



Soul Matters

The Path of **Finding Our Center**



Small Group

January 2023

Welcome to the Path of Finding Our Center

When we talk of finding our center, it's natural for calm and rest to be the first things that come to mind. Who would expect anything different? After all, the need for calm is everywhere we look. So, so many of us are tired. We're overworked, over-busy, over-committed, overly scared. We are often so weighed down by responsibility and worry that it only takes one drop of something unexpected to tip us over. So, yes, we long for rest. Yes, we want to swirl to stop.

And yet, helping us find peace and calm is not the only work found on this path of finding our center.

As our faith reminds us, being a "centered person" often involves the opposite of keeping things calm. In order to move toward a balance of justice, we have to upset the current state of things. Oppressive systems need challenged and toppled. And to accomplish that, we need to sacrifice calm and comfort, including our own. We need to remember that achieving a balance of equality requires us to be purposefully *off-balance* and *out-of-step* with our culture, or as Martin Luther King Jr. said, we need people who are *maladjusted* to the way things are.

Add all this up and suddenly "our center" appears to be a much richer place than is often recognized.

It's not simply a place of peace and calm; it's also a place of being pushed and launched. What you hear in this deep space within is not just the whisper of "Rest" and "Breathe," but also "Take a deep breath and jump!" We encounter an invitation there, not just relaxation. It's a still point, yes. But a still point upon which we pivot and turn to something new.

So as we try to make sense of "finding our center" this month, it's fine to pull up the image of the Buddha sitting peacefully under a tree, but we can't let that overshadow the image of a diver balancing way up there on her diving board, pausing to regain her composure and courage so she can leap and go "all in."

Maybe in the end, instead of only asking each other, "Are you centered these days?" we need to ask, "Where is your center sending you these days?" and "Where is your center calling you to go?"

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A

The Core Values that Lie at Your Center

Finding our center and clarity about our values go hand in hand. But do we really take the time to regularly name and bring our core values into awareness? And do our self-proclaimed values match how others see us? And how we are actually living. This exercise invites you to wrestle with both of these questions. And do it with a trusted companion.

To keep it simple, we've created a [list of values](#). Here's how to engage with it:

1. Pick your five core values [from the list](#).
2. Give a blank copy of the list to someone close to you and ask them to pick the five they think are your core values, without letting them know which you picked earlier.
3. Compare lists and discuss the differences, as well as why each of you picked what you did.
4. Either alone, or with the person close to you, engage the questions below. If you do it with the other person, invite them to also identify their top five values and engage the questions as well.
5. Come to your group ready to share insights.

Taking it Deeper: Here are some additional questions - and an online tool - to help you explore more:

- What were your parent(s) five core values? In what way are your core values and theirs the most similar and the most different? Why do you think that is?
- Of the 5 values you selected, which one would *most* like to live into more fully?
- What is one *current* behavior of yours most supports this value? What is one *new* behavior that would support this value even more?
- What are one or two behaviors that routinely fall outside of this core value? How does it feel to admit this? When you act outside this core value of yours, is it easy or hard to be compassionate with yourself?
- What's the newest value to make it on to your list of top five? Which value did it "replace"? Did that happen consciously? Or did the shift sneak up on you?
- Take this online values test and see if it reveals anything new: <https://www.valuescentre.com/tools-assessments/pva/>

Option B

Purposeful Pauses

In our culture of faster, better and never enough, it is easy to live our lives on autopilot. Taking one or two [intentional pauses](#) throughout our day allows us to challenge and correct that. It enables us to stay close to our center and be more fully present. It is a practice of mindfulness, that [all spiritual traditions](#) embrace in one form or another.

With this in mind, you are invited to take a week and weave in at least one purposeful pause into your day. Don't overcomplicate it. This can be as simple as taking a walk or pausing for a few minutes of deep breathing. One useful technique is to stop what you are doing, look around and ask yourself, "What do I notice around me?" or "What is going on in my body right now?" (You can also write down what you notice and then look back over it at the end of the week for connections) For those who want to explore a slightly more involved practice, try making time for one of these online guided mindful meditations each day: <https://reset.thriveglobal.com/>.

During and after the week, note how these purposeful pauses altered or enhanced your emotional state and/or the patterns of your day. Come to your group ready to share the most impactful insight you gained.

Option C

A Solo Retreat to Re-Center Yourself

“Every person needs to take one day away. A day in which one consciously separates the past from the future. Jobs, family, employers, and friends can exist one day without any one of us... Each person deserves a day away in which no problems are confronted, no solutions searched for. Each of us needs to withdraw from the cares which will not withdraw from us.”

— Maya Angelou

It doesn't have to cost a ton of money. It doesn't require traveling to far-away retreat centers. All it takes is space, time and intention. That's all you need to create your own solo retreat.

It's also what we hunger to get out of a solo retreat: *Space* away from the daily swirl of our normal lives helps us live life rather than life living us. *Time* to travel beneath the surface and hear the voices that only emerge with slow, patient listening. A reclaiming of *intention* so it can reclaim us.

Below are a few articles to help you design a solo retreat that's right for you. And don't forget you could take *this month's packet* (or our [Creativity Matters](#) or [UU Writers](#) packets) with you into your retreat to guide or enrich your journey.

In addition, you may want to think a bit about engaging a “reflective partner” to help you out, someone you talk to *before* and *after* your retreat. Telling someone before your retreat what you hope to get out of it helps you deepen and clarify your intentions. Having someone listen to and witness your journey after the retreat often brings additional or deeper insights.

Here are the resources to help you on your way:

- There's No Place Like Home: Creating Your Own Self-Guided Meditation Retreat
<https://valleyinsight.org/2020/09/09/september-2020/>
- How To Do A Silent Retreat At Home
<https://calmingcosmos.com/how-to-do-a-silent-retreat-at-home-step-by-step-guide/>
- I Welcomed 2020 On Solo Retreat — It Renewed My Zest For Life
<https://www.mindthatago.com/solo-retreat/>
- I Did A 2 Day Solitude Retreat And This Is What It Taught Me
<https://primallypure.com/blogs/blog/i-did-a-2-day-solitude-retreat-and-this-is-what-it-taught-me>

Option D

Keeping the Work of De-Centering at the Center

Reading is never enough, but it is part of helping white people get clearer about the work that must be done. Make some time this month to continue the on-going work of keeping de-centering work at the center by engaging this essay by [Bayo Akomolafe](#). Come to your group ready to share not only your biggest insight from the article but also what new commitment or behavior change it inspired you to make.

Dear White People

<http://www.whatisemerging.com/opinions/dear-white-people?fbclid=IwAR21oFQO2cqaWFfVlxGr5wNoJopBCWI-qUZX1F1z5R4Sl03hfoloLMuKRj0&utm>

Option E

Finding Our Center 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. It's also a powerful way to take our closest relationships to a deeper level and move our conversations with family and friends below surface level.

Below is a list of conversation starters about *Finding Our Center* to help guide and enrich your discussion.

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

Conversation Starters on Finding Our Centers:

- When was the last time someone asked you about something that lies at the deepest center of who you are?
- What three things most moved you toward your center this past year?
- It's said that [we are every age that we have been](#). What younger self do you most want to tap into right now?
- Does the idea of "[following your bliss](#)" play a role in your life?
- It is said that one of the best ways to be in touch with your deepest self is to pay attention to the person who most annoys you. Has this ever been true for you? If not, is it possible that it *might be* true for you?
- Who were you before others told you "You're too much!" or "You're not good enough!"?

Option E

Which Finding Our Center Quote Calls to You?

Sometimes we read a quote and it perfectly captures what's going on for us right now. Or allows us to view our current circumstances in a new light. 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 illuminates your journey with Finding Our Center.***

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

- **Read through the list of quotes** 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 quote** that pulls at you the most.
- Then make space to **reflect** on the gift, challenge or insight your chosen quote is offering you.
- Some of us may want to **go further** and capture your reflections with journaling or creative expression.

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

Your Question

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

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. Who first helped you find your [true self](#)?
2. Who first helped you find "the fire in your belly"?
3. What do you do to stay in touch with the fire in your belly?
4. What if you find your center when remembering the nicest thing someone ever said to you?
5. When was the last time someone asked you about that which lies at the deepest center of who you are?
6. Is it possible that the discovery of your deepest self lies in paying attention to the person that [annoys you the most](#)?
7. Who were you before others told you "You're too much!" or "You're not good enough!"?
8. Does the idea of "[following your bliss](#)" play a role in your life right now?
9. What three things most moved you toward your center this past year?
10. Have you ever felt like you "[are finally catching up to who you are](#)"?
11. It's said that [we are every age that we have been](#). What younger self do you most want to tap into right now?
12. What would enable you to tell your white friends about how their behaviors keep you from or knock you off your center?
13. What happens inside you in the silent moments? What do you hear? What do you feel?
14. What have you learned about navigating those times in life when we lose track of our center?
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 finding our center.

Word Roots & Definitions

“Finding”: [Latin](#) pons (genitive *pontis*) “to bridge.”
“Center”: from [Ancient Greek](#) from κεντεῖν (Kantian), “to prick, goad,” also “sting of a wasp.”

Related word root: “Amen”

“Amen” — can be [traced](#) to the ancient Egyptian sacred word “ament,” which can be [translated](#) as “the ground of being” or “by the earth on which I stand.” The roots point to the sensation of the earth supporting one from underneath, so they express “I stand on what I have said.”

Wise Words

At the center of your being, you have the answer; you know who you are, and you know what you want.

Lao Tzu

We do not become writers... dancers... musicians...helpers...peacemakers.

We came as such. We are.

Some of us are still catching up to what we are.

[Clarissa Pinkola Estes](#)

I believe that deep wisdom resides within each of us. Some call this voice by different sacred names— Spirit, God, Jesus, Allah, Om, Buddha-nature, Waheguru. Others think of this voice as the intuition one hears when in a calm state of mind... Whatever name we choose, listening to our deepest wisdom requires disciplined practice. The loudest voices in the world right now are ones running on the energy of fear, criticism, and cruelty... But I must not lose myself at the feet of

others. My most vigilant spiritual practice is finding the seconds of solitude to get quiet enough to hear the Wise Woman in me.

[Valarie Kaur](#)

Here’s what I discovered about the Wise Woman [within]: Her voice is quiet... I have to get really quiet in order to hear her. How do I know when I am hearing her voice? She is tender and truthful. She is not afraid of anything or anyone. She does not give me all the answers, but she does know what I need to do in this moment—to wonder, grieve, fight, rage, listen, reimagine, breathe, or push.

[Valarie Kaur](#)

We all find ourselves bouncing around three very human lies that we believe about our identity: I am what I have, I am what I do, and I am what other people say or think about me.

[Christopher L. Heuertz](#)

Inner peace doesn't come from getting what we want, but from remembering who we are.

Marianne Williamson

When the inner walls to your soul are graffitied with advertisements, commercials, and the opinions of everyone who has ever known and labeled you, turning inwards requires nothing less than a major clean-up.

[Dawna Markova](#)

If one is not faithful to his own individuality, then they cannot be loyal to anything.

Claude McKay

There are all different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than of society, say, or the super-ego, or self-interest. By and large a good rule for finding out is this. The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work that you need most to do and that the world most needs to have done. The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

Frederick Buechner

If we want to support each other's inner lives, we must remember a simple truth: the human soul does not want to be fixed, it wants simply to be seen and heard. If we want to see and hear a person's soul, there is another truth we must remember: the soul is like a wild animal -- tough, resilient, and yet shy. When we go crashing through the woods shouting for it to come out so we can help it, the soul will stay in hiding. But if we are willing to sit quietly and wait for a while, the soul may show itself.

Parker Palmer

Instead of asking ourselves, 'How can I find security and happiness?' we could ask ourselves, 'Can I touch the center of my pain? Can I sit with suffering, both yours and mine, without trying to make it go away? Can I stay present to the ache of loss or disgrace -- disappointment in all its many forms -- and let it open me?'

Pema Chodron

Where you stumble, there lies your treasure. The very cave you are afraid to enter turns out to be the source of what you are looking for. The damned thing in the cave, that was so dreaded, has become the center.

Joseph Campbell

Not until we are lost do we begin to understand ourselves.

Henry David Thoreau

Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.

[Carl Jung](#)

When someone deeply listens to you,
your bare feet are on the earth
and a beloved land that seemed distant
is now at home within you.

John Fox

I am still every age that I have been. Because I was once a child, I am always a child. Because I was once a searching adolescent, given to moods and ecstasies, these are still part of me, and always will be... This does not mean that I ought to be trapped or enclosed in any of these ages -- the delayed adolescent, the childish adult -- but that they are in me to be drawn on... If I can retain a child's awareness and joy, and *be* fifty-one, then I will really learn what it means to be grownup.

[Madeleine L'Engle](#)

You are an aperture through which the universe is looking at and exploring itself.

Alan Watts

You are the sky.
Everything else -
it's just the weather.

[Pema Chodron](#)

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

Dear Black America — We are many things, aren't we? We are hair. God yes, we are hair. And song. And memory. We are a language so deep it has no need for words. And we are words that feint, dart, and wheel like birds. Like James Brown, we feel good. Like Fannie Lou Hamer, we are sick and tired. We are fearsome. We are fire. Like God, we are that we are.

Tracy K. Smith

The Journey, Mary Oliver

Full poem at

<https://emilypoetryblog.com/2013/04/09/the-journey-by-mary-oliver/>

“But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice,
which you slowly
recognized as your own...”

Remember. Joy Harjo

Full poem at <https://poets.org/poem/remember-0>

Remember the sky that you were born under...
Remember the sun's birth at dawn...
Remember your birth, how your mother struggled...
Remember the earth whose skin you are...
Remember you are all people and all people
are you...

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 [Finding Our Center](#).

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

Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on [Finding Our Center](#).

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

Articles

How to Find Your Bliss: Joseph Campbell on What It Takes to Have a Fulfilling Life

<https://www.themarginalian.org/2015/04/09/find-your-bliss-joseph-campbell-power-of-myth/>

Videos & Podcasts

Famous, Naomi Shihab Nye

<https://poets.org/poem/famous>

Have the Courage to Stand Alone, Brené Brown

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_sYCThUQc8

[Whirling Dervishes](#) and The Dance that Centers Oneself in the Connection with the Divine

Video of the dance:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28lWyVV5f_4

What's Your Center (Not just for kids!)

From Rise of the Guardians

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHABdkw8eMg>

Who Am I?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJm2UQHSoVk&list=RDCMUcCpPUszZ4-7yzZNgAAYwJjg&index=22>

Live With Intention

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

Books

[Journal of Radical Permission](#): A Daily Guide for Following Your Soul's Calling

[adrienne maree brown](#) and Sonya Renee Taylor

[The Enneagram for Black Liberation](#): Return to Who You Are Beneath the Armor You Carry

Chichi Agorom

Related podcast found [here](#).

[The Dawn of Everything](#): A New History of Humanity

A highly praised and radical re-telling of human development that challenges what we've assumed to be the central and driving values of human societies.

Review found [here](#)

Movies

[In & Of Itself](#)

[Puzzle](#)

[In Pursuit of Silence](#)

[Soul](#)

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](#).

Packet Introduction Credit Note: Unless explicitly noted otherwise, the introductions of these packets are written by our Team Lead, Rev. Scott Tayler. Rev. Scott gives permission for his pieces to be used in any way that is helpful, including in newsletters, worship and in online service/recordings.



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