

USG SGM ~ Beginnings ~ September, 2026

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



Chalice Lighting

Let every moment be a reminder that you are more than the sum of your mistakes. A sunrise is still beautiful no matter how bad a day is. It's allowed to start over. And so are you. ~ Rudy Francisco

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.*

Spiritual Exercises

Exercise A: The Story that Isn't Done with Us Yet

A core focus of Soul Matters is inviting us to reconnect with parts of ourselves by reconnecting with memories and stories from our lives. When we return to these stories, we often notice some new aspect of it or find ourselves viewing it through a new lens. Or to put it another way, quite often our stories are not done with us yet. They have something to say to us.

So, choose one of the prompts below to revisit a story from your past. Then come to your group ready to tell it, along with how you encountered it anew and how that left you with a message of comfort or challenge.

Revisit a personal story about...

- A small step that made a big difference.
- Trying to invent a new life when everyone around you was pressuring you, directly or indirectly, to recover your old life and allow things to "go back to normal."
- Missing the boat: a time when you wished you would have taken a path but didn't.
- A difficult ending that turned out to be a beautiful beginning.

Exercise B: Visio Divina & Beginnings

Visio Divina (spiritual seeing) is an ancient religious practice where one lets images become doorways through which the divine, our inner wisdom or life itself speaks to us. In its more straight-forward form, it involves spending time with an image until it offers you a message of comfort or challenge, or reconnects you to an important memory. This is akin to how our Soul Matters groups engage the "Your Question" section of each packet.

For this exercise, you're invited to spend some time with a selection of "beginnings photos" to see what message one of those photos might have for you. Here are the steps for you to follow:

Pull up the document with the selection of "beginning photos":

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1SwHikfyjJpV40mL-xj83uXc38IY5oWxOvcPN6Z4n4U0/edit?usp=sharing>

Take your time being present with each image. Explore each photo's details and stick with it long enough to discern if that photo has an emotional gravitational pull for you.

Once you've identified the photo you most connect with, spend some time reflecting on how that image might be offering you a gift. It often helps to ask yourself, **"How is this image trying to speak to my life today by connecting me to a past memory or by offering me a message of comfort or challenge?"**

Come to your group ready to share the highlights of this exercise and what your main take away was.

Quotes for Inspiration/Readings

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting their bad advice...
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.
~ Mary Oliver

There is something deep in us that conspires with what wants to remain within safe boundaries and stay the same. ~ John O'Donohue

You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step. ~Martin Luther King, Jr

For a long time it had seemed to me that life was about to begin -- real life. But there was always some obstacle in the way, something to be gotten through first, some unfinished business, time still to be served, or a debt to be paid. Then life would begin. At last it dawned on me that these obstacles were my life. ~ Alfred D. Souza

The first step towards getting somewhere is to decide you're not going to stay where you are. ~John Pierpont "J.P." Morgan

All endings are also beginnings. We just don't know it at the time. ~ Mitch Albom

It may be that when we no longer know what to do,
we have come to our real work;
and that when we no longer know which way to go,
we have begun our real journey.
The mind that is not baffled is not employed.
The impeded stream is the one that sings.
~ Wendell Berry

Questions

Pick the one question that speaks to you most. 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?*
 - *What might my inner wisdom be trying to [say to me](#) through this question?*
 - *How might this question be trying to wake me up or get me to realize something through this question?*
 - *How might Life or my inner wisdom be trying to offer me a word of comfort or challenge through this question?*
1. What has your most joyful and/or most painful beginning taught you about yourself?
 2. Many say there is the seed of a new beginning in every ending. How has that widespread idea helped or complicated your endings?
 3. Are you somebody who wants everything to be just right before you begin something new or somebody who is fine with "jumping in" and figuring things out as you go? Either way, have you figured out what made you that way?
 4. Much of who we are is a result of a seed that was planted and nurtured by our younger selves. Our beginnings took root in their choices. So, if you could talk to your younger self, which of their choices would you most thank them for?
 5. Aging is often seen as a series of endings. But it doesn't have to be that way. How is aging asking you to see it as a series of beginnings?

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 (or watching a video of someone else singing)

Bright Morning Stars -

<https://open.spotify.com/track/25L3kVgaJJFo9zzDzevkET?si=c2580e0478474b32>

Light of a Clear Blue Morning

<https://open.spotify.com/track/07A3qmVIEGy8cixxId1x81?si=6bbd952b02f44ebc>

Extinguishing the Chalice

Too much of life is wasted trying to build and control the "right" circumstance for making a change. Instead, acting on what matters in this finite life is better started today, imperfectly, than on any someday... in every moment of life, as finite humans, all we are doing is choosing one set of problems over another... The question isn't how to avoid any bad consequences or what's the perfect decision; it's what is the price you're willing to pay. ~ Oliver Burkeman