



Soul Matters

The Path of **Belonging**



Small Group

September 2022

Welcome to Belonging

You hardly knew
how hungry you were
to be gathered in,
to receive the welcome
that invited you to enter
entirely...
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](#)

Richardson begins with hunger. And so do we. Just saying the word “belonging” conjures it up: The primal 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 while everyone is laughing inside. From the time we are little, belonging is the thing we seek. It’s the hoped for Holy Grail. The promised resting place.

But Richardson will have none of that. Our *own* belonging is only the beginning. That’s what she wants us to know. One minute she’s wrapping us in comforting words about settling in and allowing ourselves to finally breathe. The next she’s shaking us awake and telling us to get up and go.

That shaking should tell us something.

In other words, this is no gentle invitation, friends. No sweet reminder to think of others. It’s a warning. A desperate hope that we will wake to the fact that there are two kinds of belonging: one that wants to *bless* us and another that wants to *enlist* us.

Deep down we know this. The hard part is to remember it. To use Richardson’s language, if we find ourselves being invited to linger rather than leave, alarm bells should go off. We need to be wary of those who welcome us with a club jacket and a soft couch. They may have let us in, but soon they will enlist us into the work of keeping others out. There will likely even be a part of us that wants to keep others out. After all, closed circles don’t just set us apart, they sit us above.

But they also keep us small. Maybe this is why Richardson’s blessing is so intent on not leaving us alone. It knows that we only grow when the circle does. Circles that keep others out also keep the air out. No one inside a closed circle truly sings; they only suffocate, slowly.

It’s all one big reminder that the true blessing of belonging is not that you get to come inside the circle; it’s that you get to participate in expanding it. Again, as the circle grows so do we.

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A

Thank You Everything!

It's something [the sages](#) have implored us to do over and over again: welcome the difficult parts of our life back into belonging. Singer, [Alanis Morissette](#), helped bring this work into popular culture with her well-known lyrics, "Thank you, terror. Thank you, disillusionment. Thank you, frailty. Thank you, consequence. Thank you, thank you, silence." In response, many have made their own thank-you-for-the-difficult things lists. For instance, [one list](#) goes like this: "Thank you, poverty. Thank you, simplicity. Thank you, lack of fame. Thank you, hard work. Thank you, homework. Thank you, lost games. Thank you, broken hearts. Thank you, tribulation. Thank you, patience. Thank you, experience."

So what might your thank you list look like? That's what this exercise invites you to figure out. Set aside the time this month to revisit the challenging, heart-breaking, loss-filled, unwanted, even painful things that have entered your life. And then take them out of exile and bring them back into belonging by listing them one by one, with a giant thank you in front of each. The transformative work of this exercise, of course, is figuring out why they deserve your thanks. So take your time.

For some of us, it might help to engage the list further through creativity. Simply find your own way of embellishing each thank you with color, designs, or collage.

Oh, and one last thing, here's a blessing as you dive into this exercise: https://www.worldvision.org/ignite/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/11/12.11.a-Teacher-Resource_-Benediction.pdf

Option B

The Dish That Brings Back Belonging

This exercise wants to nourish your soul and your belly! The invitation is to think of a food or recipe that takes us back to a memory of deep belonging. Maybe it was the secret ingredients your Grandma put into her apple pie: orange juice and bourbon. Every time you use that recipe you are reminded of the precious gift of having four generations laughing together at holiday gatherings. Or it might be the tostones your beloved aunt taught you how to make. Whether it was your dad's way of doing BBQ or the go to dish you made when your kids were little, there's likely some beloved "belonging food" you've not made lately.

So this month, make it! And don't just stop there: share it! And don't just share the dish but share the story of how it anchors you in some precious piece of belonging in your life.

Come to your group ready to share the recipe, how it connects you to belonging and how sharing it with someone else deepened your sense of belonging with them.

Option C

Land Acknowledgments & Belonging

The website, Native Land Digital (<https://native-land.ca/>), enables you to learn about the indigenous history of the land you live on. This site and wider land acknowledgment efforts invite us to reorient our understanding of belonging. So dive into that work this month with these resources as your guides:

- Native Land Digital - <https://native-land.ca/>
- Article explaining the background on the Native Land Digital site and how to use it: <https://www.yesmagazine.org/issue/decolonize/2018/04/16/this-app-can-tell-you-the-indigenous-history-of-the-land-you-live-on>
- Native Land Digital's "Why It Matters" section - <https://native-land.ca/about/why-it-matters/>
- UU efforts around Land Acknowledgments: <https://www.uua.org/justice/blog/beyond-land-acknowledgment>
- How to go beyond land acknowledgments and become better allies to Indigenous Peoples:
 - <https://www.sierraclub.org/ohio/blog/2021/11/what-are-land-acknowledgements-and-why-do-we-do-them>
 - <https://nativegov.org/news/beyond-land-acknowledgment-guide/>
 - <https://nativegov.org/news/a-self-assessment/>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdHuuq0O3Js>

Option D

Travel This Month With the Belonging of BLUU Notes

Our UUA recently published [BLUU Notes: An Anthology of Love, Justice, and Liberation](#), a powerful collection of Black UU voices dedicated to amplifying a Black Unitarian Universalist perspective and worldview. It's a beautiful and transformative window into the journey of greater belonging that our faith is on. It's also a perfect book to companion you as you travel your own path of belonging this month. You can purchase it here:

<https://www.uuabookstore.org/BLUU-Notes-P19194.aspx>

Come to your group ready to share one of the pieces that particularly deepened, widened or fed your sense of belonging.

Option E

Which Quote Belongs to You?

Sometimes we read a quote and it perfectly captures what's going on for us right now. It puts into words what we've felt but been struggling to articulate. Suddenly everything falls into place.

With this in mind, spend some time this month reading through the quotes in the Companion Pieces section below to ***find the one that best articulates where you are on the path of Belonging right now.***

We encourage you to use the same discernment practice with these quotes as you with the packet's list of questions:

- Read through the list a few times, noting which ones "shimmer" (i.e. call to you or have an emotional gravitational pull for you). It often helps to circle or star these quotes that stand out.
- With each reading narrow your focus in on those that stick out, until you finally settle on the one that pulls at you the most.
- Then make space for some further reflection on the gift, challenge or clarification that most compelling quote is offering you. Some of us may even want to capture those insights with a writing or other creative response.

Come to your group ready to share your quote and the journey it took you on.

Option F

Belonging Over a Cup of Coffee

One of the best ways to explore our monthly themes is to bring them into the conversations you have with those closest to you. Yes, this is similar to what we do in our Soul Matters groups, but whereas our Soul Matters circles are focused on deepening your connection to your inner voice, this is more about taking your closest relationship to a deeper level. Too often the conversations with our family and friends stay on the surface level. This is an invitation to alter that dynamic.

So below are some conversation starters rooted in Belonging. Make time this month to bring them into a conversation with someone close to you.

Come to your group ready to share what surprised you about the conversation and what gift or insight it gave.

Conversation Starters on Belonging:

- What feeling comes up when you hear the word "belonging"?
- When was the first time you thought to yourself, "Now I belong"?
- What food reminds you of your belonging?
- Has belonging gotten easier or harder as you've grown older?
- Have you ever had to sacrifice belonging for integrity? Or your integrity for belonging? Do you remember the lesson that taught you? How is that lesson impacting your living and loving right now?
- Have you ever found belonging in silence?
- What pieces of your religious past do you wish still belonged to you?
- When did a moment of belonging bring you to tears?
- How might we deepen your sense of belonging to each other?

Your Question

Don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer everyone. 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?

Often it helps to read the list to a friend or loved one and ask them which question they think is the question you need to wrestle with!

1. When was the first time you thought to yourself, "Now I belong."
2. How does the assurance of belonging most often enter your body? Through words? Touch? Silence? Song? Solitude? Nature? Creative expression? Prayer? Memory?
3. What does the phrase "Belonging to myself" mean to you?
4. Whose inability to belong breaks your heart?
5. Is living in the future distorting the fact that you are already home?
6. What exiled or hidden part of yourself needs invited back into belonging?
7. Is it time to let yourself belong to your grief, rather than exiling it?
8. What one change in your UU church community would increase your sense of belonging?
9. Who reminds you of what real belonging is? Have you ever thanked them for that gift?
10. Are you being tempted or pressured to sacrifice your integrity for belonging?
11. What are you going to do to end your imposter syndrome, i.e. your secret feeling that you don't really belong, and they will soon find you out?
12. What has life taught you about disconnecting your belonging from your belongings?
13. If someone asked you, "How do you belong to the land?", what would you answer?
14. Think of the family members and friends that have the deepest sense of belonging. What do they all have in common?
15. **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 find it.

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 you thinking and open you up to new ways of imagining the path of belonging.

Word Roots & Definitions

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](#)

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

I was so shocked to learn that the opposite of belonging is fitting in. Because fitting in is assessing a group of people and changing who you are. But true belonging never asks us to change who we are. It demands we *be* who we are.

[Brené Brown](#)

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

[Azriel ReShel](#)

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

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

This we know: the earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. We did not weave the web of life; we are merely strands in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.

[Inspired by the words of Chief Seattle](#)

Is the land a source of belongings, or a source of belonging?

[Robin Wall Kimmerer](#)

Belong to your place by the knowledge of the others who are your neighbors in it: the old man, sick and poor, who comes like a heron to fish in the creek.

[Wendell Berry](#)

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

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.

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](#)

It took many years of vomiting up all the filth I'd been taught about myself, and half-believed, before I was able to walk on the earth as though I had a right to be here.

James Baldwin

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.

[The 8th Principle](#)

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

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

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...

Denise Levertov, from [Talking to Grief](#)

Your great mistake is to act the drama
as if you were alone... To feel abandoned is to deny
the intimacy of your surroundings. Surely,
even you, at times, have felt the grand array;
the swelling presence, and the chorus, crowding
out your solo voice. You must note
the way the soap dish enables you,
or the window latch grants you freedom...
The stairs are your mentor of things
to come...
Put down the weight of your aloneness and
ease into the
conversation. The kettle is singing
even as it pours you a drink...
Everything is waiting for you.
[David Whyte](#)

Music

Two different playlists for each of our monthly
themes: one in Spotify and another in YouTube.
They are organized as a journey of sorts, so consider
listening from beginning to end and using the
playlists as musical meditations.

Click [here](#) for the Spotify playlist on [Belonging](#).

Click [here](#) for all [Spotify playlists](#).

Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on [Belonging](#).

Click [here](#) for all the [YouTube playlists](#).

Special Playlist - "The PLACES we belong to" found
[here](#)

Videos & Podcasts

What Does Home Mean to You? | 0-100

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWt76WqRCVs>

How to Be Alone, Pádraig Ó Tuama

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgZT6UJocRs>

Brené Brown on the opposite of belonging

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWZa3wm1Nns>

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.

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

<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.

The Star Spanglish Banner, Angelica Maria

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

Articles

Distinguished and Singing

adrienne maree brown

<https://adriennemareebrown.net/2021/03/26/distinguished-and-singing/>

"right now, people are confusing identity with
community, and finding no satisfaction in either
place..."

On Our Bodies Not Belonging to Us...

Song by Abigail Bengson of the Bengsons

Abigail singing: [HERE](#)

adrienne maree brown singing and sharing it [HERE](#)

We will not. We will not.

We will not be controlled.

I am sovereign in my body.

I am sovereign in my soul.

**We're Not Going Back to the Time Before Roe v.
Wade. We're Going Somewhere Worse, The New
Yorker**

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/07/04/we-are-not-going-back-to-the-time-before-roe-we-are-going-somewhere-worse>

**Overturning Roe: The Disparate Effect on Women
of Color, Democracy Now**

https://www.democracynow.org/2022/6/27/scotus_roe_overturning_ignores_slavery_legacy

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..."

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 belonging to our trauma and secrets.

It's All Relative: Adventures Up and Down the World's Family Tree

A.J. Jacobs

Review:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/01/books/review/its-all-relative-aj-jacobs.html>

The Economics of Belonging: A Radical Plan to Win Back the Left Behind and Achieve Prosperity for All

Martin Sandbu

- [Related webinar](#)
- [Book Review](#)

Movies

[Lion](#)

[The Last Black Man in San Francisco](#)

[Flee](#)

[Nomadland](#)

[Short Term 12](#)

[Unorthodox](#)

More Monthly Inspiration from Soul Matters!

Our Facebook Inspiration Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

Our Instagram Page:

Find us as “soul_matters_circle”

Music Playlists:

Click [here](#) for links to the [Spotify playlists](#) for each month.

Click [here](#) to check out the [YouTube playlists](#).



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