What Does It Mean To Be a People of Longing?

October 2018
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to Be a People of Longing?

Fall in love with
the agony of love
not the ecstasy
then the beloved
will fall in love with you

-- Rumi

Longing is part of our relationship with the divine when we recognize the divine within ourselves, each other and everywhere. Theologian, Paul Tillich, defines love as the longing for the reunion of the separated, it is the way we move from isolation into community or an experience of the holy. Belonging to ourselves, each other and God is fundamental to a fulfilling spiritual life.

Yet pursuing spiritual desires does not occur without suffering a broken heart at times. The yearning for a better world. The hunger for deep connection. The longing to actualize our full potential. Leaning into these longings is to let yourself care deeply for what can’t ever be fully attained. When it comes to the most beautiful and noble of our longings, it’s all about loving and pursuing that which will always be out of reach.

And of course we reach anyway. We can’t help ourselves. It’s what it means to be human. Plato puts it this way: “We are fired into life with a madness that comes from the gods and which would have us believe that we can have a great love, perpetuate our own seed, and contemplate the divine.” Notice the implicit plea to be grateful. It comes “from the gods” he says. This madness, this dis-ease, these unstoppable longings for great love, great change and great connection are a gift! The prize is not the moment we are finally quenched; it’s that first moment when we were wonderfully cursed with thirst! Heartbreak and heartache are not dangers to be avoided; they are signs that we are living fully and leaning into the holy dis-ease that makes us most human.

It’s why Rumi says “fall in love with the agony of love.” He knows many of us avoid pursuing our deepest hungers because of fear. No one’s deepest longings ever come true. Better to play it safe and keep those deep hungers at a distance. But in this case, playing it safe also means going numb. And we were not created to go numb.

So friends get out there this month and get your heartbroken. It won’t feel good, but you will know you are on the right path. And remember Rumi’s promise: somewhere in that agony you will feel yourself loved by and deeply connected to life.

In faith,
Andrea
Spiritual Exercises

Option A:
What Gets You Up in the Morning?

What gets you up in the morning? One can go through their whole life not knowing the answer to that. Routine too easily takes over our lives. Something is wrong when “the alarm clock” is the primary thing that pushes us into the day. This exercise asks us to get into relationship with a different source of momentum.

Your assignment: For one week, take 10 minutes at the beginning of your day or at bedtime the night before to identify one thing you want out of the coming day. One thing that you want. In the midst of all the obligations ahead of you, what one desire do you want to make room for? Keep it simple. Maybe it is nothing more than to feel the sun on your face for five minutes. Maybe it is to connect and cook tonight's meal with your daughter. Maybe it is to read or run or just have five minutes of silence. Just make it yours.

Come to your group ready to share how claiming your desire and your days changed your excitement about waking up.

Option B:
What Does It Mean to Claim the Torch?

Sometimes longing helps us name the aspirational gap between what is and what is possible. It helps us work for justice perhaps or to work for wholeness in our own lives or to repair relationships. This is both a meditative and action-oriented exercise, both of which invite you to explore your relationship with the longing for justice:

The meditative part:

Make time to watch and meditate on this five minute video: https://vimeo.com/146151529

Also consider meditating on this quote that is taken from the video:

“A movement is not a flash of light. It is a flame. It is a torch passed from one generation to the next. And every so often we are blessed with moments when the smolder transforms into a blaze again and we’re forced to race down the path of progress, again. Step. Move. Walk. Witness. Transform the movement forward…. Wake up! Our right to remain in slumber has been revoked. Silence and apathy are now the only crimes. Watch now how every breath is a dance of dissent. Every raised fist an act of resistance. Witness this moment in history turn blaze again. Every moment the
Use the video and words to help you find your place in the current social shifts and struggles taking place today. If this is one of those times when the embers of justice are ready to catch flame, what is your part? How can you contribute? What is your way of claiming the torch? Which leads to the action part of the exercise...

The action-oriented part:

As you wrestle with these questions - What is your part? How can you contribute? - identify one action-oriented commitment that qualifies as “claiming the torch.” Big or small. Personal transformation or group effort. It doesn’t matter. The important piece is figuring out what it means for you.

Option C:  
Go Big

Sometimes taking on a clear “opponent” is less overwhelming than following a passion that is guaranteed to lead you into the unknown. Sometimes, as Marianne Williamson has famously said, “It is our light not the darkness that most frightens us.” Bottom line: We often mute the voice of longing because we’re scared of what it is asking of us. We don’t want to feel desire because we know it is asking us to change, in ways that seem unimaginably hard.

But there comes a time when the voice can’t be muted. The hunger trumps the fear. The voice in your head keeps saying, “This life is too small” and “I am selling myself short.” If this is true for you, make this the month of wild embrace. Let your desire loose. Don’t just lean in, jump in.

Here’s some inspiration:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”  -- Marianne Williamson
Your Question

As always, don’t treat these questions like “homework.” You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply or take a picture the one that “hooks” you most and let it lead you where you need to go. And then come to your Soul Matters meeting prepared to share that journey with your group.

1. **How is life calling you to leap?** Whether it is a big or little leap, life continually invites us to make a choice, invest in relationship or alter our path before we know all the facts or are giving guarantees. **What edge are you standing on right now?** And how is life calling you to jump?

1. Is life calling you to nurture someone else’s longing? How can you help another lean in to the hungers and hopes budding inside them?

2. When was the last time you let yourself fall freely and fully into your longings? Are you ready to go all in?

3. Are you muting the voice of longing because you’re afraid of what it is asking of you?

4. Is it possible that God speaks to us in and through our longings? Is it possible that prayer doesn’t mean talking to God at all, but instead simply listening to our dreams?

5. How is your relationship with the desire to consume? Is it consuming you more than you’d like? More than you are willing to admit? Why not ask someone to help you stop? Very few of us can control unhealthy desires on our own.

6. What do you want to be remembered for? What do you long to leave behind?

7. Do you remember your childhood desire? Didn’t you promise yourself you’d never forget it?

8. What about the desire to be true to yourself? We so often get lost trying to meet other people’s desires that we forget our own.

9. 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 or dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started, and maybe to open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be “a people of faith.”

Word Roots
Longing: A yearning or strong desire. Craving, ache, burning, hunger, thirst, hankering.

Wise Words
Whatever the expression, everyone is ultimately talking about the same thing — an unquenchable fire, a restlessness, a longing, a disquiet, a hunger, a loneliness, a gnawing nostalgia, a wildness that cannot be tamed, a congenital all-embracing ache that lies at the center of human experience and is the ultimate force that drives everything else. This dis-ease is universal. Desire gives no exemptions.
- Ronald Rolheiser

We all carry a holy longing, a yearning to know the meaning of our lives, to have a connection with the transpersonal, to experience the spiritual dimension of human life, to return to our souls' divine origins. Spirituality is the art of creating union with something greater than ourselves, with a Higher Power.
- Jeremiah Abrams

What is the difference between desire and longing? Desire is the fever of the head. Longing is the cry of the heart.
- Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

In Buddhism, we do not find any such division of the day into tedium and recreation, or material cares and spiritual leisure, or hours to cherish and hours to reject. True improvement in our lives is not just a matter of more minutes allotted to desire, but of wiser attention and worthier behavior at all times.
- Bhikkhu Nyanasobhano

In Sufism, longing is the state of every soul before God, the pull of the soul to come Home and be united with one’s Beloved. Longing draws into itself the love of God, like a magnet. The soul cries for God as an echo of God's longing for us, and God answers.
- Hilary Hart [adapted]

Freedom is a precious gift. But freedom is more than having choices at the mall, or in the voting booth, or in the unbridled pursuit of personal pleasure. I passionately believe that our deepest longing is for the freedom Jesus spoke of, lived out and calls us to share: the freedom not to be afraid. Even small doses of that freedom will enable us to live in the world differently.
— Ted Loder in The Haunt of Grace

St John of the Cross wrote of finding the lover in darkness. The Hindus describe our longing for God as being like that of maidens mad with love, who wander the dark woods all night, searching the ground for the footprints of Lord Krishna.
— Sophy Burnham in The Path of Praye

There are seasons, in human affairs, of inward and outward revolution, when new depths seem to be broken up in the soul, when new wants are unfolded in multitudes, and a new and undefined good is thirsted for. There are periods when...to dare, is the highest wisdom.
— William Ellery Channing
Eroticism, being in relation, calls the inner life into play. No longer numb we feel the magnetic pull of our bodies toward something stronger, more vital than simply ourselves. Arousal becomes a dance with longing. We form a secret partnership with possibility.

- Terry Tempest Williams in Listening to the Land

"Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And if you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you."
— Friedrich Nietzsche

— Aldous Huxley, Brave New World

“The feelings that hurt most, the emotions that sting most, are those that are absurd - The longing for impossible things, precisely because they are impossible; nostalgia for what never was; the desire for what could have been; regret over not being someone else; dissatisfaction with the world’s existence. All these half-tones of the soul’s consciousness create in us a painful landscape, an eternal sunset of what we are.”
— Fernando Pessoa

“But as, in ethics, evil is a consequence of good, so, in fact, out of joy is sorrow born. Either the memory of past bliss is the anguish of today, or the agonies which are have their origin in the ecstasies which might have been.”
— Edgar Allan Poe, Berenice

"Prayer is not asking. It is a longing of the soul. It is daily admission of one’s weakness. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart."
— Mahatma Gandhi

"That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong.”
— F. Scott Fitzgerald

May you be drenched with the longing for peace, and make justice blossom on earth.
— Hildegard of Bingen

“A movement is not a flash of light. It is a flame. It is a torch passed from one generation to the next. And every so often we are blessed with moments when the smolder transforms into a blaze again and we’re forced to race down the path of progress, again. Step. Move. Walk. Witness. Transform the movement forward…. Wake up! Our right to remain in slumber has been revoked. Silence and apathy are now the only crimes. Watch now how every breath is a dance of dissent. Every raised fist an act of resistance. Witness this moment in history. Turn blaze again. Every moment the flame is growing. But will you be the fire. This time, will you be ember? Will you be catalyst and combustion? Will you claim the torch?”

Poetry

Song of Songs 3:1-2 (The Message)

1-4 Restless in bed and sleepless through the night,
I longed for my lover.
I wanted him desperately. His absence was painful.
So I got up, went out and roved the city, hunting through streets and down alleys.
I wanted my lover in the worst way!
I looked high and low, and didn’t find him.
And then the night watchmen found me
as they patrolled the darkened city.
“Have you seen my dear lost love?” I asked.
No sooner had I left them than I found him,
found my dear lost love.
I threw my arms around him and held him tight,
wouldn’t let him go until I had him home again,
 safe at home beside the fire.

Hadewijch II
Lal Ded, (Jane Hirschfield, translated)

I was passionate,
Filled with longing
I searched far and wide.

But the day that the Truthful One
Found me,
I was at home.

I Want to be Better
Howard Thurman

The concern which I lay bare before God
today is my need to be better:
I want to be better than I am in my most
ordinary day-by-day contacts:
With my friends—
With my family—
With my casual contacts—
With my business relations—
With my associates in work and play.
I want to be better than I am in the
responsibilities that are mine:
I am conscious of many petty
resentments.
I am conscious of increasing hostility
toward certain people.
I am conscious of the effort to be
pleasing for effect, not because it is a
genuine feeling on my part.
I am conscious of a tendency to shift to
other shoulders burdens that are clearly
my own.
I want to be better in the quality of my
religious experience:
I want to develop an honest and clear
prayer life.
I want to develop a sensitiveness to the
will of God in my own life.
I want to develop a charitableness
toward my fellows that is greater even
than my most exaggerated pretensions.
I want to be better than I am.
I lay bare this need and this desire before
God in the quietness of this moment.

Today like every other day
Rumi
https://onbeing.org/blog/rumi-a-perfect-voice-for-the-
spiritual-longing-and-energy-of-our-time/

Today, like every other day, we wake up
empty and frightened. Don’t open the
doors to the study and begin reading.
Take down a musical instrument. Let the
beauty we love be what we do. There are
hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the
ground.

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and
right doing, there is a field. I’ll meet you
there. When the soul lies down in that
grass, the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase each
other doesn’t make any sense

Go to the limits of your longing
Rainer Maria Rilke
https://onbeing.org/blog/go-limits-longing/

God speaks to each of us as he makes us,
then walks with us silently out of the
night.
These are the words we dimly hear:
You, sent out beyond your recall,
go to the limits of your longing.
Embody me.
Flare up like a flame
and make big shadows I can move in.
Let everything happen to you: beauty
and terror.
Just keep going. No feeling is final.
Don’t let yourself lose me.
Nearby is the country they call life.
You will know it by its seriousness.
Give me your hand.
~ from Book of Hours I, 59

The House of Belonging
David Whyte
https://onbeing.org/blog/the-house-of-belonging/
I awoke this morning in the gold light
turning this way and that thinking for a
moment it was one day like any other.

But the veil had gone from my darkened
heart and I thought it must have been the
quiet candlelight that filled my room,
it must have been the first easy rhythm
with which I breathed myself to sleep,
it must have been the prayer I said
speaking to the otherness of the night.

And I thought his is the good day
you could meet your love, his is the gray
day someone close to you could die.

This is the day you realize how easily
the thread is broken
between this world and the next
and I found myself sitting up
in the quiet pathway of light,
the tawny close grained cedar
burning round me like fire
and all the angels of this housely
heaven ascending through the first
roof of light he sun has made.

This is the bright home
in which I live, this is where
I ask my friends to come,
this is where I want to love all the things
it has taken me so long to learn to love.

This is the temple of my adult aloneness
and I belong to that aloneness as I
belong to my life.

There is no house
like the house of belonging.
The Peace of Wild Things
Wendell Berry
https://onbeing.org/blog/wendell-berry-the-peace-of-wild-things/
When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least
sound in fear of what my life and my
children's lives may be,

I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the
great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with
forethought of grief. I come into the
presence of still water.

And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am
free.

The Road Not Taken
Robert Frost
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44272/the-road-not-taken
Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear; Though as for that the passing there Had worn them really about the same, we each bring

And both that morning equally lay In leaves no step had trodden black. Oh, I kept the first for another day! Yet knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh Somewhere ages and ages hence: Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference."

The Longing for Something More
Gretchen Haley
https://www.uua.org/worship/words/opening/longing-something-more
Every little thing that breaks your heart Is welcome here

We'll make a space for it Give it its due time and praise for the wanting it represents the longing for something more, some healing hope that remains not yet

We promise no magic no making it all better But offer only this circle of trust This human community that remembers though imperfectly that sings and prays though sometimes awkwardly

This gathering that loves, though not yet enough We're still practicing after all, still learning, still in need of help and partners Still becoming able to receive all this beauty and all these gifts

Come, let us worship together.

Articles, Podcasts and Videos

Song: An Antidote for Longing
https://onbeing.org/blog/an-antidote-for-longing/
I have since learned that “Wukun” is a song about storm clouds, but it feels so reminiscent of that longing feeling — a deep sense of connection and disconnection all at once — and has become one of my favorites. May this song bring you something for whatever you are longing for, too.

Luminosity [and Longing]
https://vimeo.com/24449670
from one of the creators: “In making this video in June and I took snippets of each other's poetry and writing and wove them into a love story. We didn't know where we were going in the beginning, but we knew it was about longing....”

“The Case for Reparations”
Ta Nehisi Coates
http://tinyurl.com/nopprgt
This article makes the case that reparations are one way to come to terms with centuries of denying desires: “Two hundred fifty years of slavery. Ninety years of Jim Crow. Sixty years of separate but equal. Thirty-five years of racist housing policy. Until we reckon with our compounding moral debts, America will never be whole.”

The Myth of Multitasking: Longing to Be Absorbed Wholly
Courtney Martin
Multitask better so you can do more. Walk through any cafe with a strong, consistent Wi-Fi signal and peer over the shoulders of the heavily caffeinated. You will see how faithfully we believe in our power to do it all, all at once, particularly online: ten tabs open on a browser, a GChat conversation in the right hand corner of a half-written email, a twitter stream flowing by with a thousand tributaries threatening to siphon off your attention.

**Longing for Absolutes in a Relative World and What Gives Lasting Meaning to Our Lives**

*Maria Popova*


“We are idealists and we are realists. We are dreamers and we are builders. We are experiencers and we are experimenters. We long for certainties, yet we ourselves are full of the ambiguities of the Mona Lisa and the I Ching. We ourselves are a part of the yin-yang of the world.”

**What Breaks Your Heart?**

*Maria Shriver*


What breaks your heart? What does your soul long for? And, how is that connected to how you are living your life now? I love this question because it’s made me think about my passion and purpose in a whole new way. I wanted to share it with you today because I believe this is a question that applies to all of us. And, I also believe that the answer lies deep within each and every one of us.

**Becoming Free of Our Substitute Life**

*Ezra Bayda*


Do you try to maintain a sense of order and control, to avoid feeling the fear of chaos, of things falling apart? Do you try to gain acceptance and approval, to avoid the fear of rejection, of not fitting in? Do you try to excel and attain success, to avoid the fear of feeling unworthy? Or do you seek busyness in adventure or pleasure, to avoid the deep holes of longing and loneliness? All of these strategies have one thing in common: they keep us encased in our artificial or substitute life.

**Trees are Sanctuaries**

*Herman Hesse*


A longing to wander tears my heart when I hear trees rustling in the wind at evening. If one listens to them silently for a long time, this longing reveals its kernel, its meaning. It is not so much a matter of escaping from one's suffering, though it may seem to be so. It is a longing for home, for a memory of the mother, for new metaphors for life. It leads home. Every path leads homeward, every step is birth, every step is death, every grave is mother.

**Movies**

**Being John Malkovich**

[https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/1908](https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/1908)

An Alice-in-Wonderland extravaganza about the yearning we all have, occasionally, to be someone else.

**Bend it Like Beckham**

[https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/5655](https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/5655)

A delightful English comedy that charts the single-mindedness of an Anglo-Indian girl to fulfill her dream of becoming a soccer player.
Bridges of Madison County
https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/4846
Probes the poetics of desire and yearning in two soulmates.

The Hours
https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/5466
A mesmerizing and multidimensional drama based on a Pulitzer prize-winning novel about the yearning of three women and their varied paths to passion, meaning, and happiness.

Songs

“Desire” by U2
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8rQ575DWD8

“Make You Feel My Love” by Adele
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0put0_a--Ng

“At Last” by Etta James
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-cbOl96RFM

“You Can’t Always Get What You Want” by the Rolling Stones
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EM_p1Az05Jo

“Monticello” by Erin Rae
Note the link includes the song as well as a reflection about “the process of growing up, from sweet nostalgia and a wild desire for novelty to wisdom, compassion, and creativity.”
http://tinyurl.com/hy499tx

Books

Book of Longing
Leonard Cohen
Leonard Cohen is one of the great writers, performers, and most consistently daring artists of our time. Book of Longing is Cohen’s collection of poems. Book of Longing contains erotic, playful, and provocative line drawings and artwork on every page, by the author, which interact in exciting and unexpected ways on the page with poetry that is timeless, meditative, and at times darkly humorous. The book brings together all the elements that have brought Leonard Cohen’s artistry with language worldwide recognition.

Book of Love: poems of ecstasy and longing
Rumi (translated by Coleman Brooks)
In "What Hurts the Soul," Rumi reminds us: "Love is the way messengers / from the mystery tell us things." The chapter headings signal the many vehicles of the Beloved-wandering, grief, tavern madness, absence, animal energies, friendship. There is rigor here as well as great playfulness. Rumi really mixes it up. Love flows and grows through emptiness, surrender, and silence. But God, as Rumi spells out in "The Stupid Things I've Done," can also make glories "from the fertilizer of sinning." Barks quotes the Sufi master: "Our loving is the way God's secret gets told!" Now there's something to take to heart!

Come Thief
Jane Hirshfield
A revelatory, indispensable collection of poems from Jane Hirshfield that centers on beauty, time, and the full embrace of an existence that time cannot help but steal from our arms.

Open to Desire
Mark Epstein
It is common in both Buddhism and Freudian psychoanalysis to treat desire as the root of all suffering and problems, but psychiatrist Mark Epstein believes this to be a grave misunderstanding. Bringing wisdom to a fresh and compelling topic, Epstein shows how desire can be a teacher in its own right,

The Agony and the Ecstasy: A Biographical novel of Michelangelo
Irving Stone
https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_s_i_1_18?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=the+agony+and+the+ecstasy&sprefix=the+agony+and+the+&crid=24A8DL1GLWOOG
His time—the turbulent Renaissance, the years of poisoning princes, warring Popes, and the all-powerful de'Medici family. His loves—the frail and lovely daughter of Lorenzo de'Medici, the ardent mistress of Marco Aldovrandi, and his last love, his greatest love—the beautiful, unhappy Vittoria Colonna...

This packet was created based on the Soul Matters Sharing Circle model of small groups by Andrea Johnson. To be used at Unity Church only.

https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/