



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred in
Our Everyday Spaces



June 2022
Celebrating Blessings

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The Welcome Mat

What Does it Mean to be a Family Celebrating Blessings?

We've all been so cautious about celebrating the past couple of years. There were logistical concerns about disinfecting and virtual technology and local regulations. There were social concerns about safety, and sensitivity, and setting good examples. And there were spiritual concerns, which maybe went unstated: Is it appropriate to celebrate in the midst of suffering? Where does joyful acknowledgement and appreciation of one's good fortune fit in the broader human context of plague and trauma? Sometimes it felt wrong to count blessings and wrong not to.

Have we turned a corner? Is this a new chapter? Maybe. But even as I type this, I'm feeling around with my left hand for some wood to knock. So what might it mean to celebrate blessings in the first summer month of the tentatively post-pandemic era?

This month's packet is full of questions around the idea of celebration and blessings, asking each member of our families to consider what it means to bless and be blessed, to celebrate and to postpone celebration. One constant is a call to celebrate smaller and more blessedly mundane occurrences as a matter of spiritual practice. Your new morning routine worked out and you made the 6:30 train as you'd hoped? Celebrate with a favorite, upbeat song on your playlist. Upon cleaning out the chicken coop, you discovered enough eggs to make up an unplanned but promising to be delicious quiche lunch? Celebrate by sending a generous slice over to the neighbor. Noticed and acknowledged a family member's microaggression, but didn't get hooked by it, and breathed your way through finishing the conversation? Celebrate by calling a friend to speak aloud that win! Read an article about sea levels making the Marshall Islands almost uninhabitable? Close your eyes, take a sip of the clean water that you have access to, feel that blessing in your body, and write you senator asking them to support renewing the [Compact of Free Association](#) with the Marshall Islands so the people receive the financial support they need to work through climate change-induced challenges to their survival.

Do you catch my drift here? What it means to be a family celebrating blessings is that we adopt a way of being—through awareness, through practice, through playfulness—that allows us to be exactly where we are, and to know that all will be well. That is what we celebrate: [all will be well](#).

With so much gratitude for the blessing of YOU,

Teresa, on behalf of the Soul Matters team



At the Table

Celebrating Blessings 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.

Last month, we spent some time adorning our tables with beauty.

Discussion Questions

1. Why are your friends glad you are in their lives? (i.e. how might they say you are a blessing to them?)
2. How does your family show gratitude after feeling blessed by life or others?
3. What's the best thing about a party?
4. Which family celebrations are your favorite?
5. Sometimes it can be a blessing when something around you finally *stops*. What's something whose ending was a blessing?
6. Who is the least likely person in the family to say "bless you" when someone sneezes?
7. If you could offer an anonymous blessing—big or small—to a stranger, what would you bless them with?
8. What has been a "blessing in disguise" in your life recently, something that seemed like misfortune, but actually turned out to be good in some ways?



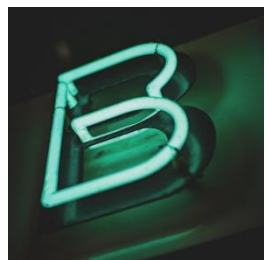
Around the Neighborhood

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!

Searching for Celebrating Blessings

Play I-Spy together as a family when next you gather at a favorite community space!

1. B – a babbling baby or a big dog
2. L – the sound of loud laughter or lovely leaves
3. E – an envelope or someone eating
4. S – salty snacks or cool shoes
5. S – slimy snails (think of our At the Bedside story!) or someone wearing a skirt
6. I – the color indigo or ice cream
7. N – the number nine or a bird nest
8. G – greens growing or sun glasses
9. S – someone wearing sandals or someone sliding down a slide



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.

The Blessing of Blackness

Back in 2017, actor Kofi Siriboe spoke about the blessing of seeing the world as a Black man, and the Internet loved his message. Do you remember it? Here it is again:

<https://www.theroot.com/watch-kofi-siriboe-says-being-black-is-a-blessing-1796895440/amp>

Siriboe's is not a message we hear enough. The story of Blackness in America too often focuses on very real hardships and oppressions, while leaving out the innovation, intellectualism, artistry, magic, and celebration of the Black experience. This month, we want to help change this narrative.

Invitation: Spend a week familiarizing yourself with the Black-experience focused, online magazine, [The Root](#). (You may already be a fan, in which case, spend some time each day catching up on their recent content!) Find an article that speaks to you and share this piece with friends. Take the time to frame your appreciation so your friends understand what it is about the content that you choose to share that speaks to you, personally, and ask them to do the same!

The Blessing of Climate Truth Tellers

We've lifted up this particular gem before, but their work is so essential, challenging, and often funny that's it's making another appearance. Of course we're talking about Mary Anaise Heglar and Amy Westervelt's climate-justice podcast, [Hot Take](#). Better than any other resource we know, Hot Take explores all the edges of the terrain where anti-racism and climate-justice overlap. Want to know what we mean? Here's an excerpt from [a recent post](#): "[Denying climate change] creates an almost legitimate rationale to close the borders: sorry, there's limited resources, and we have to keep them for ourselves. We've seen this already. It's called eco-fascism and I would say it's the next logical step from climate denial except they're both just different incarnations of white supremacy."

Invitation: Subscribe, subscribe, subscribe. Know this science, this perspective, this genius! Become a paid subscriber for \$10 a month. Make this content part of your regular conversations with friends and others in your social circle. Amplify these ideas.



At Play

Playing Games and Celebrating Blessings

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

Option A: D.I.Y. Outside Tents

June is [Great Outdoors Month](#)! What better way to celebrate the blessing of June weather than to make your own cozy, breezy, colorful, outdoor hideaway? When you create an intimate and customized outdoor play space, it makes everything that happens inside it all the more special: tea parties, dinosaur play, Legos, summer reading, or simply decorating the space as its own activity.

A handful of bamboo or rivercane poles (or PVC, or tension rods!), a funky sheet, and plenty of clothespins or alligator clips, and you have a pop-up outdoor escape in about five minutes! Check out [this tutorial](#) for pictures but know that you can riff on this basic idea to use what you have.

If you're blessed with access to a plethora of long poles, you can set up a pop-up tent city, and go visiting one another!

Option B: Obstacle Course Around Your House

To celebrate the transition to summer, you might surprise your child with this on the first day of summer vacation, or on a rainy day when you can't be outside. Set up [an obstacle course around the house](#) and have a contest to see who can complete it first. It doesn't need to be complicated (although if your family would find that fun, it could be!), but it does need to be designed in a way that everyone can participate.

Here's an example: Staring in the bedroom, run down the hall, hurdling over the two, overturned laundry baskets, then dash into the kitchen, banging each of the eight pots and pans before coming back out again, then into the bathroom, stand in the shower and sing happy birthday twice... And/or scooter down the hall, saying the ABC's backward, then wheel into the family room where three hula hoops are set up—go to the center of each one—move to the bedroom and twirl around three times... You get the idea! Remember, the parent participates, too; that's part of what makes it so fun!



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.

June’s Mantra

This too shall pass.

You know this one, right? And usually we pass it around when we’re suffering through something that feels utterly unbearable in the moment: this, too, shall pass, meaning our suffering will come to an end.

However, it is also an exquisite reminder to celebrate the blessings in the everyday. Our children’s eyes wide with wonder upon seeing a “first” --first shooting star, first five-layer birthday cake, first concert from their own favorite artist; the evening everyone’s home for dinner and grandad’s lasagna has never been more gooey-delicious and little sister’s knock-knock jokes get everyone laughing harder than they’ve laughed in years; news that next-door neighbors’ family was reunited, finally!, after harrowing months of detention at the border; these are all cherished blessings to celebrate! The joy, the relief, the awe, the profound gratitude that we are flooded with when these moments well up within us and often overflow from our eyes...well, *this too shall pass*. It’s not just the suffering that is ephemeral. Happiness is, too. That’s part of the bargain of being human.

So commit this month to celebrating these blessings, these everyday moments. Make this your daily mantra for a June in which we are all so blessedly thankful to be alive and in one another’s company. We know the ups and downs will come and go, come and go, as they always have, and always will, and knowing this we will choose appreciation every 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 Blessing of Fresh Water: Celebrating Snail Girl

As Unitarian Universalists, we formally celebrate the blessing of our Earth's clean waters during our Water Ceremony, usually held around September. Use this story in June to help prime the pump for that theme at summer's end!

Not all cultures have origin stories for clean water, and not all locations around North America have the same relationship to clean water. Before you tell this tale, share a little bit about the landscape where this story originated, and the Navajo people from whom it came.

The story is told in the beautiful picture book, [Snail Girl Brings Water: A Navajo Story](#), by Dineh storyteller Geri Keams (whose bio you can read [here](#)) and Richard Zeiler-Martin, from 1998. A condensed and adapted version is online here:

<https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/multigenerational/gather/workshop1/149426.shtml>

Stretching the Story:

- What's so important about fresh water?
- Where does your community's fresh water come from?
- Why didn't the Water Clan think to send Snail Girl at the beginning of the quest?
- Why was Snail Girl able to bring back the fresh water when Otter, Beaver, Frog, and Turtle couldn't?
- At first, Snail Girl was worried that her effort wasn't good enough. But what actually happened?
- Tell about a time that you didn't get the job done perfectly, or quickly, but that because of your work, the thing got done just the same.



On the Porch

Raising a Child Celebrating Blessings 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

Celebrating the Blessing of Getting Old(er)

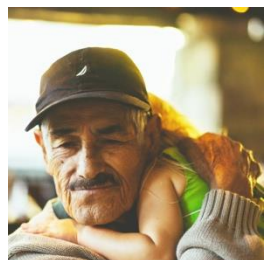
What a blessing to be here, now. And yet, for many of us, the transitions we experience in an aging body, with an aging mind, and having had decades now of experience with self-consciousness and spiritual challenges, can make getting older feel like anything but a blessing.

Aloud, with your conversation partner, read the short excerpt below from the introduction of Sue Moon’s 2010 book, *This is Getting Old: Zen Thoughts on Aging with Humor and Dignity*:

“I was never planning on getting old, myself. I wanted to live a long time, but I didn’t expect to get tattered in the process. When I saw it was happening to me, too, I decided to write about it. I wanted to look right into the face of oldness.

Buddhism says that when you don’t turn away from what is difficult, new possibilities open up. It’s a good time to let go of unimportant things. Also, it’s a good time to put a non-skid mat in the shower. There’s less time less ahead of me, but the real miracle is to be awake right now, even when I’m asleep. Besides, I’m not getting older alone. Everybody’s doing it. We’re doing it together, no matter how old we are. “

Share your thoughts on this passage. How does not aging alone make a difference in your life? In what ways are you feeling “tattered” these days—mentally, emotionally, physically, or spiritually? When you “look right into the face of oldness,” what thoughts and feelings arise for you?



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. Who in your life seems to always be focusing on their blessings? What seems to be their secret?
2. What celebration have you been putting off? Could it be time to finally enjoy and observe a happening? How might you create a celebration for an ordinary thing your family loves?
3. In what ways is your home a blessing to your family? What might it mean to create a blessing ritual for your home?
4. Name a physical feature of your own that you are grateful to have been blessed with.
5. What are the blessings from your childhood? When did you come to see these circumstances as blessings?
6. What would you have missed out on if you were not blessed to be a caregiver of your particular young person?
7. How might a member of your community consider you a blessing?
8. Sometimes there is blessing in an absence. What absence are you celebrating lately?
9. We often think of blessings as somehow "undeserved." What blessing have you experienced—unsought, maybe undeserved—that you felt compelled to "pay forward"?
10. What nuisance of aging has turned out to be a blessing to you?
11. If you understood your own birth as intended to be a blessing to this earth we are made from and on, and to which we'll one day return, what would you do differently at this exact point in your life?



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!

A Home Blessing “after” Covid

Many of us have different relationships with our homes now than we did at earlier points in the last two years. Whatever changes your family went through—and acknowledging that for many, the threat of the virus is still real—now might be a good time to have a small ritual to mourn, celebrate, and redirect energies around the concept of home.

One simple idea could be to choose a day this month to turn off the lights in your home a little early, and soon before bed, to light a candle and go around to each opening—window and door—thanking your home for sheltering you and asking this place to keep allowing you to feel warmth and togetherness in its walls.

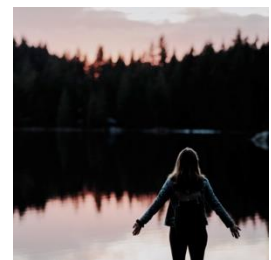
A slightly more involved idea could be to cook or bake something very fragrant that fills your home with yummy-to-you smells. Before you eat together, acknowledge that your home is full of wonderful smells, just as it has been full of other things unseen in the past two years. Go around naming these; they might be love, sickness, fear, school-on-the-computer, etc. Ask each person in your family to take a moment to consider the gift of a home full of love and yummy smells, and then dig in with a spirit of celebrating your blessings.



Blessing for a Soulful Home Provider

After Nadia Bolz Weber's [Blessed...](#)

Blessed are those whose bodies bear the marks of parenthood; blessed are those who wanted nothing more but to parent, as well as those who did not intend to parent but nonetheless are showing up for it; blessed are the diaper changers, the bath-givers, the schedule-keepers; blessed are the nursers, the bottle feeders, the tube feeders, the feeders; blessed are those who hold the bucket or hold back hair at the toilet's edge; blessed are those who rouse at dark hours and sneak into the next room to check on the baby/teen/elder whose transition feels so fragile; blessed are those who read bedtime stories in silly voices even as they still have a sinkful of dirty dishes to do before the night is through; blessed are those who leave it until tomorrow; blessed are those who bear witness to the other parents' struggles and say, "I see you. I feel it, too"; blessed are the homework helpers, the playground squabble soothers, the sleepover supervisors; blessed are those who break the bad news tenderly and sit by silently until asked for advice; blessed are those who teach taking up for another, however unpopular the position; blessed are those who muddle muddling forth at justice-making, which is to say, modeling justice-making the only way it is ever done; blessed are the porridge stirrers and smoothie blenders, the sack lunch packers and crockpot fore thinkers, and also the drive-throughers and the pizza grabbers, as well as those who cultivate generational appreciation for the ready-in-ten-minutes breakfast for dinner; blessed are the other-shoe finders, the permission slip-signers, the backpack strap-repairers; blessed are those who teach knowing one's limits, and stating them unapologetically; blessed are those who are raising themselves as they raise another; blessed are those who say a few words at the tiny gravesites of beloved pets; blessed are those who anticipate arrived-home-safe texts; blessed are those who call a friend before losing their cool; blessed are those who lose their cool, and apologize after, resolving to do better; blessed are those who are learning to see their role as gradually letting go, over a couple of decades; blessed are those who ask for help, and those who aren't yet able to do so; blessed are those who see our flawed and hurting world, and choose a future for humankind, still; blessed are the parents.



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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