



Soul Matters

Living Love Through The Practice of **Inclusion**



Companion Resources
February 2025



Welcome to the Practice of Inclusion

You hardly knew
how hungry you were
to be gathered in,
to receive the welcome
that invited you to enter
entirely...
You began to breathe again...
You learned to sing.

But the deal with this blessing
is that it will not leave you alone,
will not let you linger...
this blessing will ask you to leave,
not because it has tired of you
but because it desires for you
to become the sanctuary
that you have found...

- [Jan Richardson](#)

Jan Richardson begins with hunger. And so do we. Just saying the word “inclusion” conjures it up: The primal hunger to belong; the longing to be let in. No one likes standing outside the circle. No one likes leaning against the locked door listening to everyone else laughing inside. From the time we are little, inclusion and belonging is the thing we seek. It’s the hoped for Holy Grail. The promised resting place.

But Richardson will have none of that. To belong is only the beginning. That’s what she wants us to know. One minute she’s wrapping us in comforting words about settling in and allowing ourselves to finally breathe. The next she’s shaking us awake and telling us to get up and go.

That shaking should tell us something.

Or to put it another way, hers is not a gentle invitation. It’s not some sweet reminder to think of others. It’s a warning: Beware of the kind of belonging that *only* wants to *bless* you!

Deep down we know this. The hard part is to remember it. To use Richardson’s language, if we find ourselves being invited to linger rather than leave, alarm bells should go off. We need to be weary of those who welcome us with a members only card and a soft couch. They may have let us in, but soon they will enlist us into the work of keeping others out. There will likely even be a part of us that wants to keep others out. After all, closed circles don’t just set us apart, they also sit us above.

But they also keep us small. Maybe this is why Richardson’s blessing is so intent on not leaving us alone. It knows that we only grow when the circle does. Circles that keep others out also keep the air out. No one inside a closed circle truly sings; they only suffocate, slowly.

It’s all one big reminder that the true blessing of inclusion is *not* that you get to come inside the circle; it’s that you get to participate in expanding it. As the circle grows, so do we.

Calendar Connections

February 2025

Click on the links below for more information or inspiration about each event.

Interfaith

- [Imbolc](#) (Pagan/Wiccan) - Feb. 1 & 2
- [Nirvana Day](#)/Parinirvana Day - Buddha's entry into Nirvana (Buddhist) - celebrated on Feb. 8 by some but by most on the 15 February.
- [Tu BiShevat](#) (Jewish) - Feb. 12-13, 2025 (more [here](#))
- [Ramadan](#) (Islam) - Evening of Feb 28/day of March 1 - 30, 2025 (more [here](#) and [here](#))

Unitarian Universalist

- Fannie Barrier Williams' [birthday](#) - Feb. 12 (1855)
- Susan B. Anthony's [birthday](#) - Feb. 15 (1820) (more [here](#); On her complex relationship to racism: [here](#) and [here](#))
- [Thirty Days of Love](#) - Side with Love Campaign - Jan.15 - Feb.14
- [The Edict of Torda](#) is issued - Feb. 18 (1568)

National Holidays & Cultural

- [Black History](#) Month (more [here](#))
- Season for [Nonviolence](#) - Jan. 30 - April 4 (more [here](#))
- Groundhog Day - Feb. 2
- Rosa Parks' birthday - Feb. 4 (1930)
- National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day - Feb. 7
- [Freedom to Marry Day](#) - Feb. 12
- Passage of [The Fugitive Slave Act](#) - Feb. 12, 1793
- [St. Valentine's Day](#) - Feb. 14
- Birthday of [Frederick Douglass](#) - Feb. 14 (more [here](#))
- [Toni Morrison](#) & Audre Lorde's birthday - Feb.18 (more [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#))
- [President's Day](#) - Feb. 19
- [Louis Riel Day](#) (Canada) - Feb. 17, 2025, on the 3rd Monday of February (more [here](#))
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People ([NAACP](#)) is founded - Feb. 12 (1909)
- Malcolm X assassinated - Feb. 21 (1965), related Netflix series is found [here](#)
- [Trayvon Martin](#) is shot by George Zimmerman - Feb. 26 (2012)

For Fun and On the Fringe

- [Super Bowl](#) Sunday - Feb. 9, 2025
- International [Darwin Day](#) (Darwin's Birthday) - Feb 12
- Random Acts of [Kindness Day](#) - Feb. 17 (more [here](#))

Your Question

This list of questions is an aid for deep reflection. How you answer them is often less important than the journey they take you on.

So, read through the list of 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?*



1. When were you first “saved” by someone who widened a circle to let you in? If you could talk to them today, what would they say to them?
2. If you could go back and change a moment of being excluded or excluding someone else, what would it be?
3. Has an experience of being excluded permanently left a mark on you?
4. Have you ever invited and included something or someone in your life that unexpectedly altered the trajectory of it, something or someone that broke you out of a stifling rut, challenged you to finally face something you were avoiding, or forced you to grow in a way that you wouldn’t have on your own? If so, what did the experience teach you about courage, risk, luck or grace?
5. Do you belong to a community or relationship that demands a version of you that no longer is true? Or requires you to remove parts of yourself to belong?
6. What aspect of your personality do you need to do a better job of embracing and welcoming in? Your judgmental self? Your lazy self? Your vulnerable self? Your bitter self? Your easily frightened self? Your quick-to-anger self? Your jealous self? Your petty self? Your selfish self?
7. What aspect of your life partner, child or close friend do you need to do a better job of embracing and welcoming in?
8. What excluded and painful memory of yours wants to be welcomed back in and better understood?
9. Have you or the communities you are a part of invited diverse people into your “house” but not allowed them to “rearrange your furniture”?
10. Is it possible the community that has welcomed you with open arms has also burdened you with an unhealthy or unfair understanding of “us and them”?
11. What if Black History Month is not just a call to remember but also a form of reparations? If so, what might Black History Month be asking of you to include in your awareness and action this month?
12. How is the pain and struggle of those less fortunate than you included in your life?
13. Have your efforts to exclude risk from your life gone too far?
14. **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.

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. Nor are they intended to be analyzed in your group. Instead they are here to companion you on your personal journey this month, get you thinking and open you up to new ways of embodying the practice of inclusion in your life.

Definitions

Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance.

Verna Myers

Inclusivity is not 'how do we make you a part of what we are?' but 'how do we become more of what you are?'

[angel Kyodo williams Sensei](#)

Inclusion is being invited to a house and being able to rearrange the furniture.

Jane Silber

Wise Words

It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, *and celebrate* those differences.

Audre Lorde

If you've known the sting of betrayal, you can end up manufacturing an identity from your alienation. To protect yourself from the reminder or risk of exclusion, you begin initiating distance on your own by calling yourself 'loner' or 'independent'... But a life lived with trust only in the self is exhausting. It is not freedom; it is a yoke.

[Cole Arthur Riley](#)

Being excluded kills. It kills the spirit and sometimes it kills the body. So, here's my thought. If – like me – you're attachment rich, if you are included in most or many circles, if you belong in almost any place you find yourself, we have the opportunity and responsibility to include the uninvited... Look for someone who appears not to belong today and choose them.

[Jan Edmiston](#)

There is something to being chosen that is uniquely healing.

[Cole Arthur Riley](#)

The most peaceful people that I know, and the most wise people that I know, are the ones who have created enough internal space to be able to allow all the parts of themselves to coexist despite the contradictions... They have room for the parts of themselves that are glorious and divine and wonderful. And they have room for the parts of themselves that are petty and jealous and ridiculous. They create this big, huge auditorium of a landscape inside themselves. They don't kick any parts out, because guess what? You can't.

[Elizabeth Gilbert](#)

It's amazing really. As a human being all you have to do is enumerate exactly the way you don't feel at home in the world, and the moment you've uttered the exact dimensionality of your exile, you are already on your way home.

David Whyte

To be free, you must embrace the breadth of your own existence without apology...

But to actually be free, you must know and you must fight for the entire Universes inside of everyone else.

[Julián Jamaica Soto](#)

It's okay to distance yourself from spaces that demand a version of you that no longer is true. Belonging shouldn't depend on an illusion.

[Cole Arthur Riley](#)

If justice is what love looks like in public, then inclusion is what love looks like among groups.

Rev. Matthew Johnson

Inclusion isn't better just because it's kinder. We should bring disabled perspectives to the center because these perspectives create a world that is more imaginative, more flexible, more sustainable, more dynamic and vibrant for everyone who lives in a body.

[Rebekah Taussig](#)

They want thinking you're bad at being a girl
Instead of thinking you're great at being yourself...

They want you to blend in,
like you've never seen a blender...

[Andrea Gibson](#)

This is almost always the by-product of expanding the table: God is right-sized. Rarely, if ever, do you do the work of hospitality, authenticity, diversity, and agenda-free relationships and encounter a smaller, more selective God.

John Pavlovitz

I believe every inch of America is sacred, from sea to shining sea. I believe we make it holy by who we welcome and by how we relate to each other.

[Eboo Patel](#)

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand

A mighty woman with a torch... and her name
Mother of Exiles... cries she, with silent lips.

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me...

[Emma Lazarus](#)

The situation facing trans and gender non-conforming people in the United States right now is really bleak. And I really want to have an earnest plea that people stop framing this as a minority issue and reframe this as a universal attack on self-determination. Every one of us should be able to determine our own gender. No one else should be able to tell us what we

should look like, how we should act, and what we should do with our bodies. So we need you to show up in this moment, not just out of an ethics of allyship. That doesn't feel like enough for me, but out of an insistence and your own dignity, your own capacity to transform, your own love of self.

[Alok Vaid-Menon](#)

Put the mantle of your protection

Around the bodies of

The young and defenseless...

Take the hand of the despised

And diseased and walk proudly with them

In the high street.

Some might see you and

Be encouraged to do likewise

[Maya Angelou](#)

Videos & Podcasts

Watch the World Unfold, [Gaelynn Lea](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tib4IRmvQ-M>

Your Life, [Andrea Gibson](#)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gsUp6Wd_o8I

Birds Aren't Real?

How we create conspiracy theorists by excluding them

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VEkzweBJPM>

More [here](#)

Separating Yourself from the Pack

On how the same forces that instill a sense of inclusion also create an "us versus them" world.

<https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/separating-yourself-from-the-pack/>

How To Talk To The Worst Parts Of Yourself

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUV5DJb6KGs>

Blessing for Kin, Rev. Sean Parker Dennison

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

A Poem For The Multiracial Kids

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nv7crT0PiTc>

The New Colossus: A Vision of Refuge & Inclusion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONmCVERPLY0>

On Inelasticity & Excluding Ideas, Roxane Gay

<https://www.facebook.com/reel/1145838809850315>

The Science Behind ‘Us vs. Them’

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14XSzWT4vI0>

Whose Faith Is It Anyway? On Black UU Theology

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLCH1tl_fmE

On the “Cathedral of the World”

<https://www.tiktok.com/@revjo.uu/video/7157480430634175790>

That Which Holds All, Nancy Shaffer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=3prjmO1GpBk>

Read the text [here](#)

Articles

[Black History Month Isn't Racist, It's a Form of Reparations](#)

[Who's Afraid of Black History?](#)

[In Order To Understand The Brutality Of American Capitalism, You Have To Start On The Plantation](#)

[Are Boys Really Being Excluded From Our Attention And Care?](#)

Books

[Under the Skin](#): The Hidden Toll of Racism on American Lives and on the Health of Our Nation

[Sitting Pretty](#): The View from My Ordinary Resilient Disabled Body

[Authentic Selves: Celebrating](#) Trans and Nonbinary People and Their Families

[Pretty](#): A Memoir

[Rian Krieger's Journey](#), By UU Author, Roger A. Smith ([author website](#))

[Bone of the Bone](#): Essays on America by a Daughter of the Working Class

Movies

[The 1619 Project](#)

[Origin](#)

[The Last Black Man in San Francisco](#)

[Blitz](#)

[Shut Up and Paint](#)

[The Disruptors](#)

[Will & Harper](#)

[The Man Card](#) (watch [here](#))

[Leave No Trace](#)

Music

Click [here](#) for our Spotify playlist on Inclusion.

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

Remember! Our playlists are organized as a journey, so consider listening from beginning to end and using the playlists as musical meditations.

Additional Online Music

- [Look In My Heart](#)
- [Come, Sing a Song with Me \(YouTube\)](#)
- [My Roots Go Down \(YouTube\)](#)
- [Let Justice Roll Down \(YouTube\)](#)
- [Called To Love \(YouTube\)](#)
- [We Will Not Stop Singing \(YouTube\)](#)

Contemporary Music

- “God Help the Outcasts” from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*
- “Born This Way” by Lady Gaga
- “One Love” by Bob Marley and the Wailers
- “Imagine” by John Lennon
- “Brave” by Sara Bareilles
- “R-E-S-P-E-C-T” by Aretha Franklin

Meditations, Prayers & Blessings

Know You are Not Alone and Discover the Way Our Voices Rise*

Rev. Gretchen Haley

For this one moment
Know only that you are loved
That you are safe, and whole and loved
Know that you belong here
Here among us, here upon this earth
In your body
However tired, or broken
Your heart may be
Whatever fear, disappointment, anger
you carry
For this hour know you are not alone
Feel the presence of others
Surrounding you,
Breathing beside you, and with you,
Discovering together the way our voices rise,
and fall together
In harmony, in hope
Claim here a resilient freedom
The choice for love, for light, to live with joy
and gratitude and praise
as a form of resistance

In Sweet Company

Margaret Wolff

Full poem [here](#) and [here](#)

We sit together and I tell you things,
Silent, unborn, naked things
That only my God has heard me say.
You do not cluck your tongue at me
Or roll your eyes...
You stay with me in the dark...
You make room in your heart for my voice...
I see my future Self in you...
In sweet company
I am home at last.

Saved

Rev. Theresa Novak

Found [HERE](#) and in [With or Without Candlelight](#), UUA meditation manual & Soul Matters "[Common Shelf](#)" Book

Rest awhile...
When you feel stronger,
just a bit,
notice those who need you too...

The many ways we listen...*

Rev. Michelle LaGrave

Breathe in, slowly now, breathe out.
Breathe in, gently now, breathe out.
Listen to your breath.
Listen for another's breath.

Whether you are here, in the sanctuary,
at home, with a family member, or a cat,
or at the local coffee shop,
Listen.

Now, place your hand on your chest
Or do so for another, if they need and want your
help.

Again, slowly now, breathe in and breathe out.

Some of us hear with our ears,
the sounds we make, the sounds others make.

Some of us hear with our eyes,
watch lips, and hands, and arms, and body
movements.

Some of us hear with our bodies,
feel vibrations in the air and on our skins.

Slowly now, breathe in, breathe out.
Listen in the many ways you know how.

As we breathe together, some of us on our
own, some of us with help,
so, too, do we live together.

Gently now, breathe in, breathe out.
Breathe out, breathe in.
Together and apart.
We are many and we are one.

Breathe in, breathe out.
Listen, in the many ways you know how
as together we enter into the silence.

[Silence]...

Amen and Blessed Be

A Home for Our Souls and Our Dreams*

Cricket Potter

Found in [The Spirit That Moves](#), UUA worship
resource & Soul Matters "[Common Shelf](#)" Book

A Blessing Called Sanctuary

Jan Richardson

Full poem at

<https://adventdoor.com/2015/12/14/advent-4-a-blessing-called-sanctuary/>

You hardly knew
how hungry you were
to be gathered in,
to receive the welcome
that invited you to enter entirely -
nothing of you
found foreign or strange,
nothing of your life
that you were asked
to leave behind
or to carry in silence
or in shame...

You began to breathe again...
You learned to sing...
But the deal with this blessing
is that it will not leave you alone...
[It] will ask you to leave,
and become the sanctuary
that you have found...

We are all more human than otherwise*

Rev. Richard Gilbert

Full piece at

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/we-are-all-more-human>

The human race is a vast rainbow bursting into
view
of white and black, red, yellow and brown...
Yet for all there are fingers to touch, hearts to
break, eyes to cry, ears to hear, mouths to
speak...
Boundaries divide us, lines drawn to mark our
diversity,
maps charted to separate the human race from
itself.
Yet a mother's grief, a father's love, a child's
happy cry,
a musician's sound, an artist's stroke, batter the
boundaries and shatter the walls...

More Love

Rev. Nancy McDonald Ladd

Full piece found in [To Wake, To Rise](#), UUA
meditation manual & Soul Matters "[Common
Shelf](#)" Book

Blessing for Kin *

Rev. Sean Parker Dennison

Found in [Breaking and Blessing](#), UUA
meditation manual & Soul Matters "[Common
Shelf](#)" Book

Also in video at: [https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=yKrijGgAUJo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKrijGgAUJo)

There's My Temple*

Ma Theresa "Tet" Gustilo Gallardo

Full piece at

[https://www.uua.org/worship/words/affirmation/
heres-my-temple](https://www.uua.org/worship/words/affirmation/heres-my-temple)

There's my temple!
Believer, unbeliever or wild one...
Nature-tripper, urban-dweller, or saint...
History-maker, marginalized, unorganized.
You are welcome!

So Glad You're Here *

Rev. Darcey Laine

*To use this poem as a meditation, bring to mind
ordinary but powerful moments of being warmly
and fully invited in.*

"So glad you're here"
"So glad you're here"
Like a mantra
They repeat with warm smiles
"you must be tired"
"you must be hungry"
"you must be cold"
"It means so much
that you would come
all this way to be with us"
"Do still drink decaf?"
"I made those walnut cookies you like
when I heard you were coming"
"honey take her bags"
"tell us about your trip"
"No, take my chair,
I'll get another from the den"
"take your time"
"rest a while"
"stay as long as you like"
"so glad you're here"
"so glad you're here"

A Prayer Against Circles *

Rev. Scott Tayler

Full piece at

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/13ju1o3pH3BJ>

[JWUboPx_MK5zgNDFI0m_U-](https://docs.google.com/document/d/13ju1o3pH3BJJWUboPx_MK5zgNDFI0m_U-7Y0BkBiWng/edit?usp=sharing)

[7Y0BkBiWng/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/13ju1o3pH3BJJWUboPx_MK5zgNDFI0m_U-7Y0BkBiWng/edit?usp=sharing)

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...let's widen the circle until it breaks!
For as long as the circle exists
pieces and parts of ourselves
will always lie on the other side of the line.
The circle will never allow
the welcome we wish for...

No One Is Outside the Circle of Love *

Susan Frederick-Gray and Erika A. Hewitt

Full piece at

[https://www.uua.org/worship/words/litany/no-](https://www.uua.org/worship/words/litany/no-one-outside-circle-love)

[one-outside-circle-love](https://www.uua.org/worship/words/litany/no-one-outside-circle-love)

[Permission Source](#)

For Valentine's Day...

Love is Loud

Chad Snyder

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Note: As an option, consider playing "Love Will Guide Us" near the end of the meditation, and inviting the congregation to join in signing the hymn

Love is Loud
Love, says the old covenant,
Is the spirit of this church
Love.
The spirit of our church
I hope so
Because Love has things to say
Love is joy and laughter,
giggles and silly love songs
But Love speaks, too,
to the real pain in the world

Love knows.
It knows hate and fear
Selfishness, Greed
Bullet and blade
The cutting edge of indifference
Love knows
And Love does not let us turn away
It does not rest in thoughts and prayers
Love knows the names
Says the names out loud
And will keep saying them
Until the day,
We hope against all that is holy,
Those names no longer need saying

Love is loud
Love clamors, it applauds,
it shouts down and fires up
Love calls to the margin,
and not waiting for the echo,
chases its voice to that margin,
in song and joyful noise,
In apology for hurts caused,
shifts the center
until the margin
isn't
Love does not suffer the suffering of others in
silence
But resonates in silent space held for another's
story

...
Love is the spirit of this church
if we choose it, give it voice.
And if we make that choice,
then in the noise,
in the raucous joy and wailing pain,
Righteous rage
in the resonating silence,
in the cacophony of beautiful voices and
possibilities,
through all that holy racket,
Love will guide us.



Soul Matters
SHARING CIRCLE

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