



Soul Matters

**What does it mean to be
a people of BECOMING?**



**April 2021
Small Group**

What Does It Mean To Be A People of Becoming?

It's become popular in our society to talk about spiritual journeys as a process of living into your full or true self, of letting the authentic seed inside you unfold. We UU's agree. We even enshrined it in our principles that celebrate each of our unique seeds (inherent worth) and unique journeys (a free and responsible search).

At the same time, there's something deep within UUism that pushes in the opposite direction. Historically, we've been "leavers" - people who struggled not so much to find ourselves but to untangle ourselves from the religious identities we were given. Our spiritual journeys did not begin with a blank slate; they began with the hunger to wipe that slate clean and begin anew.

So we have this important awareness that spiritual journeys are not simply about unfolding your true self, but also about untangling from your old self. We agree with Albert Schweitzer who wrote:

"The path of awakening is not about becoming who you are. Rather it is about unbecoming who you are not."

Which means we are also sensitive to the fact that most spiritual journeys begin with a goodbye -a separation, a decision to walk away. We know that the first step is often laced with mourning, difficult endings and, all too often, isolation. We know that "unbecoming" is not easy work.

We also know that it isn't a one-time thing. We find ourselves routinely tempted into and thus tangled up in all kinds of identities and journeys that aren't truly ours. "Unbecoming who you are not" is a journey we walk every day, over and over again.

So what does all this mean for us this month? Well, first, it's an important reminder that we're not just here to help each other hold steady and persevere on our current paths. Often our primary gift is to help each other find and take the exit ramps.

It also means remembering that being a people of becoming involves tenderness. We are here not just to make room for each other's unique stories; we are also here to make room for each other's pain. Again, "unbecoming who you are not" involves bravely walking away, enduring isolation and navigating grief. And so, if we are going to complete our journeys of unbecoming and becoming anew, we're definitely going to need pit stops of kindness and tenderness along the way.

May this month be a time of pulling into one of those pit stops, together. Let the unraveling begin!

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A

Could Have Been Your Credo

Often the journey of becoming is guided by one's credo. These statements of belief and purpose ground us, keep us on track and remind us who we most want to be. But the truth is few of us actually write them. However, we do stumble upon them. That's right, we come across someone else's words and they feel as though they are ours. Every word may not fit perfectly but the essence of the piece captures the essence of us. Holding on to their words helps us hold on to ourselves.

So this month, spend some time with the credo-like pieces below and figure out which one is the one you could have written. Come to your group ready to share why exactly it spoke to you. Was it a particular line or two? Or something more general?

Consider keeping your chosen piece (or part of) in front of you for a few weeks, allowing you the occasion to read it and see it almost every day.

Oh, and if you end up inspired to write your very own credo, by all means, that counts too!

Credos to Choose From:

This Is What You Shall Do - Walt Whitman
<https://icatchshadows.com/walt-whitman-love-the-earth-and-sun-and-the-animals-despise-riches-and-hate-tyrants/>

Famous - Naomi Shihab Nye
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47993/famous>

If - Rudyard Kipling
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46473/if--->

Thirty Things I Believe - Tarak McClain
<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=99478226>

Jonah - Steve Garnaas-Holmes
<https://www.unfoldinglight.net/reflections/kityytf8ped8lxg42a64d6rxg8py8y>

Advice to Myself - Louise Erdrich
<https://wordsfortheyear.com/2016/05/04/advice-to-myself-by-louise-erdrich/>

The only dream worth having is... - Arundhati Roy
<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/160805-the-only-dream-worth-having-is-to-dream-that-you>

Try to Praise the Mutilated World - Adam Zagajewski
<https://www.poetryoutloud.org/poem/try-to-praise-the-mutilated-world/>

The Credo - Robert Fulghum
<http://orlandospreciouspoems.blogspot.com/2010/05/credo-by-robert-fulghum.html>

Things to Think - Robert Bly
<https://inspirare.blog/2010/03/14/things-to-think-by-robert-bly/>

"Hokusai Says" - Roger Keys
<https://suzannewhitby.com/hokusai-says-dont-be-afraid-with-thanks-to-roger-keys/>

9 Learnings from 9 Years of Brain Pickings - Maria Popova
https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/10/23/nine-years-of-brain-pickings/?mc_cid=637ca026b4&mc_eid=04e3c8a6e2

12 truths I learned from life & writing - Anne Lamott
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X41iulkRqZU>

9 Life Lessons - Tim Minchin
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoEezZD71sc>

Option B

Your Journey of Becoming in Six Words

Larry Smith is passionate about helping people share their stories of becoming. He created a website - [Six Word Memoirs](#) - with numerous tools and prompts to make the sharing easier. One of his prompts turned out to be everyone's favorite: "Pair down your life journey to six words." It was inspired by Ernest Hemingway taking up a bar bet to write a novel in 6 words. Hemingway's response: "For Sale: Baby shoes, never worn." Besides making the telling of your journey easier, this six-word challenge helps people focus on, celebrate, remember and hold on to the essence of their stories of becoming.

So, this month, take up the challenge for yourself. Below are some example six-word journeys and online resources to help you on your way.

Example Six-Word Journeys

Married by Elvis; divorced by Friday
Down for maintenance, be back soon.
Threw spaghetti on wall; some stuck.
Told to marry rich. Married Richard.
We're the family you gossip about.
The psychic said I'd be richer.
Eight thousand orgasms; one baby.
Tried surfing on a calm day.
Wasn't born a redhead; fixed that.
Mom was "earthy"; Now I'm "green."
Son's autism broke and rebuilt me.
Tore up my own suicide letter.
Sixty. Still afraid of the dark.
Class clown; Class president; town drunk.
Forged through fire; sustained by friendships.
No future, no past. Not lost.
Life's GPS keeps saying, recalculating... recalculating.
The exits were entrances in disguise.
Play. Play. Play. Play. Play. Play.

Online Resources:

- **The Story of the Six-Word Project: Why it worked and why it matters**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jR1V7lxsOu0>
- **Video Meditation with Inspiring Six-Word Journeys**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBnP0DoGjRI>
- **Six-Word Story Writing Advice**
<https://eightladieswriting.com/2016/03/16/elizabeth-six-word-stories/>
- **Not Quite What I Was Planning: Six-Word Memoirs by Writers Famous and Obscure**
Rachel Fershleiser & Larry Smith
<https://www.amazon.com/Not-Quite-What-Was-Planning/dp/0061374059>

Option C

Five Pictures of Becoming

As we age, our understanding of becoming shifts; it's a bit less about where we're headed and more about where we've been. Our concern with our "emerging self" lessens and is replaced with thoughts about our "whole self." We don't simply picture ourselves as who we are and who we hope to be, but instead as all of who we've been. So this month get in touch with the wholeness of who you are **by finding 5 pictures of who you have been!**

Here's some guidance: Don't just find any old 5 pictures. Instead find five pictures that capture five key stages/chapters of your life, five chapters that are key to who you are. For instance, a picture of you as the catcher on your pee wee baseball team, you at college graduation, you during your college gap year, your marriage, you and your first kid, you during your struggle with illness, when you learned guitar at 50, you at the funeral of your mother or best friend, you walking in your favorite part of the woods. The goal is not only to capture pieces of you, but to pull them together in one space. (For you creative folks, consider using them to create a collage!)

When you are done, spend some time with all of them. What do you see in the wholeness of the pictures that you may not have noticed before when looking at them all by themselves? How do they tell the story of who you are? Where's the through line? Where's the bend in the road that says so much about you? How does each picture still live in you? What message or invitation do they have for the "emerging you"?

Bonus Task: Find one more picture, one that represents that "emerging you" - the you that is just now joining the story.

Option D

What Inhibits Our Becoming

With her Pulitzer Prize-winning book, [The Warmth of Other Suns](#), Isabel Wilkerson established herself as a shimmering voice and trusted guide as America reckons with its racist history and struggles to become a country on a new path. Her newest book, [Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents](#), continues to uncover the unacknowledged and insidious structures that divide us and prevent the full becoming of all our citizens.

So as your exercise this month, allow Wilkerson's new work to take you into a deeper understanding of the challenge ahead of all of us. America will never be a "land of true becoming" as long as the undertow of caste remains in place.

Here's her book and other avenues for exploration:

- **Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents, Isabel Wilkerson - Book**
<https://www.amazon.com/Caste-Origins-Discontents-Isabel-Wilkerson/dp/0593230256>
- **NY Times Review**
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/31/books/review-caste-isabel-wilkerson-origins-of-our-discontents.html>
- **PBS Interview:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzOHYnQWMwQ>
- **Interview with Trevor Noah:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7m49DT8pPe0>
- **Discussion with Bryan Stevenson:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bP0m0jKORwg>

Option E

Find Becoming in Our Recommended Resources

Our recommended resources are full of wisdom about what it means to be a people of and a person of becoming. Engaging these resources and finding the one that especially speaks to you is a spiritual practice in and of itself.

So, if none of the above exercises call to you, engage the recommended resources section of this packet as your spiritual exercise for the month.

Set aside some regular time throughout a week to go through them and meditate on them until you find the one that most expands or deepens your understanding of Becoming. After you've found it, consider printing it out and carrying it with you or pinning it up so you can continue to reflect on it throughout the weeks leading up to your group meeting. Come to your group ready to share where the journey led you.

Your Question

Don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every single 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"? 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 day you first welcomed in the person you would become?
2. Is it possible that you have actually become what your 6 year old self imagined you be, perhaps in a totally unexpected form?
3. Was being told "You can become anything" good for you or bad?
4. What has "growing older" unexpectedly birthed in you?
5. Many of us mark the first day of our becoming as the time when we discovered one of our core passions. When did you discover your first passion? How has it grown and morphed over the years? How are you being called to rekindle it anew?
6. What if becoming first requires us to unbecome who we are not? Is it possible that you need to unravel before you can unfold?
7. Who are you beyond your ability to make money?
8. What are you doing to ensure that you don't become a person who has regrets?
9. What if you finally allowed yourself to say out loud, "I am an artist!" or "I am a leader!" or "I am beautiful!" or "I am smart!" or "I am..."?
10. Is life calling you to return to the past so you can move more fully into the future?
11. How many lives do you want to live in this one lifetime you've been given?
12. Has your desire to become extraordinary betrayed you?
13. Are you living in spite of your losses or to avenge them?
14. What if we only grow when we travel beyond the circle of those who agree with us?
15. You are rightly proud of having become such a responsible person. Is it time to allow your reckless side to grow just a little? What might be a way to do that this month?
16. **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 hear it. Or maybe the question or call you need to hear is waiting in one of the quotes listed below. Consider looking there!

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 what it means to be a people and a person of becoming.

Word Roots & Definitions

The word root *be* comes to us from the Old English prefix *be* “on all sides” as *beset*, or *bedazzled*. It also includes the Proto-Indo-European PIE root *bheue* to be, to exist, to grow. The old English idea of *cumin* “to move with the purpose of reaching” extends that to growing with intention.

[Source](#)

Wise Words

And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

Anais Nin

Do not ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.

Howard Thurman

A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will come out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping, we are becoming.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real... It doesn't happen all at once. You become. It takes a long time.

Margery Williams Bianco, The Velveteen Rabbit

If you can see your path laid out in front of you step by step, you know it's not your path. Your own path you make with every step you take. That's why it's your path.

Joseph Campbell

If we're always looking in mirrors—made of glass or social media—and looking outward, we should not be surprised when truly new things don't want to come through us to be born.

[Caitlin Breedlove](#)

Do not ask your children to strive for extraordinary lives. Such striving may seem admirable, but it is the way of foolishness. Help them instead to find the wonder and the marvel of an ordinary life. Show them the joy of tasting tomatoes, apples and pears. Show them how to cry when pets and people die. Show them the infinite pleasure in the touch of a hand, and make the ordinary come alive for them. The extraordinary will take care of itself.

William Martin

We find comfort among those who agree with us – growth among those who don't.

Frank A Clark

We evolve in the midst of narratives meant only for some
and ways of being made narrow by fear and power.
We must, then, have the courage to listen to the
truth of our own lives,
to the wisdom that comes from within...

This lifelong labor cannot be carried out alone. It
requires help
from friends, and lovers, family, and creaturely
companions
who bear witness to what makes us come alive.
And say to us, "Listen. Look. Feel. Pay attention to
that."

This is loving and being loved.

[*enfleshed*](#)

There is something dying in our society, in our
culture, and there's something dying in us
individually. And what is dying, I think, is the
willingness to be in denial. And that is
extraordinary. It's always been happening, and
when it happens in enough of us, in a short enough
period of time at the same time, then you have a
tipping point, and the culture begins to shift...
Where I feel like people are at now is, no, no, bring
it on. I have to face it — we have to face it.

[*Rev. angel Kyodo williams*](#)

There is no me without you.
We shape one another.
The Sacred that birthed us
weaves our lives together
so that we can only find ourselves
through shared becoming.

[*enfleshed*](#)

Everything about our existence points toward
change, flexibility, and
dynamic re-creation.

And it's hard because change involves loss.

Can we hold the losses well
while not holding ourselves back?

[*Rev. Manish Mishra-Marzetti*](#)

The path of awakening is not about becoming who
you are. Rather it is about unbecoming who you are
not.

Albert Schweitzer

There are two questions that [a person] must ask
[themselves]. The first is "Where am I going?" and
the second is "Who will go with me?" If you ever get
these questions in the wrong order, you are in
trouble.

Howard Thurman

Now I become myself. It's taken
Time, many years and places;
I have been dissolved and shaken,
Worn other people's faces...

[*May Sarton*](#)

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond
measure. ..

We ask ourselves,
Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented,
fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be?

Marianne Williamson

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 got
through first, some unfinished business, time still to
be served, a debt to be paid. Then life would begin.
At last it dawned on me that these obstacles were
my life.

Alfred D'Souza

We do not grow absolutely, chronologically. We
grow sometimes in one dimension, and not in
another; unevenly. We grow partially. We are
relative. We are mature in one realm, childish in
another. The past, present, and future mingle and
pull us backward, forward, or fix us in the present.
We are made up of layers, cells, constellations.

Anais Nin

I wanted a perfect ending. Now I've learned, the
hard way, that some poems don't rhyme, and some
stories don't have a clear beginning, middle, and
end. Life is about not knowing, having to change,
taking the moment and making the best of it,
without knowing what's going to happen next.
Delicious ambiguity.

Gilda Radner

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I— I took the
one less traveled by, And that has made all the
difference.

[Robert Frost](#)

I believe in waking up in the middle of the night and
packing our bags and leaving our worst selves for
our better ones.

Leslie Jamison

If we are going to find our way out of shame and
back to each other, vulnerability is the path and
courage is the light. To set down those lists of
what we're supposed to be is brave. To love
ourselves and support each other in the process of
becoming real is perhaps the greatest single act of
daring greatly.

Brené Brown

A defenseless heart is where real love grows.

Pauline Capalbo

Poetry

Becoming

Jim Harrison

Poem found at:

<http://www.ayearofbeinghere.com/2014/05/jim-harrison-becoming.html>

We finally die from the exhaustion of becoming.
We whirl with the earth...
our soft brains ill-trained
except to watch ourselves disappear into the
distance.
Still, we love to make music of this puzzle.

Love After Love

Derek Walcott

Poem found at:

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/love-after-love/>

The time will come
when, with elation,
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door, in your own mirror...

Famous

Naomi Shihab Nye

Poem found at:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47993/famous>

I want to be famous in the way a pulley is famous,
or a buttonhole, not because it did anything
spectacular,
but because it never forgot what it could do.

Having Come This Far

James Broughton

Poem found at:

http://www.sharonsinger.ca/poem.php?poem_id=390

No longer do I hunt for targets
I've climbed all the summits I need to...
Now I give praise and thanks...

How Becoming a Mother Is Like Space Travel

Catherine Pierce

Poem found at:

<https://www.thenation.com/article/culture/how-becoming-a-mother-is-like-space-travel/>

I Am Afraid of Nearly Everything

Anonymous

Full piece at

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/i-am-afraid-nearly-everything>

...most of all, I am afraid of what I might become:
reconciled to injustice,
resigned to fear and despair,
lulled into a life of apathy...

Music

We create two different playlists for each of our monthly themes: one in Spotify and another in YouTube. We organize these lists as a journey of sorts. So consider listening from beginning to end and using the lists as musical meditations. Follow the links below to connect with this month's "Becoming songs." And we have TWO PLAYLISTS for you this month, one on the general journey of becoming and another celebrating the journey of becoming your true self!

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

Click [here](#) for the Spotify playlist on [Becoming Our True Selves](#).

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

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

Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on [Becoming Our True Selves](#).

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

Videos & Podcasts

Why Is an Ordinary Life Not Good Enough Anymore? – Alain De Botton

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KDB42qGT-8>

On our modern hunger to become extraordinary, admired and "loved"

On the not-so-subtle message that becoming "ordinary" is not good enough!

What [would you become] If Money Was No Object? - Alan Watts

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khOaAHK7efc&feature=emb_logo

I'm Adulting - The Holderness Family

<https://www.facebook.com/TheHoldernessfamily/videos/437551800438068>

[Related video](#)

Anne Applebaum, Pulitzer-prize winning author and staff writer at The Atlantic, on the future of democracy

<https://www.iheart.com/podcast/962-the-munk-debates-podcast-p-52131924/episode/anne-applebaum-on-the-future-of-75690167/>

The Monk Debates: Be it Resolved, the political survival of the Republican Party requires a clear and irrevocable break with Donald Trump and Trumpism.

On what's becoming of politics...

<https://munkdebates.com/podcast/republican-party>

Ian Morris, archaeologist and historian, on the past and future of human civilization

<https://www.iheart.com/podcast/962-the-munk-debates-podcast-p-52131924/episode/ian-morris-on-the-past-and-75505145/>

Articles

For Those Who (Privately) Aspire to Become More Reclusive

<https://www.theschooloflife.com/thebookoflife/for-those-who-privately-aspire-to-become-more-reclusive/>

Becoming Free, School of Life

<https://www.theschooloflife.com/thebookoflife/coming-free/>

How your personality changes as you age

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200313-how-your-personality-changes-as-you-age>

“Our traits are ever shifting, and by the time we’re in our 70s and 80s, we’ve undergone a significant transformation... We become more conscientious and agreeable, and less neurotic... Research has shown that we develop into more altruistic and trusting individuals. Our willpower increases and we develop a better sense of humor. Finally, the elderly have more control over their emotions. It’s arguably a winning combination...”

When Are You Really an Adult?

Julie Beck

<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/01/when-are-you-really-an-adult/422487/>

On Not Meeting Nazis Halfway

Rebecca Solnit

<https://lithub.com/rebecca-solnit-on-not-meeting-nazis-halfway/?fbclid=IwAR2AoDnk-mrKQhg8LpBHKb7VwyHov5d7UEGi60V2LhXOzXrMUge7vChoNL4>

On how we become a country that deals with our divisiveness.

The End Of Capitalism Has Begun

https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/17/postcapitalism-end-of-capitalism-begun?CMP=share_btn_fb&fbclid=IwAR1THrLleFa3W85tMf5Jersfs-383CmBldtlu5Io1NLI DNx2eubQ_i0zWs10

The Future of American Politics: A party built on whiteness is collapsing; two-party dominance may go with it.

<https://prospect.org/politics/future-of-american-politics/>

Books

Becoming: A Spiritual Guide for Navigating Adulthood

From Skinner House Books

<https://www.uua.org/young-adults/spirituality/becoming>

Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life

Richard Rohr

On how the work of becoming changes in the second half of life...

Find a review [HERE](#)

From Age-ing to Sage-ing: A Revolutionary Approach to Growing Older

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

On the Brink of Everything: Grace, Gravity, and Getting Old

Parker J. Palmer

Broken Open: How Difficult Times Can Help Us Grow

Elizabeth Lesser

[Caste](#)

Isabel Wilkerson

On American reckoning with who it is and what it needs to become

Movies

[Moonrise Kingdom](#)

[Lady Bird](#)

[Becoming](#)

[Moonlight](#)

[Boyhood](#)

[The “Up Series”](#)

[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](#).

Find support for bringing the monthly themes home and into your family life with

Soulful Home: A Guide for Families:

<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/soulful-home.html>

Photo Credit: The cover photo is by Jukan Tateisi and found on Unsplash at https://unsplash.com/photos/bJhT_8nbUA0



© 2020-21 Soul Matters ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Packets are for use only by member congregations of the Soul Matters Sharing Circle.

Learn how to join at

<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com>