



Soul Matters

April 2016

*What Does It Mean To Be
A People of Creation?*



Image from https://www.longislandpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/RunDown_EarthDay.jpg

What Does It Mean To Be A People of Creation?

Creativity is simply our ability to dream things up and make them happen. — Peggy Taylor

Amen. It *is* about dreaming and imagination. It is about being able to envision what others haven't. It is about noticing connections that haven't been drawn. Even connections between us and the earth, and us and each other. To be a people of creation is indeed to dream the "not yet."

But what about that other part? "...and make them happen." There's something in there that sometimes gets short shrift. Yes, creation requires the ability to imagine the "not yet," but it also requires the courage to live into it.

Which means that this month is not just about imagination, artistry and self-expression, but also about bravery. It takes courage to offer a unique expression. It takes courage to try new things and fail. Heaven knows it takes courage to create and plant seeds for that which won't be finished in your lifetime. Creativity asks us to leave the familiar, to break with the pack, to risk being singled out. Yeah, there is joy, beauty and play in creation, but there is also insecurity, isolation and the sheer exhaustion of trying again and again until you finally stumble on that one and lucky moment of getting it right.

And so maybe that's why we also better talk about "co-creation" this month. Something as daring as creativity is dangerous if we try to do it alone. Indeed, where did we get that silly idea that artists and inventors are isolated, independent geniuses?! If there ever was a myth, that is definitely one. There is no such thing as a "person of creation"; only "people of creation"! New ideas are created in the clash of debate. New art occurs only when inspired by those who have gone before. New and better forms of community are built on the back of those who have toiled and sacrificed long before we put ourselves on the line. Simply put, there are no creators without companions.

So this month, let's honor the bravery that allows the creative instinct to come alive. But let's also give thanks for the companions that make it all possible. And, yes, ok, let's go ahead and indulge a little in the sheer joy and sacred fun of dreaming things up!

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A: **Create Something and Give it Away**

This exercise invites you to explore the relationship between creativity and generosity.

Often the creative impulse is about expressing yourself, but it is also about using yourself for the sake of others. Another way to put this is to say: we create in order to heal and help. Indeed, from a spiritual perspective, creativity is not just about bringing something new and original into the world; it's also about bringing in beauty, kindness and joy.

So, how does the world and the people around you need beauty, kindness, and joy? And which of your many creations can usher that in?

Option B: **Your Resume of Failures**

This exercise invites you to explore the relationship between creation and failure.

Yup, failure. Nothing gets created without it. The well-known examples of this come from the scientific world; think penicillin, Velcro or Teflon. But some of the most interesting creative failures today are occurring in the world of business and entrepreneurial endeavors. Numerous business schools actively preach one simple message: Fail faster and fail better!

In fact, a Stanford Business School professor recently reported a new trend: young entrepreneurial job seekers are listing their failures on their resumes! Instead of boasting about their successes and awards, they proudly promote their marketing missteps and start-up disasters, and what they learned from them. By sharing what they learned and how they used that learning, they display their ability to look at their failures with creative eyes, not as dead ends and bungled attempts but as lessons and brave test runs.

So why not try it? Here's your assignment:

Sit down with a piece of paper and spend a day or two listing all your life failures. Then take another day or two and consider them in a new light. Jot down a few bullet points under each "failure" explaining how those dead ends actually became a new road, how what seemed a moment of coming up empty really turned out to be a time of discovering something new, something you would have never looked for otherwise.

Then come to your group ready to share what you learned about creation and blessed failures.

Option C: **Capture Creation**

This exercise invites you to explore the relationship between creation and attention.

So much of creativity is about seeing connections, noticing the new, looking at things in a new light, appreciating what is trying to be born. Indeed, maybe appreciation and gratitude has more to do with creativity than we think. So this month, ramp up your appreciation and refine your attention by taking a picture of one “act of creation” each day.

You decide what counts as “an act of creation.” What it is, matters less than you finding it. Many of us have a cell phone to make it easier on us, but if you don’t have, carry a camera.

Do this daily for at least a week. Each night, share your discovery/photo with a loved one or a friend. Tell them why it symbolized creation for you, and more importantly, why that particular act of creation garners your gratitude. At the end of your week or two, line all the photos up and figure out what lesson they want to offer. Where are unexpected patterns? What did you not notice when you first took the picture? How are they calling you to be more than grateful but also a caretaker?

Option D: **Create Something Together**

This exercise invites you to explore the relationship between creativity and community.

Rarely do new ideas arise from our own isolated heads. Never is art without previous inspiration. Hardly ever is there a creator without a companion.

To honor this, find a partner and create something together. Grab your kid and build a model car or a tree house! Plop a puzzle on a card table in your living room and have the whole family piece it together over a week’s time. Convince your artist or writer friends to do a joint project. Invite your neighbor over to help plant and share a garden. Join the creative justice makers in your neighborhood as they try to build a better and more beautiful world.

Come to your group and share what new lesson you learned about why we need each other.

Your Question

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the one question that "hooks" you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal of these questions is not to help you analyze what creation means, but to figure out what being a person of creation means for you today. So, which question is calling to you?

1. What are you building, painting, composing or planting with your life? ("All the arts we practice are apprenticeship. The big art is our life." -M.C. Richards)
2. When did you stop singing? When did you stop dancing? When did you stop telling your story? When did you stop sitting in silence? (Cross-cultural anthropologist Angeles Arrien tells us that in many traditional cultures, when an ill person goes to the healer, he or she is asked these four questions.)
3. Are you as "creatively maladjusted" as you'd imagined you would be? ("Human salvation lies in the hands of the creatively maladjusted." - Martin Luther King, Jr.)
4. When was the last time you created (or helped create) something that will outlive you?
5. Are you ready to re-create yourself? Is it time to start with a blank canvass? To start writing a new story?
6. What around you needs put back together again?
7. When was the last time you "failed beautifully"? Is fear of failure preventing your life from becoming art?
8. What if you started every day with a creative act? ("My future starts when I wake up every morning. Every day I find something creative to do with my life."- Miles Davis)
9. What if you started every day with "In the beginning..."?
10. Pablo Picasso believed "every act of creation begins with an act of destruction." What needs to be deconstructed, wiped away or tilled over in your life in order for a new creation to take root?
11. If you were put on trial for being part of creation and tangled up in the interconnected web, could you be convicted? Would your sentence be significantly greater than all of your neighbors?
12. Are your decisions based on fear or creativity? ("I invented this rule for myself to be applied to every decision I might have to make in the future. I would sort out all the arguments and see which belonged to fear and which to creativeness, and other things being equal I would make the decision which had the larger number of creative reasons on its side. I think it must be a rule something like this that makes jonquils and crocuses come pushing through cold mud." — Katharine Butler Hathaway)
13. What's your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what the theme is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

Recommended Resources

As always, this is not required reading. We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started, and maybe open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be *a people of creation*.

Creation

Definition: the act of producing or causing to exist; an original product of the mind, especially an imaginative artistic work; the world; the universe.

Synonyms: cosmos; nature; life; formation; genesis; handiwork; opus

Words of association: art, imagination, action, beauty, beginnings

Wise Words

Creativity is simply our ability to dream things up and make them happen. — **Peggy Taylor**

Every act of creation is first of all an act of destruction. — **Pablo Picasso**

All the arts we practice are apprenticeship. The big art is our life. — **M.C. Richards**

All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up. — **Pablo Picasso**

The extravagant gesture is the very stuff of creation. After the one extravagant gesture of creation in the first place, the universe has continued to deal exclusively in extravagances, flinging intricacies and colossi down eons of emptiness, heaping profusions on profligacies with ever fresh vigor. The whole show has been on fire from the word go! — **Annie Dillard**

It is the tension between creativity and skepticism that has produced the stunning and unexpected findings of science. — **Carl Sagan**

Human salvation lies in the hands of the creatively maladjusted. — **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

A spirituality of work is based on a heightened sense of sacramentality, of the idea that everything that is, is holy and that our hands consecrate it to the service of God. When we grow radishes in a small container in a city apartment, we participate in creation. We sustain the globe. When we sweep the street in front of a house in the dirtiest city in the country, we bring new order to the universe. We tidy the Garden of Eden. We make God's world new again. When we repair what has been broken or paint what is old or give away what we have earned that is above and beyond our own sustenance, we stoop down and scoop up the earth and breathe into it new life again, as God did one morning in time only to watch it unfold and unfold and unfold through the ages. — **Joan Chittister**

Cross-cultural anthropologist Angeles Arrien tells us that in many traditional cultures, when an ill person goes to the healer, he or she is asked four questions: When did you stop singing? When did you stop dancing? When did you stop telling your story? When did you stop sitting in silence? She calls these the healing salves. — **Peggy Taylor**

You must have a room, or a certain hour or so a day, when you don't know what was in the newspapers that morning, you don't know who your friends are, you don't know what you owe anybody, you don't know what anybody owes you. This is a place where you can simply experience and bring forth what you are and what you might be. This is the place of creative incubation. At first, you may find that nothing happens there. But if you have such a sacred place and use it, something eventually will happen. — **Joseph Campbell**

Invocation

On all of creation,
The animate and inanimate,
The weak and the strong,
The young and the old,
The wise and the simple,
The free and the captive,
The peaceful and the anxious,
The joyful and the sad,
The saint and the sinner,
The living and the dead,
Be the grace and glory of God.

— **David Adam:**

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/practices/view/27282/invocation>

Help us to bring darkness into the light,
To lift out the pain, the anger,
Where it can be seen for what it is—
The balance-wheel for our vulnerable, aching
love.
Put the wild hunger where it belongs,
Within the act of creation,
Crude power that forges a balance
Between hate and love.
Help us to be the always hopeful
Gardeners of the spirit
Who know that without darkness
Nothing comes to birth
As without light
Nothing flowers.
— **May Sarton**

Creation is an act we are all participating in — moment by moment, breath by breath, dream by dream. We are constantly evolving from one thing to the next, reinventing our outward selves as our inner spirit grows and emerges in new ways. Our thoughts, our words, our actions — these create reality, not only for ourselves as individuals, but they shape the world for all beings. Our intentions pull the future into place; our linked hopes hold the power to shape the world-that-will-be. We are all co-creators of the universe. — **Leslie Mills, Soul Matters minister**

We belong to the community of creation—a phrase that embraces everything God created: every species, human and nonhuman, every living organism in the air or under the water or buried in the dirt. When I encountered the idea of creation as one massive living organism, it made sense to call it ‘community.’ This community is so intertwined and interconnected that, if one part is destroyed, the other parts will be affected. — **Sally Bingham**

Creation stories are not meant to be literal events. We call them ‘myths’ to help us see that they are real and true at a level deeper than facts. Creation stories serve to define who we are as people by showing us where we have come from and what was important as we began. A creation story is the cornerstone of meaning. Stories of creation tell us not only about beginnings but also right now. Creation is not something that happened once at the beginning of everything. Creation is always happening. — **Douglas Taylor, Soul Matters Minister**

To be alive: not just the carcass
But the spark.
That's crudely put, but ...

If we're not supposed to dance,
Why all this music?
— **Gregory Orr**

I have wished a bird would fly away,
And not sing by my house all day;

Have clapped my hands at him from the door
When it seemed as if I could bear no more.

The fault must partly have been in me.
The bird was not to blame for his key.

And of course there must be something wrong
In wanting to silence any song.

— **Robert Frost**

The writing life requires courage, patience, persistence, empathy, openness, and the ability to deal with rejection. It requires the willingness to be alone with oneself. To be gentle with oneself. To look at the world without blinders on. To observe and withstand what one sees. To be disciplined, and at the same time, take risks. To be willing to fail — not just once, but again and again, over the course of a lifetime. “Ever tried, ever failed,” Samuel Beckett once wrote. “No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.” — **Dani Shapiro**; more about writing and the creative life here: <http://tinyurl.com/h5y3ju2>

Videos & Podcasts

A “speed painter” creates art in 90 seconds and shows how much a change in perspective changes art.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHUXmIW6Bhc>

Creating music within nature’s creation.

<https://www.facebook.com/RubenMandolini/videos/859843210777227/>

Lil Buck and Yo-Yo Ma

<https://www.facebook.com/the grindlifemusic/videos/850068791750938/?fref=nf>

One song played by a band scattered all over the world

<https://www.facebook.com/DavidAvocadoWolfe/videos/10152897988601512/>

A very touching video about being close to and loving creation: “I love you mother nature, your sunny fields of green, your taste of freedom...” (3 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0Eh-0z4pQY>

“The green boat: Reviving ourselves in our capsized culture” — a TEDx Talk by Dr. Mary Pipher (20 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iozxLbuPiX4>

A three minute video about how Carol Ott is documenting all abandoned and blighted buildings in Baltimore; one of the unspoken messages is how we need to look wide-eyed at destruction and take responsibility in order for new creation to happen.

<https://www.facebook.com/TheAtlantic/videos/10153664760718487/?fref=nf>

On Being: Creativity and the Everyday Brain Krista Tippett interviews Rex Jung, a neuropsychologist, who is working on a cutting edge of science, exploring the differences and interplay between intelligence and creativity. He and his colleagues unsettle long-held beliefs about who is creative and who is not. And they're seeing practical, often common-sense connections between creativity and family life, aging, and purpose. You may be surprised to learn what studies show about “brainstorming.” <http://www.onbeing.org/program/rex-jung-creativity-and-the-everyday-brain/1879>

Articles & Online

“Ten Things Creative People Know”

“Do you consider yourself creative? If the answer is ‘no,’ you are not alone. ... It turns out that you don't have to be a great artist to be creative. Creativity is simply our ability to dream things up and make them happen.”

<http://www.dailygood.org/story/766/ten-things-creative-people-know-peggy-taylor-charlie-murphy/>

Religious Naturalism: A religious worldview grounded in the sciences, the humanities, and the arts

“Every culture has a central story – of who we are and how we came to be. In Judeo-Christian religion, this is described in the book of Genesis. In religious naturalism, it is the story of emergence and evolution. This begins with the Big Bang, leading to formation of stars and planets and the emergence of life on Earth and human beings. It shows an order and beauty in the workings of physical world, and it gives a sense of our place in a vast and ancient cosmos.”
<http://religiousnaturalism.org/>

“What's the Value of Video Games? Addiction, Recreation, and Re-Creation” by Rachel Wagner
<http://tinyurl.com/hdpm7g9>

The Creativity Post

“The Creativity Post is a non-profit web platform committed to sharing the very best content on creativity, in all of its forms: from scientific discovery to philosophical debate, from entrepreneurial ventures to educational reform, from artistic expression to technological innovation – in short, to all the varieties of the human experience that creativity brings to life.”
<http://www.creativitypost.com/>

Creation Myths

An overview of different types of creation stories from cultures all over the world.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creation_myth

Fun inventions to make everyday life a little better

<http://tinyurl.com/hxk353t>

Play Exquisite Corpse

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/play-exquisite-corpse>

12 talks to watch this Earth Day: TED Talks

<http://tinyurl.com/zetmqc>

Black Lives Matter Herstory: The Creation of a Movement

<http://blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/>

Movies & Television

Climate Refugees

This “multi-award winning Sundance film has screened around the world illuminating the human face of climatic change.”
<http://www.climaterefugees.com/>

Billy Elliot

A talented young boy becomes torn between his unexpected love of dance and the disintegration of his family. A testimony to the artistry of bringing forth what is unique within you.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0249462/>

Edward Scissorhands

A gentle man, with scissors for hands, is brought into a new community after living in isolation. A celebration of allowing difference to enter the world and make it more beautiful.
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0099487/?ref=kw_li_tt

Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle

Sly, sharp and witty, Dorothy Parker and colorful characters of the Algonquin Round Table are the subject of ... this acclaimed film directed by Alan Rudolph. The plot of the film centers on Mrs. Parker’s life in New York City during the 1920s, portrayed as flashbacks from her life working in Hollywood decades later.
<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/mrs-parker-and-vicious-circle>

Nova: Origins

Has the universe always existed? How did it become a place that could harbor life? What was the birth of our planet like? ... NOVA presents some startling new answers in "Origins," a groundbreaking four-part NOVA miniseries hosted by astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson.
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/space/origins-series-overview.html>

Songs

“Blue Boat Home” by Peter Mayer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtZUM0JhLvc>

“God Shuffled His Feet” by the Crash Test Dummies

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AzNzCiZwk28&feature=youtu.be>

Re-creation: Combining classical instruments and grunge music to create something entirely and wonderfully new.

<https://www.facebook.com/sitecifras/videos/1104860572887638/>

Books

Book for April for the Justice and Spirit online book club (run by UU publishing house Skinner House Books):

When God Isn't Green: A World-Wide Journey to Places Where Religious Practice and Environmentalism Collide by Jay Wexler

In this lively, round-the-world trip, law professor and humorist Jay Wexler explores the intersection of religion and the environment.

<http://www.uuabookstore.org/When-God-Isnt-Green-P17803.aspx>

Sign up for online book club here:

<https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/173731-justice-and-spirit-unitarian-universalist-book-club>

The Green Boat by Mary Pipher

From the book review: Mary Pipher takes on our planet's greatest problems with the skills of a truly gifted therapist. She knows why we avoid and deny the truth and she knows how we can heal ourselves and our communities even as we try to heal the earth.

<http://tinyurl.com/zdrsodz>

Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear by Elizabeth Gilbert

Big Magic wants to help readers live “a life that is driven more strongly by curiosity than by fear.” It is broken into six inspiring and thought-provoking sections: Courage, Enchantment, Permission, Persistence, Trust, and Divinity.

Book review: <http://tinyurl.com/jzqakgw>

Grounded: Finding God in the World—A Spiritual Revolution by Diana Butler Bass

<http://dianabutlerbass.com/books/grounded-finding-god-in-the-world-a-spiritual-revolution/>

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in Without Going Crazy

From the book review: The challenges we face can be difficult even to think about. Climate change, the depletion of oil, economic upheaval, and mass extinction together create a planetary emergency of overwhelming proportions. *Active Hope* shows us how to strengthen our capacity to face this crisis so that we can respond with unexpected resilience and creative power.

<http://tinyurl.com/j4bs7nh>

Books for children and families about creation:

The Everything Seed

Short enough to be a children's book but with meaning for all ages, *The Everything Seed* is “a new myth for a new generation, one that explains ... where we, and the world around us, originated. This joyous celebration of the origins of life is told through captivating poetry and luminous artwork.”

<http://tinyurl.com/gt2b3c4>

Big Momma Makes the World

“With down-home language and infectious rhythms, Phyllis Root spins a creation myth like no other, brilliantly illustrated by the incomparable Helen Oxenbury.”

<http://tinyurl.com/hysp5r6>

List of books for children and families:

<http://amzn.com/w/3TY4B39GPQUWU>

April Events

Earth Day

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earth_Day

Passover

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passover>

National Poetry Month

<https://www.poets.org/national-poetry-month/home>

UUA Climate Justice Month

<http://www.uua.org/environment/climate/climate-justice-month>

Jazz Appreciation Month

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/smithsonian-jazz/jazz-appreciation-month>

Hosea Ballou's Birthday

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hosea_Ballou
and <http://www.uuworld.org/articles/ballou-manifesto>

If you've enjoyed this packet and are not a part of a Soul Matters congregation, please learn more about how to join us at www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com

Join the Soul Matters Facebook page to engage in the theme with participants from around the US, Canada and Europe: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/soulmatters/>