

Soul Matters

A kaleidoscope of thoughts, images, stories, poetry, podcasts, and videos to engage hands, hearts, and minds.

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](#)



This Soul Matters packet was prepared by Rev. Carie Johnsen at Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Augusta, ME. To receive an electronic copy, please email info@augustauu.org. To learn more about Unitarian

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."

QUESTIONS TO WALK WITH



Below is a list of questions to open the mind's gateway to reveal the wisdom that is right below the surface of our ordinary, everyday lives. Pick one question, any, the one that grabs you and won't let go, then walk with it. Let your mind wander and wonder. Let the question percolate. Listen curiously to what surfaces. Live into the answers. Be surprised by what is discovered. Share what you learn with someone meet along the way.



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 say 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

Questions to Consider:

1. 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?
2. What if "Am I succeeding?" was replaced with "Who needs me?" "Who loves me? With whose life is my own bound up?"
3. 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?

OPENING WORDS

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)

CLOSING WORDS

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

Azriel ReShel

Spiritual Practice ~ Deepening Experiences

*This is the religious and spiritual task of life: the realization, making real,
of the Profound Beauty, the Untarnishable Integrity that defines you.*

*the Profound Beauty... can [only] be found...
within the human heart,
within the souls of our lives,
under the floorboards of our living.*

~ Kenneth W. Collier

Option A:

Approaching the Soul Matters Themes from a Multicultural and Anti-Racism Lens

What does it mean to be a people of..... Belonging

What spiritual work must we do to make Unitarian universalist Community church of Augusta a place where every person belongs and can bring their whole selves, including culture, history, and identities? How might you share or partner with others to attend to this task?

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:

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?"



Other Wise Words...

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

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

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

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

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*

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

Suggested books for a fall day...

[Eternal Echoes: Exploring Our Yearning to Belong](#) by John O’Donohue

“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.”

[Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone](#) by Brené Brown

[Beloved](#) by 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](#) by Laura Erickson-Schroth, Laura A. Jacobs

Or perhaps a movie...

[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?”