



Soul Matters

The Gift of Interdependence



Small Group

April 2024

Welcome to the Gift of Interdependence

Talk of interdependence immediately calls up the work of *saving* the planet, rightly so. But what if the first step toward saving the planet is learning to *speak* to it? And hear it? Could our collective failure to confront the climate crisis be rooted in our lost ability to listen? What if the quickly-going-extinct creatures don't want our sympathy, but our ear? What if the fraying of the web isn't just about us failing to act, but also us having forgotten who we are. And what if nature itself is the only one who can help us remember?

It's a month of tricky questions, friends. As we begin, may these words by Rev. Kaaren Anderson send us on our way.

We Are One

Perhaps if I could pull my senses back
to the scraping squeak of the window opening
that welcomes in the pasture's chorus of peepers,
whose resonate tones glide over my bed sheet and mental haze,
I'd be able to hear my amphibian friends' primordial call:
We are one, we are one, we are one

Perhaps if I could recall the rapid thrum
of the nine hummingbirds beating wings,
whipping in and out around the feeder,
with a thrummmm, thrummmm, thrummmm
on that cold Montana morning in May,
I'd remember that my heart beat synched with metronomic ease
to their tiny thrumming selves and rhythmic reminder:
We are one, we are one, we are one

Perhaps if I could be real still
and lay my body on the syrupy mud
along the creek behind the wood
and hear the ferns unfurling in unison
and the roots of the poplar stretching toward the spring,
I'd remember that the universe sings a song to us,
each minute, of every hour, of every day, of every year:
We are one, we are one, we are one

Perhaps if I made it a priority to listen to that siren song,
I'd ask the right questions, and make the right statements;
and return to the communion of creatures of which I am a part.

The truth is we make this planet about us, and only us
and when we do, the earth calls our separate selves back, singing:
*"Ask yourself, you beautiful, thoughtful, gorgeous species,
How much of the planet are you really entitled to?
How much of the planet are you really entitled to?"*

And with the peepers, and the hummingbirds and the ferns and the roots,
I would respond:
We are one, we are one, we are one.

Our Spiritual Exercises

It's one thing to analyze a theme; it's quite another to experience it. By pulling us out of the space of *thinking* and into the space of *doing*, these exercises invite us to figure out not just what we have to say about life, but also what life has to say *to us*!

Pick the exercise that speaks to you the most. Come to your group ready to share why you picked the exercise you did and what gift it gave you.

Option A

Build a Relationship with a Sibling from the Natural World

May we love the earth not as an object—beautiful nature to pass through—but as a complex, miraculous subject that we build a relationship with.

[Courtney Martin](#)

This exercise is all about leaning into Courtney Martin's wish for us. We know how to appreciate nature. And, unfortunately, we are very skilled at how to *use* it. But we are less practiced at building a relationship with it. So, this month, let's work on a two-way, instead of one-way, relationship with the natural world.

The key here is reciprocity, even friendship. Pick an animal, flower, plant or body of water that you have an affinity for or want to deepen your relationship with. Then spend a week (or the entire month) and engage that "natural sibling" in some or all of these ways:

- [Introduce yourself](#) and get to [know it](#).
- Take care of it somehow; Support its thriving.
- Visit it regularly, like you would a close friend.
- Capture its beauty by [photographing](#), painting or [drawing](#) it at different times of day and in [different weather](#)
- Learn about how it came to live in the place it does. Is it natural to your landscape or not?
- Learn its [scientific name](#).
- Learn [its role](#) in [its ecosystem](#).
- Learn how [Native Americans relate](#) to it.
- Spend an entire [day around it](#).
- [Sleep](#) near it.
- Practice the spiritual discipline of [listening to it](#) or even [talking to it](#). Want some guidance about listening to the natural world? Try [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)
- Bring questions to it. [Ask it for advice](#).

Option B

Be Like Noah

In the biblical story of Noah's Ark, God made sure that Noah saved all the animals along with himself. Clearly God felt that the new world would not thrive without all the natural creatures in it. But one also wonders if God commanded this because God knew we human beings *also* needed the community of creatures to thrive!

To honor the gift and miracle of the animal community, let's be like Noah this month and ***collect as many animals as we can, just with a camera rather than an ark.***

As inspiration, check out how a group called The Art of Creation did a similar project:

<https://www.ecodisciple.com/blog/circlewood-photo-ark/?ref=the-ecological-disciple-newsletter>.

Option C

Reconnect with the Place You Already Are

Who we are is deeply intertwined with where we live. And yet our connection to and with our nearby world is often frayed. So, in an effort to reconnect with your sense of place, we invite you this month to go on some “micro-adventures”!

Here’s more information to explain it and guide you along your way:

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/05/well/live/awe-microadventure-exploration.html>
- <https://www.noemamag.com/a-single-small-map-is-enough-for-a-lifetime/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwHwXld0pxE&t=119s>
- <https://www.outsideonline.com/adventure-travel/destinations/north-america/outdoor-activities-ideas-close-to-home-fun/>

Option D

Find Yourself in the World of Climate Apathy

Social psychologists are in wide agreement that the vast majority of us suffer from some level of [climate apathy](#). However, they are quick to point out that, in most cases, this apathy isn’t driven by us not knowing the facts about the climate emergency, but instead by us not knowing how to act on what we know.

Luckily, moral philosopher, Elizabeth Cripps, is here to help. She has written a guide for how to escape climate apathy. Here’s the link to it: <https://psyche.co/guides/how-to-escape-climate-apathy-and-help-to-avert-catastrophe>

So, for this exercise, read through her guide and do two things:

1. **Identify yourself in her writing.** She lifts up many different attitudes and struggles in her guide. Find the ones that describe the feelings you have. Where in her article do you see a reflection of yourself?
2. **Follow one of her suggestions.** Cripps offers many suggestions. Find one that calls to you and engage it this month, alone or with a partner.

Option E

Write a Letter to the Future

Parent-activist [Jill Kubit](#) and the behavioral scientist Trisha Shrum, [created a project](#) called [DearTomorrow](#) which challenges people to [write a letter](#) to a child who is important to them, for those [children to receive in 2050](#). The instructions are to express your hopes and fears about the climate crisis in your letter, describing the world you want for them, in 27 years’ time. You are also asked to write about what you think especially needs to change and what you will do to help make that happen.

So, for your exercise this month, take on [DearTomorrow’s challenge](#) of writing this letter to an important child. It helps to do it with a partner, so enlist someone to not only write a letter, but also get together with you to read and discuss each other’s letter and how the process was for you.

Option F

Name the Gift of Being Bound in Friendship

Our friendships shape, save and inspire us in ways too many to count. This form of interdependence is among our most treasured. But we rarely tell our friends how much being bound to them means.

So this month, tell them! Yes, it will be awkward. Yes, it will feel incomplete and imperfect. But do it anyway. Our friends deserve to know what a gift they are to us.

If telling them off the cuff is too intimidating, consider writing it out and reading it to them. Watch this video to get inspired: https://www.instagram.com/reel/C0K2d_6JinX/?igsh=MTFINnBneHRsMzUzYw%3D%3D

Option G

Ask Them about Interdependence!

One of the best ways to explore our monthly themes is to have conversations about them with people who are close to you. It not only deepens our conversations but also our relationships. Below is a list of “interdependence questions” to help you on your way. Be sure to let your conversation partner know in advance that this won’t be a typical conversation. Telling them a bit about Soul Matters will help set the stage.

Interdependence Questions:

- Has a tree ever *spoken* to you? How about [a river](#)? Or the ocean? Or the moon? What about [a weed](#)?
- Do you think age impacts the way we *connect with* the interdependent web?
- How does climate anxiety or grief show up in your life?
- Do you feel that “sacrifice” has a central role to play in addressing the climate crisis?
- When was the last time you became thoroughly absorbed in the curiosity of understanding [another creature's life](#)?
- How has the place where you live shaped the way you understand and approach life? And yourself?
- Do you struggle with “burdening” others with your troubles and worries? If so, who or what led to your belief that your grief, worry or struggle is unwanted by or too heavy for others?
- Have you ever been “loved” by the natural world?

Option H

Which Interdependence Quote Calls to You?

Spend some time this month reading through the quotes in the *Companion Pieces* section below to **find the one that speaks most powerfully to you**. 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

This list of questions is an aid for deep reflection. They are not meant to be answered as much as to take you on a journey. Read through the questions 2-3 times until one question sticks out for you and captures your attention, or as some faith traditions say, until one of the questions "shimmers."

Then reflect on that question using one or all of these questions:

- *What is going on in my life right now that makes this question so pronounced for me?*
- *How might my inner voice be trying to speak to me through it?*
- *How might Life or my inner voice be trying to offer me a word of comfort or challenge through this question?*

Writing out your thoughts often enables you to go deeper. It also sometimes helps to read the list of questions to a friend or loved one and ask them which question they think is the question you need to wrestle with.

A note about self-care: *Often these questions take us to a vulnerable space. It is OKAY to ignore the questions that may be triggering – or lean in if that feels safe.*

1. What aspect of nature did you connect with most meaningfully as a child? A dog? A horse? A tree? The ocean? Lightning bugs? The rain? A path in the woods?
2. Do you think age impacts the way we *care for* the interdependent web?
3. Do you think age impacts the way we *connect with* the interdependent web?
4. Has a beloved young person ever altered the way you think about your relationship with nature or the planet?
5. Where do you feel your connection to nature in your body? What happens to you when that place of connection is stirred? What has that feeling of connection communicated to you most recently?
6. Do you feel that "sacrifice" has a central role to play in addressing the climate crisis?
7. When was the last time you became thoroughly absorbed in the curiosity of understanding another creature's life?
8. How has the place where you live shaped the way you understand and approach life? And yourself?
9. Some of us *live in* a place and others of us *belong to* a place. Have you found a place you belong to yet?
10. What time of day do you feel most like "yourself"?
11. Has a tree ever *spoken* to you? How about a river? Or the ocean? Or the moon? What about a weed?
12. Has your commitment to community been tripped up by the trap of self-improvement?
13. We are glad to support and bear the burdens of others. But many of us wouldn't dare "burden" those same people with *our* troubles. What has tricked you into thinking that your grief, worry or struggle is unwanted by or too heavy for others? Who or what taught you that the weight of your worries must be carried by yourself alone?
14. Have you ever had a friend that "birthed a new world in you"?
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 gift of interdependence.

Wise Words

A human being is a part of the whole called by us 'the universe'... [But we] experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of our consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

Albert Einstein

And if it's true we are alone,
we are alone together,
the way blades of grass
are alone, but exist as a field.
Sometimes I feel it,
the green fuse that ignites us,
the wild thrum that unites us...

[Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer](#)

You are not IN the universe, you ARE the universe, an intrinsic part of it. Ultimately, you are not a person, but a focal point where the universe is becoming conscious of itself. What an amazing miracle.

Eckhart Tolle

Douglas Steere, a Quaker teacher, says that the ancient question, "Who am I?" inevitably leads to a deeper one, "Whose am I?" – because there is no identity outside of relationship. You can't 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, whose lives, is your own all bound up, inextricably, in obvious or invisible ways?

[Victoria Stafford](#)

Each friend represents a world in us, a world possibly not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born.

Anais Nin

Each experience of love nudges us toward the Story of Interbeing, because it only fits into that story and defies the logic of Separation.

[Charles Eisenstein](#)

Frequently in my practice, patients tell me that they often cry in private. I ask them whether they ever allow their grief to be witnessed and shared with others. There is usually a quick retort of "No, I couldn't do that. I don't want to be a burden to anyone else." ...We need to recover our right to ask for help in grief, otherwise it will continue to recycle perpetually. Grief has never been private; it has always been communal. Subconsciously, we are awaiting the presence of others, before we can feel safe enough to drop to our knees on the holy ground of sorrow.

[Francis Weller](#)

We are all broken by something. We have all hurt someone and have been hurt... The ways in which I have been hurt—and have hurt others—are different from the ways [others have] suffered and caused suffering. But our shared brokenness connects us.

Bryan Stevenson

When members of the Native American Blackfoot tribe meet each other, they don't ask "How are you?" Instead, they ask "How are the connections?"

[Jeremy Lent](#)

Much as I enjoy popular New Age commentary on love, I am often struck by the dangerous narcissism fostered by spiritual rhetoric that pays so much attention to individual self-improvement and so little to the practice of love within the context of community. Packaged as a commodity, spirituality becomes no different from an exercise program. While it may lead to the consumer feeling better about his or her life, its power to enhance our communion with ourselves and others in a sustained way is inhibited.

[bell hooks](#)

If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together.

African Proverb

We never know how our small activities will affect others through the invisible fabric of our connectedness. In this exquisitely connected world, it's never a question of 'critical mass.' It's always about critical connections.

Grace Lee Boggs

Our values arise from our identity. If someone defines themselves as an isolated individual, they will feel entitled to pursue their own happiness at the expense of others. Someone who identifies primarily with their nation will have no qualms about putting up barriers to prevent others from entering... that old worldview of separation has expired. It's not just dangerous, leading us to the precipice of ecological devastation and climate breakdown—it's plain wrong.

[Jeremy Lent](#)

There is nobody in this country who got rich on their own. Nobody. You built a factory out there-- good for you. But I want to be clear. You moved your goods to market on roads the rest of us paid for. You hired workers the rest of us paid to educate. You were safe in your factory because of police forces and fire forces that the rest of us paid for... Now look. You built a factory and it turned into something terrific

or a great idea--God bless! Keep a hunk of it. But part of the underlying social contract is you take a hunk of that and pay forward for the next kid who comes along.

Senator Elizabeth Warren

I wish the knowledge were easier to come by, that individualism is just a scam, that you are always the butterfly wings. You are always a flap of the storm... You must not believe the lying lie that you do not matter, that whatever change you can organize is so insufficient as to not be worth your time...

[Rev. Julián Jamaica Soto](#)

Here is the question we must at last confront: Is land merely a source of belongings, or is it the source of our most profound sense of belonging? We can choose... You, right now, can choose to set aside the mindset of the colonizer and become native to place, you can choose to belong.

[Robin Wall Kimmerer](#)

Whether we and our politicians know it or not, Nature is party to all our deals and decisions, and she has more votes, a longer memory, and a sterner sense of justice than we do.

[Wendell Berry](#)

We Americans are not usually thought to be a submissive people, but of course we are. Why else would we allow our country to be destroyed? Why else would we be rewarding its destroyers? Why else would we all — by proxies we have given to greedy corporations and corrupt politicians — be participating in its destruction? Most of us are still too sane to piss in our own cistern, but we allow others to do so and we reward them for it. We reward them so well, in fact, that those who piss in our cistern are wealthier than the rest of us. How do we submit? By not being radical enough. Or by not being thorough enough, which is the same thing.

[Wendell Berry](#)

You carry Mother Earth within you. She is not outside of you. Mother Earth is not just your environment. In that insight of inter-being, it is possible to have real communication with the Earth, which is the highest form of prayer.

[Thich Nhat Hanh](#)

How monotonous our speaking becomes when we speak only to ourselves! And how insulting to the other beings – to foraging black bears and twisted old cypresses – that no longer sense us talking to them, but only about them... Small wonder that rivers and forests no longer compel our focus or our fierce devotion. For we walk about such entities only behind their backs, as though they were not participants in our lives. Yet if we no longer call out to the moon slipping between the clouds, or whisper to the spider setting the silken struts of her web, well, then the numerous powers of this world will no longer address us – and if they still try, we will not likely hear them.

[David Abram](#)

Weed, it is you with your bad reputation that I love the most. Teach me not to care what anyone has to say about me. Help me to be in the world for no purpose at all except for the joy of sunlight and rain. Keep me close to the edge where every wild thing begins.

[Tom Hennen](#)

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... 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](#)

In some Native languages the term for plants translates to “those who take care of us.”

[Robin Wall Kimmerer](#)

If you find yourself... hearing, again, the earth's great, sonorous moan that says... all you love will turn to dust... Do not raise your small voice against it... Instead, curl your toes into the grass... Walk through the garden's dormant splendor. Say only, thank you.

[Ross Gay](#)

I've come to believe... we already know our oneness with each other, so the process of coming to consciousness... is a process of recollecting. When we awake... We will understand that we have never been alone.

[Rob Spiegel](#)

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 Interdependence.
- Click [here](#) for the **YouTube playlist** on Interdependence

Articles

Re-Composing Shakespeare

<https://13tonsoflove.substack.com/p/re-composing-shakespeare>

Greed Does Not Have to Define Our Relationship to Land, Robin Wall Kimmerer

<https://lithub.com/robin-wall-kimmerer-greed-does-not-have-to-define-our-relationship-to-land/>

“He is the obscene of the Anthropocene... Windigo is the name for that which cares more for itself than for anything else... Windigo tales arose in a commons-based society where sharing was a survival value... But in a profit-based society, the indulgent self-interest that our people once held as monstrous is now celebrated as success. Americans are called on to admire what our people viewed as unforgivable...”

Living in the Shelter of Each Other

<https://kathrynwonders.wordpress.com/2015/05/03/the-shelter-of-each-other/>

Smoking gun proof': fossil fuel industry knew of climate danger as early as 1954

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/jan/30/fossil-fuel-industry-air-pollution-fund-research-caltech-climate-change-denial>

Videos & Podcasts

Dance With Life

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0AC9tT2iYk&t=257s>

Understanding Interconnectedness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmvwG-tD918>

Gotta love [this kid's way](#) of getting close to nature!

Between the Earth and the Sky: The interconnective art of Wangechi Mutu

<https://vimeo.com/575476465>

Ubuntu: The Essence of Being Human, Bishop Desmond Tutu

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44xbZ8MN1uk>

Fighting Climate Change with Art

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

Stop-Motion Film Warns of Climate Crisis

<https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2023/12/up-in-smoke-wwf/>

Got Climate Doom? Here's What You Can Do to Actually Make a Difference

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/10/opinion/climate-change-personal-actions.html?>

Why Humans Are So Bad At Thinking About Climate Change

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkZ7BJQupVA>

New Climate Promises, Same Old Global Warming

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/12/opinion/net-zero-global-warming.html>

To Save The Climate, Reimagine Capitalism

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fua_rUk0zk0&t=126s

Exposing UN Greenwashing

<https://www.planetcritical.com/p/exposing-un-greenwashing>

Related articles [here](#) & [here](#)

The Case For A More Radical Climate Movement

<https://www.vox.com/vox-conversations-podcast/22691428/vox-conversations-climate-change-andreas-malm>

Books

[Braiding Sweetgrass](#)

[Our Moon](#): How Earth's Celestial Companion Transformed the Planet, Guided Evolution, and [Made Us Who We Are](#)

[The Hidden Life of Trees](#): What They Feel, How They Communicate

[The Inner Life of Animals](#): Love, Grief, and Compassion

Movies

[My Octopus Teacher](#)

[The Elephant Whisperers](#)

[The Hottest August](#)

[The World Before Your Feet](#)

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Our Facebook Inspiration Page:

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

Our Instagram Page:

Find us as "soul_matters_circle"

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