



# Soulful Home

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Finding the Sacred in  
Everyday Spaces



Interdependence

April 2024

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# The Welcome Mat

## Exploring the Gift of Interdependence

My friend Nina only meant to foster Brutus for a week or two until a good home was discovered. But as the weeks and months dragged on, and the friend-of-a-friend who had found Brutus as a stray and placed him with Nina “very temporarily” stopped returning her calls, Nina reconciled to the fact that she may be in the role of foster-pet parent for a while. She began taking him on outings to socialize him to new smells, sights, and experiences. It should also be said that as these weeks and months progressed, Brutus’ likely Irish wolfhound heritage revealed itself more and more unequivocally. One day, walking down a hill, Brutus lunged. Nina, holding the leash, fell—hard. A loud, internal crack and a deep shoulder pain alerted her that her collarbone had broken.

I went to visit her a few weeks after this. I thought we would talk about whether or not she’d continue to foster Brutus. It’s quite a commitment to welcome a very, very large adolescent dog into one’s home. I was prepared to help Nina weigh options and consider needs and limitations, even knowing that two rescues had already turned her down early on in the process. But before I even had a chance to knock, Nina—and Brutus, with a favorite chew toy hanging from his giant, fuzzy face—met me at the door. Nina handed me a short list written on a pink sticky note as I walked in.

“What’s this?” I asked. She paused, scratching behind Brutus’ surprisingly tiny ear, and then gestured emphatically with the hand that was not tucked into a sling. “This is what I actually NEED. Half the church has been here with things I DON’T need, and DON’T want. When people ask you what they can do to help, tell them something on this list. That’s IT. I don’t want people to come with harnesses and pinch collars, and casseroles in dishes that are hard for me to wash, offering—rudely!--to find a better home for Brutus. Thank you, but no thank you!”

What was on Nina’s list? A handful of regular chores that were difficult for her to do without the use of two arms: weeding in the garden, hanging up laundry to dry, going through a tall stack of boxes she had been in the middle of sorting for donation, that kind of thing. The rest, she was working through on her own timeline, and in her own ways. Isn’t that what we’d all hope our friends and acquaintances would allow us the dignity to do?

Interdependence doesn’t mean rushing in to meet others’ needs as we see them. It means being fully present to one another’s experiences and empowering those around us to thrive because—in the iconic words of the Rev. Julián Jamaica. Soto—[all of us need all of us to make it](#). Interdependence means that you can count on



me to show up (if showing up is welcome) and be present to you, and I can count on you to show up and be present to me. Interdependence starts with relationship, and relationship starts with simple, humble, open-hearted presence to who and what is before us. We can trust that the next, right move will reveal itself.

In our play and exploration this month, we'll start from our interdependence as a given, but we'll experiment with ways to connect with others more skillfully and gracefully, both human and non-human. We'll play cooperative games. We'll ask questions about our own vulnerabilities and deep needs. And we'll get outside to experience the season and the present, as well as our great blessing to be out in it, together as a Soul Matters sharing circle, in each of our little places called home.

We do this for ourselves and others, because as we get better at mutuality, we all thrive.

Yours on our beautiful web of existence,

***Teresa***, on behalf of the Soul Matters team





# At the Table

## Exploring Interdependence 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.

### Discussion Questions

1. When you go outside, what kinds of things are you most likely to connect with, and want to put in your pocket to take home—rocks? feathers? sticks? interesting leaves? tiny bones? shells? all of the above?
2. Whom do you count on? Who counts on you?
3. In what ways do you care for the plants and animals around your home?
4. Name three people outside of your family who you could go to for help.
5. What is one thing your family learned about interdependence during the Covid-19 pandemic?
6. What does it mean to be a good human?
7. What sights, sounds, and smells helps you feel most connected to your particular place? (Some of ours: the particular color of green of a favorite tree's early spring leaves, the smell of maple syrup cooking down, fog creeping in off the river, early morning birdsong, the soft lowing of cows in a nearby field, etc.)
8. Teen climate activist Greta Thunberg convinced her family to give up some parts of modern life—namely, frequent airplane travel—in order to reduce their carbon footprint. What have you decided, as a family, to embrace in the name of caring for the climate?
9. When's the last time you sang or danced with others? What would it take to do that more in your life?
10. What sometimes makes you feel disconnected from those around you, or from the Life Source, or the Holy, or what some people call God?

### 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.



## From the Mailbox

Our "From the Mailbox" section is a monthly postcard to parents from the future world we want to create together. Each "postcard" is an invitation for families to engage in the work of dismantling white supremacy culture, and all the social and environmental harm caused by it. The postcards lift up the life of brave and prescient souls whose work has manifested the Spirit of Love and Justice. They're meant to *inspire courage, create interest, and give adult caregivers a leaping-off point* to learn more themselves and start rich conversations at home.

### This Month's Postcard: bell hooks

Dear travelers and homebodies,

bell hooks beams at me from the stage, me and a thousand other people who came to bask in her life-giving radiance. Of all her deeply synthesized philosophy and original wisdom about gender, class, race, politics, and intersecting identities, it's her thoughts on coexisting in community that move me most. "We best realize love in community," she says. "Our interdependence is the staff of life, our capacity to feel both with and for ourselves, and other people." hooks understood power better than maybe anyone else alive in her time. And her message? Share power and apply it to justice. Use power to build community. Uplift others as you rise yourself.

With whom will you share power today? What deep truths inside you can create more freedom and understanding all around you? How will you strengthen the fragile parts of our interconnected web?

Love,

*the Awaiting World*

ps. PBS Newshour recorded a tribute to bell hooks' life after her death in 2021. You can watch it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05DMEyXRTNg>



# At Play

## Playing Games with Interdependence

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

### Option A: Field Day Fun

Field Day activities offer a nice balance of cooperation and competition. Some favorites include egg-and-spoon relay race, [parachute play](#), three-legged race, and team run mat races, because all of these require teammates to depend on one another for success.

Meet some family friends at the park and bring supplies for one or more of these jolly pastimes. If you're intrigued by the [team run mat idea](#), as we were, consider making your own running mat out of old, folded and duct-taped plastic tarps. It works best if you team similar-height people together, but in a group with a variety of heights, put the taller people in the middle. Give your own family challenges such as navigating to a certain spot and then going in reverse. Or race another family who's also up for the challenge! A fun follow-up tarp game is to get the whole family to stand on the (unfolded) tarp then try and flip it over without touching the ground; here's a hint—there's lots of scooching and laughing involved!

### Option B: Text Connect with *Would You Rather...?*

Text games can open up a silly, low-stakes dialog and connection with teenagers through their phones. Have this list of the Internet's best Would You Rather questions handy and text them when you know your teen has some down time, maybe on the bus home from school, or after homework but before bedtime.

- Would you rather be able to teleport or time travel?
- Would you rather have the ability to shrink to ant-size or grow to giant-size?
- Would you rather be forced to dance along to every song you hear, or sing along?
- Would you rather be 10 minutes late or 20 minutes early?
- Would you rather be able to read minds, or become invisible at will?
- Would you rather live in a treehouse or a cave?
- Would you rather be fluent in all languages, or a master of every musical instrument?
- Would you rather be able to control the weather, or talk to animals?
- Would you rather find a rat in your kitchen or a roach in your bed?
- Would you rather be trapped in the middle of a food fight, or a water balloon fight?
- Would you rather be able to fly or breathe under water?
- Would you rather live without music, or without your phone?
- Would you rather go back to a place you loved, or explore a place you've never been?
- Would you rather take amazing selfies, but look terrible in all other photos, or be photogenic everywhere but in your selfies?
- Would you rather be able to take back anything you say, or hear every conversation that's about you?
- Would you rather be the best at something that no one really cares about, or average at something that's well-respected?



# 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.

### April’s Mantra:

“All of us need all of us to make it.”

There are a few phrases that get right to the heart of UU theology, and this is one of them. Bless its author, the Rev. Julián Jamaica Soto! What a gift.

Use this phrase when you find yourself stuck in us versus them thinking, or when you find yourself seeking out only individuals who think, look, sound, and act like you.

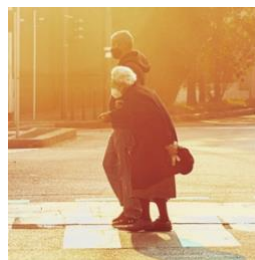
Use it also when you are seeing more scarcity than abundance, when it seems like there is just not enough \_\_\_\_\_; fill in the blank—love, land, trust, sense, security, etc. to go around.

Use it when the news of the day feels raw and overwhelming, when policy and strategy and election cycle and law and injustice seem to all be versions of the same, threatening disconnection.

Use it when you feel separate from the life force that animates each tiny plant, animal, and fungus around you, when you’re not sure what you’re doing here or why.

Use it when you are reluctant to ask for help, when your conditioning against burdening another with your needs prevents you from reaching out, though connection and care is exactly what you require.

And finally, share this sentiment. Tell it to anyone who will listen this month. It’s core to our interdependence.





## 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.

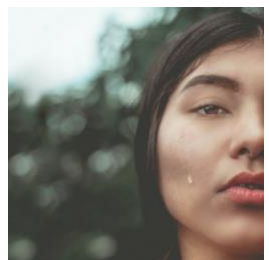
## Mustard Seed Medicine

This story is a staple in UU communities who use Spirit Play in their storytelling and religious education programs. It comes from Buddhism. The theme that's most often brought forward from this story is impermanence. In a frantic mother's search, door to door, for mustard seeds from a household that has not experienced death, she comes to understand that losing a loved one is a universal truth that affects us all. However, the arrival at that truth—the going door to door, asking after each family: “Have you lost someone? Yes? I see. I am sorry to hear that. And thank you.”—is, itself, a lesson in interdependence. All families have experienced that keen grief, all have been vulnerable in their loss, all have begun the process of creating a new wholeness around the missing pieces, doubtless with the help of neighbors and friends. The mother learns about impermanence and interdependence, both.

*Read the [Parable of the Mustard Seed](#) together with your child.*

### Stretching the Story:

- Has anyone in your social circle died? Use this story as an opportunity to say their name and bring their presence into the heart of your family. A simple mention is enough to help send the message to your child that those whom we've loved and who have died are not forgotten.
- If your child has a friend with a loved one who has died, you might remind them that—if this friend decides to share thoughts or feelings about it—that simply staying there with their friend, and maybe saying, “That sounds hard,” is really all a person needs.



# On the Porch

## Raising a Child of Interdependence 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: A Basement Room in the Mansion of Another’s Mind

Author Stephen Jenkinson wrote about an occasion in which he realized, with poignance, how we are not only interdependent in life, but also in memory. Read this passage together, aloud, with your trusted conversation partner.

<https://orphanwisdom.com/2023/09/21/toynbee-trail/>

Who lives in your memory rent-free, a guest whose words and images bring a smile to your face even now?

In what ways do you hope you live in the minds of others?



## 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 was the moment in your life when you felt fully independent from your family of origin?
2. Who taught you the most about connecting with nature? What were the main lessons you learned?
3. How have you recovered from being disappointed by those you had depended on?
4. In what ways does your spiritual survival depend on others?
5. What have you accomplished as part of a group that you would not have been able to make happen alone?
6. Renowned outdoor educator Joseph Cornell describes the impulse to spend time in nature this way: "Nature reminds us of the finer parts of ourselves. There's a wholesomeness in nature that reminds us of the wholesomeness in ourselves." In what ways has spending time in and observing nature helped you connect with something healthy and life-affirming inside of you?
7. Have you ever apologized to someone for not being there when they needed you? What was that experience like for you?
8. How are you more dependent on others now, as the caretaker of a young person?
9. Is your heart in good hands at this point in your life? How have you recognized the times when it was not so?
10. What one message about interdependence do you hope your young person takes with them into adulthood?
11. Name all the people who have contributed to whatever degree of material security you enjoy at present. How far back can you go?
12. Whose love have you grown into?



## 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!

### The Mustard Seeds

In much of North America, the time is just right for planting mustard. (In the deep South, this might need to wait until early fall.) Mustard is an easy-to-grow green that thrives in containers and in many different kinds of soil and can be eaten as a sauteed side dish or a pot herb chopped and added to soups and stews for extra nutrition and spice.

After reading the At the Bedside Story, show your child a package of mustard seeds, and tell them that you’ll plant some together the next day.

### Our UU Web

As UUs, we most often think of the interdependent web of life as something outside of our churches—out in our communities or out in nature. But our UU web, connecting covenanted communities across the continent and beyond, is precious, powerful, and strengthened by our care and devotion. Make time this month to visit a congregation in a nearby area or, if possible, spend a night at one of our [UU camps or retreat centers](#). So many UU groups livestream Sunday services and other offerings that you could also join in from home. As you do so this month, create an intention to grow the bonds of our faith, holding and feeling held by our far-flung people.

### Shinrin Yoku – Forest Bathing

Many decades of study have confirmed that spending time immersed in nature has a far-reaching, positive effect on our minds and bodies. Plan an outing this month that allows your family to experience this together. It might be “forest bathing,” the name for the practice studied by Japanese forestry scientists in the ‘80s, shown to reduce blood pressure, lower cortisol, and boost immune system and mood. But more recent studies have shown these effects are measurable in many different environments, not just forests. If your child asks you why you’re outside essentially doing nothing, you might have a few answers ready: “We’re offering our out-breaths to the plants, and their out-breaths are good for us, too.” “We’re not doing nothing. We’re being outside together,” or “This is good for our minds and bodies, and it’s free,.”



## Blessing of Interdependence

*Whoever belongs to you, whoever resides in your heart, may their living presence or their cherished memory be a blessing to you.*

*To whomever you belong, the many sets of arms that surround you in love and compassion, may their support steady you in times quiet and chaotic.*

*May your ancestors' acts of courage and deeds of misjudgment both remind you that life goes on, and that each next action is a chance to make good, to make amends, or simply to be awake.*

*May you recall this month that your blood, your bones, even your consciousness, however one might define it, is made not from something other than but exactly of this mighty and fragile planet we share, that you and all of creation were linked at the beginning, are linked now, and ever more will be.*





## 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/](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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