



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred in
Our Everyday Spaces



May 2022
Nurturing Beauty

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The Welcome Mat

What Does it Mean to be a Nurturing Beauty?

Sociologist [Tressie McMillan Cottom](#) has written extensively about the construction of beauty. She argues that the way beauty is most often conceptualized in the dominant culture is as that which has aesthetic value that can be capitalized upon. And the way this plays out is that a few people profit off of a beauty standard that is so narrow that the majority of people could only achieve it with great expenditures of money.

A couple of months ago, the phenomenal pop artist [Lizzo did an interview](#) with Harper's Bazaar magazine in which she said, "...what I'm doing is stepping into my confidence and my power to create my own beauty standard. And one day that will just be *the* standard."

Can you imagine that a day when *the* standard of beauty is the standard that one sets for one's self? We are going to be nurturing that kind of beauty in ourselves this month, the kind that emanates from within, and is unique and evolving and personal. We're also going to be nurturing our own ability to find beauty in the everyday. And finally, we will be creating beauty, too, because the act of creating something beautiful is a kind of nurturing of one's self, too.

Khalil Gibran says that beauty is "a light in the heart." A constant in all our Soulful Home packets is the intention for you to find something within that nurtures that light in the heart of you, the parent, guardian, and very special adult in the life of a UU child. May your own beauty, the beauty of the love you share, and the beauty of our shared word be balm for the spirit this month!

Teresa, on behalf of the Soul Matters team



At the Table

Exploring Nurturing Beauty Through Discussions

At the Table questions explore the monthly theme through a discussion for all ages. They are designed for a family gathering - maybe during a Friday night meal, a quiet moment in the living room or before a board game night.

Introducing the Activity

Family members who are readers can alternate who reads the questions. Those who are not readers are invited to share their own impromptu questions. Discussion partners might answer as thoughts come to them or take turns in a circle.

Special this month...

Before we begin, this month we're going to be putting special attention on the family gathering place. That might be a meal table, or the counter in the kitchen where people lean/sit on stools/hang out, a coffee table, etc.

What would nurturing the beauty of this space look like? Maybe a small jar of wildflowers or greenery in water? Maybe a framed family photo in the center? A few favorite stones or crystals? A small bowl filled with dried fruit or nuts for munching? A purchase of some new, playful and fun salt and pepper shakers? A token representing a family inside joke?

Don't try to make it a big thing. No need for a full-on altar (unless you have one already set up in this space!). More like a tweak, a small something that gives you the opportunity to pause, take a breath and think, "Here I am, home, with my beloveds."

Discussion Questions

1. What part of your home is the most beautiful to you? What makes it so?
2. What beautiful landscape or [biome](#) do you hope to visit one day?
3. What's beautiful about your faith?
4. How are your ideas about beauty different from your friends'?
5. When you see a beautiful field of flowers, or a beautiful animal, what is the feeling in your body?
6. What can be beautiful about a mistake or a problem?
7. Can a taste or smell be beautiful?
8. Do animals have a sense of what is beautiful? How do you think they perceive beauty?



9. What usually happens to beautiful characters in a story? Is that the way life actually happens? Do you think that's how it should be?
10. Is the opposite of beautiful always ugly? Could it be something else?
11. Who nurtures your mind? Your body? Your heart and emotions? Your spirit?
12. Have you ever received a "beautiful gift"?

Return to the Discussion Throughout the Week

Thoughts develop with time. Find opportunities to bring up particularly compelling questions again during the month, maybe on walks, rides home, when tucking your child into bed, etc. If thoughts grew or changed, notice together how we are all evolving beings, opening ourselves to new truths and understandings as we live our lives and connect with others.



Around the Neighborhood

Around the Neighborhood activities engage families with their surroundings through the lens of the theme. It's about perceiving our well-known world in new ways. As you safely move around your neighborhood during this time of Covid, these suggestions help you transform your everyday backs-and-forths into a family adventure!

Treasure Hunt for Those Who are Creating Beauty

We are going to be spending time this month expanding our concept of beauty, so that we can recognize it more easily in our world, and then grow it. Some folks in our communities are already doing that! Let's see if we can spot some of them together this month. Find someone in your neighborhood...

1. whose garden is quirky and beautiful.
2. whose garden is formal and beautiful.
3. whose business is visibly welcoming to people who can't always assume welcome.
4. whose clothing shows great intentionality and style.
5. whose love for animals (wild animals or pets) is evident.
6. whose manner is peaceful.
7. who is always smiling.
8. who is whistling or humming a beautiful tune.
9. who moves through the world with kind regards for others.
10. who seems to smile for no reason.
11. who tries to bring out the best in others.



From the Mailbox

Our literal mailboxes connect us to the wide world outside, sometimes with messages asking things from us (a donation letter or flyer encouraging us to vote), sometimes with messages offering us gifts (a letter from a friend or a special delivery). Our "From the Mailbox" section applies this metaphor to today's call for families to engage in the work of dismantling white supremacy culture. And so, we open and accept these "invitations" to join those wise leaders and organizations who are co-creating an anti-racist future.

Creating Beauty for Others: NavajoStrong

This month, in our Blessing section of this packet, we included a translation of the well-known Navajo "Beauty Prayer." Collectively, as a country, we are in desperate need of the character envisioned by this prayer, whose subject is a person or a people willing to meet their fears and move forward through them, into beauty. (See our Blessings section for more.) We want to nurture this pursuit of beauty in ourselves and in others, because the world needs strong and committed people to dismantle white supremacy culture and bring about peace and justice.

Invitation: The Native-rooted and Native-run nonprofit [NavajoStrong](#) aids the Navajo community in dealing with health disparities related to disease and poverty, specifically but not limited to the Covid-19 pandemic. (Maybe you read about the disproportionate losses the Navajo Reservation experienced in the height of the pandemic.) Explore what this nonprofit is doing to provide resources, and see how best you can help, including making a donation (best option!), buying a t-shirt and being willing to pitch the mission of the group when people ask you about it, and switching your Amazon charity to NavajoStrong.

Nurturing Beauty in the Schoolyard

School gardens are not only an important location of STEM education, but also a source of daily beauty in the lives of students and teachers. From glowing ruby, orange, pink, and gold stalks of Swiss chard to the delicate drone of fuzzy bumblebees working flowers, plants are so generous to our senses with their loveliness! In 2021, school garden educators from across the nation came together to create [a resource to make school gardens explicitly anti-racist](#). We're going to familiarize ourselves with this resource, and then determine how to best apply them in our local communities.

Invitation: Find a school garden in your area and make contact with the organizers to see how you can support it. With summer coming up, perhaps they need volunteer workers while the children are out of school. Maybe it's as simple as needing a new wheelbarrow, or a big load of compost delivered. Share this endeavor with friends! Once you've established a relationship, you'll have a better sense of how to introduce some of the concepts you learned about in the anti-racism resource.



At Play

Playing Beautiful Games

At Play activities and questions are a way to joyfully, playfully, and imaginatively experience the theme.

Option A: Adult’s Favorite Childhood Board Games

Is there a board game or two, or three, that you can picture perfectly in your mind, not only because you played it so much, but because the game itself was so visually interesting? For kids from the ‘70s, ‘80s and ‘90s, there were games such as [Connect Four](#), [Pente](#), [Reversi](#), and [Rubik’s Race](#) that were graphically simple but fun; games that were detailed and accurate such as [Risk](#), [Clue](#), and [Guess Who?](#); and games that were whimsical and imaginative such as [Labyrinth](#).

Think back through your own childhood and identify a game or two whose visuals were so interesting that they formed the tabletops of memory after memory from your own childhood. Find a copy of one of these games and invite your family to play with you! You will invariably have stories to tell as you play together, further enriching the moment.

Option B: Leave No Trace Spot It

This game is most often played indoors, but we’re going to do it in an outdoor space so that we can practice ‘leave no trace.’ Leaving no trace allows others to enjoy the beauty of outdoor spaces without having to think about who made that rock tower, or whose initials are carved into that tree, etc.

In the outdoor space of your choosing, have your players walk around looking at every detail. Then, ask them to leave the area for a few minutes and close their eyes. You are going to introduce something to the environment, maybe natural, maybe human-made. Call the players back and see who can find the item that you introduced!

For younger kids, it works best to have something rather obvious, but tucked behind something else or on the periphery of the area. Older players might enjoy the challenge of broken sticks in the form of an X, or a clear, plastic wrapper that’s easily overlooked at a glance.



Option C: Wind Wheels

Even though we can't see the wind, we can hear it, and notice how it feels on our skin, and notice how its energy moves the treetops or grasses. The wind teaches us that beauty is more than what we see with our eyes! In this terrific paper craft, we'll be playing with the wind by making an unusual little wind-powered wheel out of paper!

Set these up on the street in front of your house, in your church parking lot, at the park, or anywhere else you have a strip of concrete available on a windy day.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TEmQ3IPQKu4>



On the Message Board

A Monthly Reminder

The On the Message Board section lifts up a theme-related mantra, graphic, quote, or gesture for your family to carry with them throughout the month. Think of these “family sayings” or “family signs” as tools for the journey, reminders that help us refocus and steady ourselves and our kids as we navigate through life’s challenges and opportunities. Each month, write this mantra on your family message board, or on a sticky note to put on your bathroom mirror, or the fridge. Make it part of your routine to share the mantra each morning so that it becomes something you all carry with you throughout the day.

May’s Mantra

...strong and bowing at the very same time.

Our mantra this month comes from the brilliant poem by UU minister Theresa Soto called “Taraxacum.” In it, Soto takes as their subject a dandelion—*Taraxacum officinale*—and makes a parallel between the tenacious “weed” and us, the readers. We, too, Soto says, can reach impossibly deep to our source, can stretch out to the light with our beauty. And even though dandelions can be “clipped and fought,” just as we can be harmed, worn down, and damaged, we, too, can grow back even more breathtaking, “*strong and bowing at the very same time.*”

Can you see this, in your mind’s eye? The splendid, yellow blooms that, wizened, may grow a little closer to Mother Earth, may not stretch quite so far out there alone after having encountered suffering, but whose glow is not at all diminished by having had to do the work of regrowing after hurt? This is the kind of beauty we want to nurture together this month in ourselves and in our families, a beauty that is deeply, strongly rooted in gratitude and interdependence, and which refuses to stop showing up.

The poem comes from Soto’s [*Spilling the Light: Meditations on Hope and Resilience*](#). The publisher, Skinner House Books, posted a picture of the poem on Twitter when the book first came out, and you can find that [here](#). Read the whole poem together as a family at least once this month. At the start of something new—a Monday back to work or school, a first swimming lesson, going to the R.E. room again at church after so long away—remind each other of the affect you are all adopting this month as you nurture beauty together, *strong and bowing at the very same time.*



At the Bedside

At The Bedside activities engage the theme through storytelling. This takes place during the dreamy, almost otherworldly hour or so before children or youth drift off to sleep. Through stories and the questions and realizations that they prompt, we come to understand the nature of and our own place in the cosmos. But also, these selections invite you to remember, shape, and share stories from your own past, using thoughtful narratives to help your child weave the tale of who they are and whose they are.

The Scratched Diamond: Deciding on Beauty

This story is part of the UU curriculum, *Love will Guide Us*, created by Alice Anacheka-Nasemann and Cathy Cartwright-Chow. It is a retelling of a Jewish teaching tale from the 1700s.

The concept is familiar—a king cherishes a pristine object, and laments its being damaged, only to discover that in its “flaw,” a new and more complex beauty can be found. Read the story ahead of time and think about ways you can connect this storyline to your home life. It is a lesson that we all will learn over and over again in our lives, so helping a child to be able to see beauty as boundless and ever-changing will serve them well into the future.

Read the story of The Scratched Diamond [here](#).

Stretching the Story:

- Do you have something you own that you love as much as the king loved that diamond? How would you feel if it got damaged?
- The change made the diamond even more beautiful in the king’s eyes; what or who have you thought was beautiful before a change, as well as after?
- Tell about a time that someone else’s perspective allowed you to see beauty when before you couldn’t.



On the Porch

Raising a Child Nurturing Beauty Together

On the Porch supports sharing realizations and hopes around the theme with other supportive adults. Perhaps this happens on a literal porch or front stoop, but it could happen wherever parents and their circle of support gather and talk (online or in person) about soulful parenting. The “A Sip of Something New” section invites you to engage a new idea shared by someone else. The “Spiritual Snacks” section stimulates personal storytelling and the sharing of your own wisdom and experience.

A Sip of Something New: Different Ways of Knowing Beauty

This video, released in 2014, features people who are blind describing what beauty means to them. Their insights broaden and enrich the idea of beauty. Watch this video with your trusted friend or conversation partner.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlcx_q8u_YI&t=104s

How do you experience beauty in ways that have nothing to do with seeing? Talk about this together.

Spiritual Snacks to Share

Bring these questions with you when the time comes to hang out with your co-parent or buddies. Don't treat the questions as a list to go through one by one. Instead pick the one or two that speak to you the most. Treat the questions less as a quiz and more like doorways inviting you into the world of storytelling and memory.

Questions

1. What characteristics have you nurtured in yourself lately?
2. Name something beautiful about the way your conversation partner speaks (could be the way they say a particular word, the tone they take when speaking with children, the pitch of their laugh, etc.)
3. Whose ideas of beauty did you inherit? And when did you begin to question them and form your own ideas?
4. What is beautiful to you about aging?
5. Raising children often requires us to confront our own insecurities, sometimes around appearance. How has being a parent helped you to work through your own wounds around looks?
6. What nurturing earlier in your life prepared you most for the task of parenting?
7. What is something beautiful about the past year that you hope your child remembers about this challenging part of their childhood?



The Extra Mile

The Extra Mile section is for families who want to continue exploring the theme of the month through larger adventures, more complex projects or simply through additional modalities not otherwise included in the packets. The Extra Mile suggestions often surpass what is considered an “everyday moment” in a family, and may involve more preparation, planning, or time to accomplish. A bit more effort, but well worth it!

Beauty in the Abstract: Guided Self-Portraits

This activity provides just the right amount of guidance and structure for everyone to feel successful, but not so much that it feels as if you’re following a formula or getting mired in the process. The result is a face that is our own—maybe looking like us, but maybe more *feeling* like us, based on the colors, patterns, and focusing details we choose to include in the picture.

Go simple, and use copy paper and colored pencils, or make the media a special part of the experience, splurging for watercolor paper and a set of paints or oil pastels.

<https://artfulparent.com/how-to-draw-abstract-self-portraits-for-kids-in-six-simple-steps/>

Use this activity to talk about how subjective the idea of beautiful is, and how beautiful variety is, especially when gathered together into a collection.



Blessing of Nurturing Beauty

The prayer below is a traditional Navajo–Diné–blessing prayer often referred to as “The Beauty Way,” or “Walk in Beauty.” Navajo historian Wally Brown describes the meaning of the prayer [here](#), translating the concept of beauty into four experiences—joy, happiness, confidence, and peace. Brown says that the blessing’s intention is to give one strength in the face of spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical fear, which can “stop [one] from growing.” In the Navajo tradition, it is one’s responsibility to, as Brown says, “make that effort...to get beyond [the fears].” As Unitarian Universalists, we also acknowledge that living according to our Principles can be daunting, and we [draw from](#) the Navajo/Diné wisdom as we aim to lift ourselves and each other to the task.

The translation we’ve included here comes from a nonprofit collective of Navajo artisans known as [Shimá](#);

In beauty may I walk.
All day long may I walk.
Through the returning seasons may I walk.
On the trail marked with pollen may I walk.
With grasshoppers about my feet may I walk.
With dew about my feet may I walk.
With beauty may I walk.
With beauty before me may I walk.
With beauty behind me may I walk.
With beauty above me may I walk.
With beauty below me may I walk.
With beauty all around me may I walk.
In old age, wandering on a trail of beauty, lively, may I walk.
In old age, wandering on a trail of beauty, living again,
may I walk.
It is finished in beauty.
It is finished in beauty.



Connect with more Inspiration for your family, and for you!

Parents can Join our Facebook and Instagram pages for
daily inspiration on our themes:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/?ref=settings>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/soul_matters_circle/

Parents and youth will want to check out our [YouTube](#) music playlist on the monthly theme.

Credits

Soulful Home packets are prepared by
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