others we will never be whole. We will never be home.

Rev. Scott Tayler

The Guest House

Jellaludin Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks

Full poem [here](#)

<https://allpoetry.com/poem/8534703-The-Guest-House-by-Mawlana-Jalaluddin-Rumi>

“Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows...”

Talking to Grief by Denise Levertov

Full poem found here:

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/talking-to-grief/>

“Ah, Grief, I should not treat you like a homeless dog...
I should trust you.
I should coax you
into the house and give you your own corner...”

Listening for Our Song

Rev. David S Blanchard

On the “song that belongs to us” and the work it takes to belong to oneself...

Full piece at

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/listening-to-our-song>

“Our songs sing back to us something of our essence, something of our truth, something of our uniqueness. When our songs are sung back to us, it is not about approval, but about recognizing our being and our belonging in the human family...”

But most of all, above everything else, who in the Bible besides Jesus knew—knew—that we’re carrying the kingdom of heaven around with us, inside, where we’re all too goddam stupid and sentimental and unimaginative to look?

J.D. Salinger, Franny and Zooey.

The only true belonging is the courage to stand alone and belong to ourselves.

[Azriel ReShel](#)

As it turns out, men and women who have the deepest sense of true belonging are people who also have the courage to stand alone when called to do that. They are willing to maintain their integrity and risk disconnection in order to stand up for what they believe in... Guess what emerged as the

greatest barrier to belonging? Fitting in. Because when we fit in, we assess a situation and acclimate. When we belong, we bring ourselves to it and say this is who I am.

[Brené Brown](#)

Some of us aren't meant to belong. Some of us have to turn the world upside down and shake the hell out of it until we make our own place in it.

Elizabeth Lowell, Remember Summer

This is where we all belong
Many many miles from home
Don't look back, you know better than that
Mapai, A Million Ways To Live

You only are free when you realize you belong no place — you belong every place.

[Maya Angelou](#)

No one is as capable of gratitude
as one who has emerged from the kingdom of night.

We know that every moment is a moment of grace,
every hour an offering;
not to share them would mean to betray them.
Our lives no longer belong to us alone;
they belong to all those who need us desperately.

Elie Wiesel, Safe Passage

May the frames of your belonging be large enough
for the dreams of your soul.

[John O'Donohue](#)

Songs

“Belonging Songs” are found on our October Soul Matters Spotify playlist. Click [here](#) to check them out! You can also explore the playlists from other months [here](#).

Online - Videos

What Does Home Mean to You? - All ages answer
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWt76WqRCVs>
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10155754153816117>

Earthrise

<https://emergencemagazine.org/story/earthrise-film/>
Award winning short video telling the story of the Apollo 8 astronauts and the first image captured of Earth from space in 1968. About “escaping” earth to realize how deeply we belong to it, and each other...

Online - Podcasts

Opening the Question of Race to the Question of Belonging - On Being Podcast

John A. Powell

<https://onbeing.org/programs/john-a-powell-opening-to-the-question-of-belonging-may2018/>
On anti-racism as “the project of belonging” and a challenge to enlightenment individualism.

TED Talk - Dare to refuse the origin myths that claim who you are

Chetan Bhatt

https://www.ted.com/talks/chetan_bhatt_dare_to_refuse_the_origin_myths_that_claim_who_you_are
“We all have origin stories and identity myths, our tribal narratives that give us a sense of security and belonging. But sometimes our small-group identities can keep us from connecting with humanity as a whole -- and even keep us from seeing others as human. It's time to change the question from "Where are you from?" to "Where are you going?"”

Articles

The Healing is Not Done

Rev. Rebekah Savage

On our failing and struggle to create a true community of belonging...

Full piece at

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/homily/promise-and-practice-healing-not-done-reflection>

“I play this moment over and over again in my head: the day I heard of the Thomas Jefferson Ball, hosted by Unitarian Universalists in 1993. As a person of color, raised in a UU congregation, I felt a shiver down my spine as I learned something new and unsettling about the faith that I call home...”

Finding Our Way to True Belonging

Brené Brown

<https://ideas.ted.com/finding-our-way-to-true-belonging/>

Why Unitarians and Universalists Belong Together

Marilyn Sewell

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/unitarians-and-universalists_b_873972?fbclid=IwAR2xAeZbT4A1joulTosaedb_I94KjKkrSfqBPc5ddARbz29f-7sJrsJyhA

Books

[Eternal Echoes: Exploring Our Yearning to Belong](#)

John O'Donohue

Excerpt: “There is a lovely balance at the heart of our nature: each of us is utterly unique and yet we live in the most intimate kinship with everyone and everything else. Its more profound intention is the awakening of the Great Belonging which embraces everything. Our hunger to belong is the desire to awaken this hidden affinity. Then we know that we are not outsiders cut off from everything, but rather participants at the heart of creation...”

Book - Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone."

Brené Brown

Review: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/author-brene-brown-social-scientist-new-book-braving-the-wilderness/>

Beloved

Toni Morrison

On the struggle to break free from belonging to our trauma and secrets, and how they become entities we live with, our tragic community, if we don't.

You're in the Wrong Bathroom! And 20 Other Myths and Misconceptions About Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People

Laura Erickson-Schroth, Laura A. Jacobs

<http://www.beacon.org/Youre-in-the-Wrong-Bathroom-P1261.aspx>

Confronting our myths to become a community of true belonging.

Movies

You Can Count on Me

On the redeeming discovery that we belong to each other, no matter what.

Short Term 12

The journey of a young woman offering belonging to others but struggling to find it for herself.

Antonia's Line

A celebration of radical belonging, courage and expanding what family means.

Minding the Gap

A celebration of the belonging of friendship and a study of what happens when a circle of young men struggle to move from childhood to adulthood but don't quite belong to either.

Chocolat

"We must measure our goodness, not by what we don't do, what we deny ourselves, what we resist, or who we exclude. Instead, we should measure ourselves by what we embrace, what we create, and who we include?"

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>

CREDITS: When a recommendations' source is not listed, the author has given permission for inclusion in this packet and for use in worship, with the understanding that the author will be credited verbally or in the order of service.



© 2019-20 Soul Matters ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Packets are for use only by member congregations of the Soul Matters Sharing Circle.
Learn how to join at <http://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com>