



## *What does it mean to be a people of Incarnation?*



## **What Does It Mean To Be A People of Incarnation?**

Incarnation has a wonderfully tangible and concrete feel to it. Incarnation literally means “embodied in flesh” or “taking on flesh.” It is a concept found in many religious traditions. It is used to refer to the material manifestation of a divine entity, god, or force whose nature is immaterial. In the Christian context, incarnation refers to Jesus Christ, the “Word made flesh.” He endures across the ages because the accounts of his life paint a portrait of a man whose way of being in the world manifested the holy and transcendent. Yet, we don’t want to simply imitate Jesus; rather, when Jesus or any spiritual teacher says to go and do likewise, they are encouraging and empowering us to embody the transcendent through our own unique finite life in our own day and age.

One way to embody the truth of incarnation is remember that what happens to us, to our bodies, matters—matters to us and, I believe, to God. In many ways, ethics is about how we treat bodies, our own and the bodies of others. It matters that we create jobs which don’t demean human dignity and don’t treat the bodies of laborers as disposable cogs in a sweatshop machine. It matters how police and prison officials treat all bodies, including black and brown and transgendered bodies. It also matters, and these are signs of grace: when we relax beside a warm fire on a cold night, when strong and tender hands massage away the knotted tension of stress from our shoulders, and when a welcoming embrace assures that we belong. It matters that we find joy in a dancer’s flowing beauty, in a painter’s luminous canvas, in the three-point shot that ties a game at the buzzer and sends it into overtime, in the perfect spiral pass to a sprinting split-end, in the powerful strokes and swiftly gliding body of a swimmer, and in the bursting speed of a runner.

Bodies matter; they are where we meet glory, feel grace, and encounter truth. And, our bodies tell stories: lines and furrows of worry in our faces, downcast gazes, slumped shoulders, springing steps, shuffling feet, clenched fists, and out-stretched arms. The reason we are called to sink into and care for our bodies is not just to relieve stress; it’s so that our body’s voice no longer gets drowned out by all the other noise. The reason we are called to allow nature to embody us is not simply so that we can feel our interconnectedness; it’s so that we can allow that interconnectedness to tell us its wisdom.

May this month’s work of embodiment help us to feel grace and encounter truth!

In Faith,

Andrea Johnson

# Our Spiritual Exercises

## Option A: Embody your Gender

*“For here you need not hide, nor pretend, nor be anything other than who you are and who you are called to be.”*

*- Rebecca Edmiston-Lange*

These words remind us of our highest common calling – to know, to name, to honor each other as our full selves. These words call us to be authentic, and to honor the authenticity of others. Being a welcoming and inclusive community means consciously working to find ways to name, honor, and value experiences and identities that are usually minimized or devalued. It means uncovering our unconscious assumptions about what’s “normal” and who is present in our community, and opening ourselves to the possibility of greater diversity. In order for us each to feel welcome and included in faith communities, we need to see ourselves reflected and present in some way.

*– from the Unitarian Universalist Association*

Pronouns are a powerful form of agency for individuals defining their own identity. Gender identity is a fluid and open process for many, and some feel that traditional pronoun use doesn’t fit with their own gender identities. Transgender, genderqueer, and other gender-variant people may choose different pronouns for themselves than those in traditional use. By naming our own pronouns with intention, we become more mindful of gender identity diversity and openness.

*- Adapted from the UW-Madison LGBT Campus Pronoun guide*

The following is a chart of common pronouns used, knowing that these take many forms from person to person, and can change.

Subjective	Objective	Possessive	Reflexive	Example
She	Her	Hers	Herself	She is speaking. I listened to her. The backpack is hers.
He	Him	His	Himself	He is speaking. I listened to him. The backpack is his.
They	Them	Theirs	Themselves	They are speaking. I listened to them. The backpack is theirs.
Ze	Hir/Zir	Hirs/Zirs	Hirself/Zirself	Ze is speaking. I listened to hir. The backpack is zirs.

Being inclusive and welcoming means learning and growing in our awareness of gender identity and diversity, and being more comfortable with language that changes and adapts as we strive to honor diversity and openness in our communities. Intentional pronoun use is one way to honor and welcome people of various identities, as well as understand and acknowledge our own identities. Knowing that it is a learning process, and holding each other in grace, **take this month to do the following:**

1. Wear a pronoun button or nametag (you can make your own or you can buy one on Etsy for \$2. [https://www.etsy.com/listing/280964050/button-hello-my-pronouns-are-for-lgbt?gpla=1&gao=1&utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=shopping\\_us\\_e-accessories-patches\\_and\\_pins-pins\\_and\\_pinback\\_buttons&utm\\_custom1=024aba87-410c-8288-0380-0000295f0ff7&gclid=CjwKCAiAoaqXQBRa8EiwAIiOWsm4gFK7A1sCSp0tmhM9IoziiYu1THCzjOCJ547ItEhyLbZEJjqmf3hoC7U4QAvD\\_BwE](https://www.etsy.com/listing/280964050/button-hello-my-pronouns-are-for-lgbt?gpla=1&gao=1&utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=shopping_us_e-accessories-patches_and_pins-pins_and_pinback_buttons&utm_custom1=024aba87-410c-8288-0380-0000295f0ff7&gclid=CjwKCAiAoaqXQBRa8EiwAIiOWsm4gFK7A1sCSp0tmhM9IoziiYu1THCzjOCJ547ItEhyLbZEJjqmf3hoC7U4QAvD_BwE)) every day wherever you go for at least one week.
2. Introduce yourself using your name and pronouns.
3. Put your preferred pronouns in your email signature
4. Use pronouns as a common “introduction/check-in” practice in small groups - Like Chalice Circles
5. Use someone’s name in place of pronouns more often.
6. Ask others how they would like to be referred to.
  - Remember that pronouns may change for individuals and are not always linked to their gender identity. Honor someone’s request to not share their pronoun if it makes them uncomfortable.
  - If you make a mistake, simply correct yourself or offer a quick apology, showing respect and care.
  - Remind others gently about your pronouns, and begin in a place of grace, respect, and honoring of each other.

Please also listen to Karen Herring’s sermon from October 14<sup>th</sup> where she beautifully articulates the importance of honoring a person’s chosen gender and shares her journey of parenting her child, Cat. <http://unityunitarian.libsyn.com/shehetheywe-rev-karen-hering-october-22-2017>

**Come to your group ready to share what it means to begin to embody and be aware of your gender identity and others.**

### **Option B: Embody Your Privilege**

The embodiment of (or lack of) privilege is arguably *the* defining characteristic of our relationships and our life’s trajectory. And yet most of us in this culture are taught to ignore privilege, even pretend that it doesn’t exist. The website Buzzfeed has created a powerful video and shared a challenging set of questions to help us get in touch with our privilege and its consequences. So, for this exercise:

1. go to the Buzzfeed website: <http://www.vagabomb.com/What-Is-Privilege-Let-This-Demonstrative-Experiment-Answer-That-for-You/>
2. read the article
3. watch the video, and then
4. reflect on the questions that are shared.
5. Find a way to participate in the experiment/questionnaire either by organizing a handful of your friends or imagining yourself doing it with a circle of your family, neighbors and co-workers.
6. Come to your group ready to share what it means to begin to embody and be aware of your privilege.

## Option C: A Love Letter To Your Body

*Deep Breaths are like little love notes to your body. - Anon*

In a vulnerable and insightful [essay](#), Christine Valters Paintner asks, “How many of us treat our bodies with the lavish attention they deserve? What does it mean to treat our bodies like the temples they really are? What is the damage caused by the endless messages we receive each day about our bodies' inadequacies? What if for one day we could put to rest the damaging stories we tell ourselves about how our bodies don't measure up? What if we could bring our full presence to our bodies' needs instead of endlessly ignoring them?...What if our bodies truly were an "inexhaustible source of sanctification" and we treated them as such?”

She goes on to challenge us to “write a love letter to your body, offering both gratitude and forgiveness. Instead of using words, offer it in food, in warmth, in touch... Instead of rushing from place to place until you crash into bed exhausted, allow holy pauses to breathe deeply, take a long bath as an act of offering, lavish yourself with oil. Prepare a nourishing meal for just yourself. Eat chocolate, but make sure it is the deepest, darkest, richest kind you can find and eat it with as much attention as you can summon. Make an appointment for a massage and receive some loving touch imagining that you are being anointed for blessing others.”

So there you have it. Paintner lays out this exercise plan and simple:

**“Write a love letter to your body, offering both gratitude and forgiveness. Instead of using words, offer it in food, in warmth, in touch... “**

If you find yourself struggling with what this might mean for you or if you want to go take this further, consider another simple blessing or love letter. Spend a morning or evening completing the following list of sentences:

1. To my *mind* I say thanks. It has helped me hold on to memory, dream bigger dreams and correct the sometimes confusing and confused voices in my head. ***I especially thank it for the time it...***
2. To my *eyes* I say thanks. They have helped me perceive life more widely and anew. ***I especially thank them for the time they...***
3. To my *ears* I say thanks. They have helped be take in beauty, new ideas and the wisdom and pain of others. ***I especially thank them for the time they...***
4. To my *throat and voice* I say thanks. It has enabled me to speak into existence the me that is truly me. It has helped me bravely speak out, offer soft words of comfort to others and sing myself back into joy. ***I especially thank it for the time it...***
5. To my *heart* I say thanks. It has been broken, allowed itself to mend and was brave enough to trust again. ***I especially thank it for the time it...***
6. To my *body's sensuality* I say thanks. It has helped love and feel loved. It has allowed me to know intimacy and experience a self that extends beyond the limits of my own skin. ***I especially thank it for the time it...***
7. To my *hands* I say thanks. They have allowed me the gift of good work. They have held others and allowed me to hold on tight to those I needed most. They have also been brave enough to let go. ***I especially thank them for the time they...***
8. To my *feet* I say thanks. They have led me on adventures and helped me stand tall. They have allowed me to dance and feel every ounce of my joy. They have made me move forward when my heart wanted to run in fear. ***I especially thank them for the time they...***

## Option D: Engage in a Body Prayer

Some people sing when they pray; other people say some words quietly to themselves. Some people even sit very still and don't say anything at all. All kinds of praying and meditation are ways for people to feel connected with something besides themselves. We can also make prayers with our body. This month, try on a body prayer practice. Here are four different types. Read or watch the body prayer demonstrations, choose one and see if you can do it almost every day for the next week or two (or for how long is comfortable for you).

- Multiple Religious Traditions Body Prayer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f45TKrhGXHs>
- Julian of Norwich Body Prayer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7iImZilFvOE>
- UU Body Prayer: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/body-prayer-version-one>
- Sufi Body Prayer

**“I step into the embrace of the Beloved . . .”**

Take one step forward with the right foot, then bring the left to meet it.

**“ . . . to receive and to give.”**

Cup hands in front of heart, then extend forward as a gesture of giving.

**“I put behind me all worldly concerns and egoistic thoughts.”**

Bring hands back, palms facing forward, at shoulder level, elbows bent.

**“I open my heart . . .”**

Place hands over heart center.

**“and offer thanksgiving and praise.”**

Lift hands and arms upwards, while also looking up.

**“I surrender to you . . .”**

Bow at the waist, sliding hands down thighs to the knees.

**“ . . . that I may do your will . . .”**

Drop to the knees and touch forehead to the ground.

**“ . . . now and always . . .”**

Sit up and back on heels, hands resting on thighs.

**“ . . . at One with you.”**

Touch forehead to the ground again.

Stand and take one step back to original starting place.

Repeat the entire cycle three times.

From *Developing & Deepening Your Spiritual Practice: An Interspiritual Approach*, by  
Rev. Diane Berke, PhD

Come prepared to discuss with the group your experiences of embodied prayer.

# 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 speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is not to analyze what "welcome" means in the abstract, but to figure out what being a part of a people of pilgrimage means for you and your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work"?*

1. To what extent are you called to make your words become flesh?
2. What might it mean for you to bring about the wonder of incarnation?
3. What values are you willing to incarnate?
4. When was the last time you "found God" through your body and senses?
5. When was the last time you listened to your body? What is your body saying right now?
6. Do you embody(embrace) or deny your pain, your joy?
7. Have you embodied and embraced your shadow side as well as your light?  
(<http://www.wisdom-pills.com/2015/10/24/embodying-your-shadow-what-it-means-and-how-to-do-it/>)
8. What family legacy are you embodying and living out? Is that legacy a blessing or a burden?
9. Have you forgiven your body for letting you down? For betraying you?
10. Have you thanked your body for all its carried and given you?
11. Have you allowed yourself to become embodied in and swallowed up by stress?  
(<http://www.radiolab.org/story/91580-stress/> )
12. What might it look and feel like to embody silence and stillness?
13. Has your embodiment of the role of mother (father, spouse, son, daughter, soldier, doctor, etc.,) turned out the way you expected?
14. What embodiment are you longing to break out of?
15. 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.

# Recommended Resources

As always, this is 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 your thinking started, and maybe open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of pilgrimage.

## Word Roots

**Incarnation** means having a bodily form. The act of being made flesh. c. 1300, "embodiment of God in the person of Christ," from Old French *incarnacion*. The love of God made visible in the world.

## Wise Words

Humans are body and spirit, brains and minds, hearts and love. We are embodied spirits. Emotional and spiritual experiences are somehow and always physical.

—*Guy Sales*

Don't explain your philosophy. Embody it.

—*Epictetus*

The incarnation manifests the power of the human body to bear the divine.

—*Wendy Farley, Feminist Theologian*

The purpose of life is not to transcend the body, but to embody the transcendent.

—*The Dalai Lama*

Each of us are the face of God in this world, and God's voice and hands. .

—*Rev. Galen Guengerich, UU Minister*

Jesus' resurrection is not a one-time anomaly, but the regular and universal structure of reality revealed in one person.

—*Richard Rohr*

The Lord did not come to make a display. He came to heal and to teach suffering men. For one who wanted to make a display the thing would have been just to appear and dazzle the beholders. But for Him Who came to heal and to teach the way was not merely to dwell here, but to put Himself at

the disposal of those who needed Him, and to be manifested according as they could bear it, not vitiating the value of the Divine appearing by exceeding their capacity to receive it.

—*Athanasius of Alexandria, On the Incarnation written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.*

Theologian Sallie McFague, explains that the world is our meeting place with God and invites us to imagine the world or universe as God's body. Using the lens this model provides, she asks what we see and what we can say about various dimensions of the relationship of God and the world. It focuses on embodiment, inviting us to think about God and bodies. What would it mean for instance to understand sin as the refusal to share the basic necessities of survival with other bodies? To see Jesus of Nazareth as paradigmatic of God's love for bodies? To interpret creation as all the myriad forms of matter bodied forth from God and empowered with the breath of life, the spirit of God? To consider ourselves as inspired bodies profoundly interrelated with all other such bodies and yet having the special distinction of shared responsibility with God for the well-being of our planet? Such a focus McFague argues causes us to see differently, to see dimension of the relation of God and the world that we have not seen before. Most importantly this organic model calls for a planetary agenda that asks all religions, nations, professions, and people to reconstruct their lives and their work to help our earth survive and prosper.

—*Sallie McFague, The Body of God*

A voice comes to your soul saying, Lift your foot, cross over. Move into emptiness of question and answer and question.



*-Rumi, The Glance*

The body is a sacred garment. It's your first and last garment; it is what you enter life in and what you depart life with, and it should be treated with honor.

*-Martha Graham*

What is saving my life now is the conviction that there is no spiritual treasure to be found apart from the bodily experiences of human life on earth. My life depends on engaging the most ordinary physical activities with the most exquisite attention I can give them. My life depends on ignoring all touted distinctions between the secular and the sacred, the physical and the spiritual, the body and the soul. What is saving my life now is becoming more fully human, trusting that there is no way to God apart from real life in the real world.

*Barbara Brown Taylor, from An Altar in the World: Earth is So Thick With Holiness*

## Poems

### **You Have to Know Your Body as the Home of God**

*Rebecca Parker*

You have to know your body  
as the home of God  
And this is the purpose of Christmas.  
The rose blossoming in the wilderness  
is the unfolding of your pleasure  
as the fingers peel an orange and sweetness  
buds in the mouth.  
The bright star in the night sky  
is the sudden clarity of your instinct for joy.  
The birth cry in the night  
is your child,  
falling into the dark,  
and your arms holding her.  
The terror of Herod's murderous intent  
is your rage that would prefer death to  
change.  
The singing angel is your voice at church,  
not sure of the tune  
but certain, for a moment, that there is glory.  
The animals, breathing their warm breath  
in the fragile stable are your emotions

kneeling into the body of earth  
at ease in the presence of God.  
Mary is you  
God in your body.  
Joseph is you  
sheltering God in the world.  
This is the key to the mystery,  
The Word became flesh.  
We are the dwelling place.

### **The Gospel of John 1:1-5**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.  
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, . . . full of grace and truth.

### **Messenger**

*Mary Oliver*

My work is loving the world.  
Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird—  
—  
equal seekers of sweetness.  
Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.  
Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.  
  
Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?  
Am I no longer young, and still not half-perfect?  
Let me  
keep my mind on what matters,  
which is my work,  
  
which is mostly standing still and learning to be  
astonished.  
The phoebe, the delphinium.  
The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.  
Which is mostly rejoicing, since all ingredients  
are here,  
  
which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a  
heart  
and these body-clothes,  
a mouth with which to give shouts of joy  
to the moth and the wren, to the sleepy dug-up  
clam,

telling them all, over and over; how it is  
that we live forever.

### **Ask Me**

*William Stafford*

Some time when the river is ice ask me  
mistakes I have made. Ask me whether  
what I have done is my life. Others  
have come in their slow way into  
my thought, and some have tried to help  
or to hurt: ask me what difference  
their strongest love or hate has made.

I will listen to what you say.  
You and I can turn and look  
at the silent river and wait. We know  
the current is there, hidden; and there  
are comings and goings from miles away  
that hold the stillness exactly before us.  
What the river says, that is what I say.

### **Between the World and Me**

*Ta-Nehisi Coates*

Here is what I would like for you to know: In  
America, it is traditional to destroy the black  
body – it is heritage.

Enslavement was not merely the antiseptic  
borrowing of labor – it is not so easy to get a  
human being to commit their body against its  
own elemental interest. And so enslavement  
must be casual wrath and random mangling, the  
gnashing of heads and brains blown out over the  
river as the body seeks to escape. It must be rape  
so regular as to be industrial.

There is no uplifting way to say this. I have no  
praise anthems, nor old Negro spirituals. The  
spirit and soul are the body and brain, which are  
destructible – that is precisely why they are so  
precious.

And the soul did not escape. The spirit did not  
steal away on gospel wings. The soul was the  
body that fed the tobacco, and the spirit was the  
blood that watered the cotton, and these created  
the first fruits of the American garden.

### **Your Presence Is Near**

*Julianne Lepp*

We have not forgotten  
In nature we seek you  
In the whisper of wind

In the new green wood  
Your presence is near

We have not lost hope  
In the dust of the desert  
In the rush of the wave  
In the rise of the mountain  
Your presence is near  
We remember the cycle  
In the promise of blossoms  
In the dying leaves  
In the bare branches  
Your presence is near

### **When God was Pregnant**

*Bob Janis Dillon, UU Minister*

when god was pregnant  
her belly swelled up like song  
'til she was rounder than the  
seasons of the world.  
her legs grew larger than the  
questions  
raised by wondering boys,  
her breasts filled the emptiness  
of one moment's yearning for  
another.

when god was pregnant the  
angels fetched cold towels and  
practiced breathing,  
learning anticipation: an artifice  
born of desperation,  
a waiting room trick, muttering  
love into the dark places.

when god was pregnant she  
ached. she cried. she howled at  
her own power to ruin a  
comfortable past. her heavens  
were not just the time and tides,  
but divulged the naked risk of  
life itself.  
her sovereign choice  
was to become strong enough  
to tear apart all plans, to break  
open the careful hold,  
to lose control and therefore  
gain the loss.

small wonder we carry a little of  
her madness, and tend  
to give our hearts away to make  
us whole.

### **I love the World**

*Leslie Mills, UU Minister*

Let me put it this way –  
I am wildly, irrevocably in love  
with the world.  
And you –  
you wonderful, beautiful, brave  
spark of creation –  
you are inseparable from the world.  
I breathe you in.  
I take your story into me,  
and it lodges  
in my soul.  
We will never be  
two separate things again –  
if ever we were.

### **A Lifelong Sharing**

*Mother Theresa*

Love cannot remain by itself – it has no  
meaning. Love has to be put into action and  
that action is service. Whatever form we are,  
able or disabled, rich or poor, it is not how  
much we do, but how much love we put in  
the doing; a lifelong sharing of love with  
others.

### **The Paradox**

*Sarah Kay*

When I am outside living,  
all I can do is notice all there is to write  
about.  
When I read about love, I think I should be  
out loving.  
When I love, I think I need to read more.  
I am stumbling in pursuit of grace,  
I hunt patience with a vengeance.  
On the mornings when my brother's tired  
muscles  
held to the pillow, my father used to tell  
him,  
For every moment you aren't playing  
basketball,  
someone else is on the court practicing.

I spend most of my time wondering  
if I should be somewhere else.  
So I have learned to shape the words thank  
you  
with my first breath each morning, my last  
breath every night.  
When the last breath comes, at least I will  
know I was thankful  
for all the places I was so sure I was not  
supposed to be.  
All those places I made it to,  
all the loves I held, all the words I wrote.  
And even if it is just for one moment,  
I will be exactly where I am supposed to be.

### **Funny**

*Anna Kamienska*

What's it like to be a human the bird asked  
I myself don't know  
it's being held prisoner by your skin  
while reaching infinity  
being a captive of your scrap of time  
while touching eternity  
being hopelessly uncertain  
and helplessly hopeful  
being a needle of frost  
and a handful of heat  
breathing in the air  
and choking wordlessly  
it's being on fire  
with a nest made of ashes  
eating bread  
while filling up on hunger  
it's dying without love  
it's loving through death  
That's funny said the bird  
and flew effortlessly up into the air

## **Videos and Podcasts**

### **Black Privilege**

*Crystal Valentine*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fpNoLVfl3o>

### **White Privilege**

*Kyla Lacey*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fpNoLVfl3o>

### **Embodying and Accepting our Beauty**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aW8BDgLpZkI>

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

### **Do You Embody Your Body With Joy?**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0tEcXLDDd4>

### **Who We Want to Become: Beyond the New Jim Crow**

<http://www.onbeing.org/programs/michelle-alexander-who-we-want-to-become-beyond-the-new-jim-crow/>

What world do we want to embody? What does it look like to embody hope and justice as a culture? The civil rights lawyer Michelle Alexander calls the punitive culture that has emerged the ‘new Jim Crow,’ and is making it visible in the name of a fierce hope and belief in our collective capacity to engender the transformation to which this moment is calling.

### **How Trauma Lodges in the Body –On Being Podcast**

<https://onbeing.org/programs/ellen-langer-science-of-mindlessness-and-mindfulness-nov2017/>

Human memory is a sensory experience, says psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk. Through his longtime research and innovation in trauma treatment, he shares what he’s learning about how bodywork like yoga or eye movement therapy can restore a sense of goodness and safety. What he’s learning speaks to a resilience we can all cultivate in the face of the overwhelming events — which, after all, make up the drama of culture, of news, and of life.

### **Why Is the World So Beautiful?**

<http://www.onbeing.org/programs/frank-wilczek-why-is-the-world-so-beautiful/>

The world’s beauty as an embodiment of truth. Nobel physicist Frank Wilczek sees beauty as a compass for truth, discovery,

and meaning. His book, [A Beautiful Question](#), is a long meditation on the question: “Does the world embody beautiful ideas?” He’s the unusual scientist willing to analogize his discoveries about the deep structure of reality with deep meaning in the human everyday.

### **The Secret Emotional Life of Clothes**

<http://www.npr.org/programs/invisibilia/485605882/the-secret-emotional-life-of-clothes?showDate=2016-07-22>

Do clothes have the power to transform us? A show featuring seven separate stories about how the clothes we wear affect us [and embody us] more than we think (though perhaps less than we hope).

## **Articles**

### **The Shared Experience of Built Sacred Spaces**

*Sarah Smarsh*

What does your church space embody? Even on a humble patch of flat grassland, there’s a recognizable energy field inside a place designated for speaking with God. How could there not be in a building that has contained so many prayers and songs, so many tears over dead farmers in open caskets, so many smiles at crying babies with holy water running down their cheeks?...

<https://onbeing.org/blog/when-the-physical-becomes-secondary-the-shared-experience-of-built-sacred-spaces/>

### **Embracing “Today’s Body”**

*How to shift from a "fix it" mindset to approaching the body with more kindness and acceptance.*

In a recent yoga class I attended, the teacher, when she moved us through the poses, used the term “today’s body.” She didn’t say your body or even the body, but today’s body. I liked the unexpected playfulness of that expression. Immediately it made my body feel more acceptable, less personal, and at the same time more connected with the other people in the

room—and their bodies. We all have a “today’s body.”...

<http://www.mindful.org/two-mindfulness-practices-get-back-touch-body/>

### **Six Ways to Be Embodied While You Eat**

Informal mindfulness practices for those of us who don’t have five minutes to contemplate a raisin.

<http://www.mindful.org/6-ways-practice-mindful-eating/>

### **The Body Divided**

*Ona Gritz*

*from the Bellingham Review & Utne Reader*

A woman with cerebral palsy gets comfortable in her own skin

<http://www.utne.com/arts/the-body-divided>

### **The Cosmic Christ**

*Richard Rohr*

<https://cac.org/christ-in-evolution-2017-04-04/>

Franciscan theology on the whole emphasized the incarnation as the love of God made visible in the world. Love is the reason for creation. God is inherent in life itself, that God is the life force of everything who grows things from the inside. In humans and animals this is experienced as sexuality, in plants as photosynthesis...Death is simply a transformative stage.

### **I Met God, She’s Black**

*Anita Little*

<http://religiondispatches.org/i-met-god-shes-black-an-exhibit-makes-the-black-female-body-a-temple/>

“To some degree, Black Lives Matter is shifting that narrative because you have queer black women at the forefront that are really the voice of challenging authority and protecting black bodies. With this exhibition, I wanted a space for black women to talk about how they value themselves against an environment that constantly attempts to dehumanize them and their contributions.”

### **Uses of the Erotic**

*Audre Lorde*

<http://www.cds.hawaii.edu/sites/default/files/downloads/resources/diversity/SisterOutside.pdf>

The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference. Another important way in which the erotic connection functions is the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy. In the way my body stretches to music and opens into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms...

### **Emerson’s Mirror**

*Richard Higgins*

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/ralph-waldo-emersons-unitarian-legacy>

Emerson and the Transcendentalists are probably more relevant now than they were in their time,” said the Rev. Suzanne Meyer, associate minister of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta. “They speak out of our UU tradition to a postmodern mindset that is tired of scientism and reductionism, just as they were reacting against the Enlightenment rationalism of their day. They offer us a naturalist spirituality, a naturalist mysticism, without metaphysics and supernaturalism.”Music

### **What If God Was One Of Us**

*Joan Osborne*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Gx1Pv02w3Q>

*Covers:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OeXY678B7pM>

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

### **Everybody Here Is a Cloud**

*Cloud Cult*

...And everybody here is a cloud  
And everybody here will evaporate this  
You came up off the ground  
From a million little pieces  
Have you found where your place is?

Have you found where your place is?...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28IjHKVU6mo>

### Right Here Right Now

*Jesus Jones*

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

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kA\\_oAcWCM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kA_oAcWCM)

### Connected

*Brian Tate performed by City Soul Choir*

I am a part of you. You are a part of me.

And so together we are one body...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUKyWJ7DSg0>

## Movies

### I Am Not Your Negro

An inspiring documentary on the legacy of African-American writer and activist, James Baldwin. A raw and moving engagement with our embodiment of racism.

*Trailer:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5ZeLuVHTbg>

*Review:*

<http://www spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/28329/i-am-not-your-negro>

### Captain Fantastic

An astonishing, touching and inspiring film about an unconventional father trying to make his life and parenting an embodiment of his values. Also an exploration of what happens when those values are not also embodied by the surrounding society.

[https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/captain\\_fantastic](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/captain_fantastic)

### My Love, Don't Cross That River

*A jubilant celebration of commitment, intimacy and embodying a single life, together.*

[https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/my\\_love\\_dont\\_cross\\_that\\_river](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/my_love_dont_cross_that_river)

### Review:

<http://www spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/28206/my-love-dont-cross-that-river>

## Books

### A Christmas Carol

*Charles Dickens*

[https://www.amazon.com/Unlikely-Pilgrimage-Harold-Fry-Novel/dp/0812983459/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF\\_8&qid=1507756733&sr=8-1&keywords=unlikely+pilgrimage+of+harold+fry+by+rachel+joyce](https://www.amazon.com/Unlikely-Pilgrimage-Harold-Fry-Novel/dp/0812983459/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF_8&qid=1507756733&sr=8-1&keywords=unlikely+pilgrimage+of+harold+fry+by+rachel+joyce)

*Pilgrimage-Harold-Fry-*

*Novel/dp/0812983459/ref=sr\_1\_1?ie=UTF\_8&qid=1507756733&sr=8-*

*1&keywords=unlikely+pilgrimage+of+harold+fry+by+rachel+joyce*

Each of the ghosts in this classic story are an incarnation of an element of the holiday, and the characters incarnations of the ways one can react to or creatively take part in the celebration.

### Grounded: Finding God in the World

*Diana Butler Bass*

Bass argues that what appears to be a decline actually signals a major transformation in how people understand and experience God. The distant God of conventional religion has given way to a more embodied sense of the sacred that is with us in the world...in the soil, the water, the sky, in our homes and neighborhoods, and in the global commons.

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

### An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith

*Barbara Brown Taylor*

Taylor shares how she learned to find God beyond the church walls by embracing the sacred in the natural parts of everyday life.”

“There is no spiritual treasure to be found apart from the bodily experiences of human life on the earth.

<https://www.amazon.com/Altar-World-Geography-Faith/dp/0061370479>

<http://www spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/view/18828/an-altar-in-the-world>

### A Beautiful Question: Finding Nature's Deep Design

*by Frank Wilczek*

Nobel physicist Frank Wilczek sees beauty as a compass for truth, discovery, and meaning. His

book, [A Beautiful Question](#), is a long meditation on the question: “Does the world embody beautiful ideas?”

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/aug/01/a-beautiful-question-natures-deep-design-frank-wilczek-review>

## **Landscapes of Aging and Spirituality:**

### **Essays**

Nineteen UU writers reflect on embodying the experience of aging and the spirituality of aging. Alternately tender and frank, funny and wistful, these heartfelt ruminations offer companionship for those walking and embracing the journey of later life.

<https://www.amazon.com/Landscapes-Aging-Spirituality-Kathleen-Montgomery/dp/1558967591>

*GA panel discussion with some of the authors:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqSLHt5seI8>

## **Between the World and Me**

*Ta-Nehisi Coates*

Although the book has been widely praised as a monumental text about black life, it’s more specifically a book about how to live free in a black male body.

Review: <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/ta-nehisi-coates-and-a-generation-waking-up>

This packet was created based on the Soul Matters Sharing Circle model of small groups.



<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcirce>

