

## USG SGM ~ THE GIFT OF HERITAGE ~ October 2023

drawn from Soul Matters materials, see the full packet for more of all of these elements

[www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com](http://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com)



**Chalice Lighting:** Some people are your relatives, but others are your ancestors, and you choose the ones you want to have as ancestors. You create yourself out of [their] values. — *Ralph Ellison*

**Check-in:** *Share your highs and lows since we last met focusing on what drains you and what lifts you up. We give each other the gift of listening without asking questions or offering advice to allow people the safety to share what's in their hearts.*

**Introduction:** Be on the lookout, friends. The ghosts are on their way! After all, you can't talk about heritage without talking about - and encountering - ancestors. And we're not talking about relatives here. As Ralph Ellison points out, there's a big difference between relatives and ancestors. Relatives give us our brown eyes and bowed legs; ancestors bestow a legacy.

Relatives are those we tell stories about; ancestors call us to carry stories forward. Relatives live on in our DNA; ancestors live in the whispers of our hearts. Our relatives allowed us to be here; our ancestors tell us why we are here. The difference comes down to values. Values we use to construct not just our stories but ourselves.

Take success. Remember that old line, "He was born on third base but believes that he hit a triple." People with a clear sense of heritage and ancestry, know the truth of how they got where they are. Instead of telling tall tales about their magnificent swing, they speak of "the shoulders on which I stand." Hubris or humility? Ancestors at their best never let us forget the latter. You will also hear ancestor-conscious people speak of blessings differently. When we get gifts from the kind of ancestors Ellison is talking about, those gifts always come with a responsibility. There is no such thing as keeping the gifts of heritage to oneself. They are meant to be passed on. Ancestors don't just remind you that they came before; they remind you of those who will come after. Another way to put this is to say that ancestors remind us that we are part of something larger. Even obligated to something larger, because as much as we need these larger webs and stories, they need us too. Ancestors say: Whether or not the sacred stories and values stay relevant, depends on you! Whether or not each other's histories are told truly, depends on you! Whether the family cycles of health are strengthened and family cycles of dysfunction are stopped depends on you! Whether or not that arc is bent back toward justice, is up to you! Ancestors plop these incomplete and intimidating endeavors in our laps and say, "We've done our part and taken it as far as we can. The next step of the journey is in your hands."

### **Spiritual Exercises:**

#### **Option 1: *The Memento That Matters***

We all have one: a favorite [family memento](#) that holds something important about our family heritage and history. Most of the time, these mementos also keep us grounded in a value or offer us comfort or inspiration when we need it most. So this month reflect on one of your favorite family mementos and figure out why it has such a hold on you? If possible, bring that memento with you to show to your group.

#### **Option 2: *Cook & Share a Piece of Your Heritage***

Heritage isn't just held in our minds and memory. Just as often, it's held in the food we eat, and the recipes passed down to us. So this month, reconnect with your family heritage with one or more of these food activities:

- Dig out an old family recipe and have your family cook it with you. As you do, share the stories connected with it.

- Invite over a small circle of friends and have each of them bring a dish from a family recipe or their particular culture. During dinner take turns sharing your stories connected to the dish everyone brought.
- Talk to a parent, aunt, uncle, or grandparent and ask them to share their favorite family recipe with you.

And maybe most important of all, whichever option you choose, consider making the recipe again the day of your group and sharing it with your Soul Matters friends!

### **Quotes for Inspiration/Readings:**

The past is never dead. It's not even past. ~*William Faulkner*

History doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme. ~*Mark Twain*

To acknowledge our ancestors means we are aware that we did not make ourselves. ~*Alice Walker*

When a society or a civilization perishes, one condition can always be found. They forgot where they came from. ~*Carl Sandburg*

When heritage becomes a box instead of an inspiration, it has gone too far. ~*Brandon Sanderson*

When we lie about the past, we steal from the future. ~*Abigail Bengson*

**Questions:** *Pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is to figure out what being a part of a people who honor the Gift of Heritage means for you and your daily living.*

1. What story told by (or about) your ancestors has shaped you the most?
2. If you could talk to one of your ancestors, who would you choose? And what would you ask them?
3. What is your favorite [family memento](#)? And why does it have such a hold on you?
4. If you could change one thing about your family heritage, what would it be?
5. Often parents consciously or [unconsciously](#) transfer their unfilled dreams onto their children. What have you learned about dancing with your parents' unfulfilled dreams?

**Sitting in Silence:** *Take a few moments to sit quietly and reflect upon your thoughts.*

**Sharing/Deep Listening:** *Respond with your thoughts and experiences with the topic. We create a safe space by listening deeply and not responding. When sharing, connect with what is true for you. When listening, give the speaker your full attention rather than thinking about what you will share.*

**Reflection and Gratitude:** *This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared. Consider lifting up one comment or experience for which you are particularly grateful.*

**Singing/Videos** Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on [The Gift of Heritage](#).

**Abigail DeVille Listens to History** <https://art21.org/watch/new-york-close-up/abigail-deville-listens-to-history/>

Calling out official American history as "garbage," Abigail DeVille uses discarded materials herself, like old furniture and tattered flags, to construct complex room-sized installations evoking the overlooked histories of Black Americans in all its messiness and grandeur...

**Extinguishing the Chalice:** The mission of your life should be to leave a better world behind than what you inherited. ~*Sri Ravi Shankar*