



UU Writers

The Gift of **Pluralism**

Participant Packet

May 2024

Personal Warm Up Prompts

Ease your way into this month's theme with one or more of these question prompts. Use them as a free association exercise. Don't try to create a full or finished piece of writing. Simply take around 5 minutes to jot down bullet point thoughts, a short intuitive response, idea fragments or maybe even sketch some images. Have fun getting your creative juices going!

Option A: What were you taught in your family of origin about pluralism and welcoming difference? How does that still impact you today?

Option B: If you weren't afraid of being judged or rejected, what part of your pluralistic self would you let out into the world?

Option C: How has an experience of having your difference included left a mark on you?

Option D: Whose refusal to conform made it possible for you to add your uniqueness to the pluralism of the world?

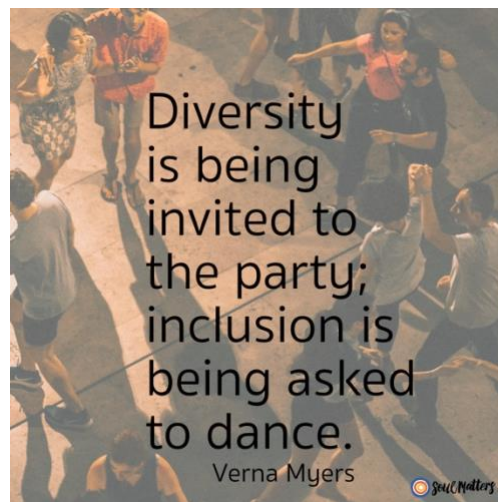
Option E: What aspect of your life partner, child or close friend do you need to do a better job of embracing and welcoming in?

Option F: Listen to and reflect on one of these songs on *The Gift of Pluralism*:

- **32 Flavors - Ani DiFranco**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_pMYbleHpU&list=PLvXOKgOQVYP7cu9PIA38nUCI493myRFta&index=4
- **Border Crossing - Namoli Brennet**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vh_DX4rz_j8&list=PLvXOKgOQVYP7cu9PIA38nUCI493myRFta&index=5
- **This Is Me – Greatest Showman Cast**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjxugyZCfuw&list=PLvXOKgOQVYP7cu9PIA38nUCI493myRFta&index=12>

*p.s. If music is your writing muse, you might want to check out our entire **Soul Matters music playlist** on *The Gift of Pluralism*:*

- Click [here](#) for the Spotify playlist on Pluralism.
- Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on Pluralism.



Writing Project Exercises

Suggested Steps

Step 1: Which project exercise/prompt is yours and why?

Spend some time reflecting on the options below. Treat it as a spiritual discernment exercise, in which you try to discern which option seems to be emotionally pulling you towards it. For those who are comfortable, you might think of it as asking, “Which exercise is my inner voice inviting me to explore?” Or to put it another way, the goal is to figure out which exercise is “yours” and why that is so.

Step 2: First thoughts

Write whatever comes to mind in response to the exercise you selected. Free associate using words, sentence fragments, images.

Step 3: Write your piece

Write your reflection, poem, story, song, or story inspired by your writing.

Take your time. For some, their piece will spill out whole cloth in a matter of moments. For others of us, it will be a journey of twists and turns, with us writing and rewriting as first drafts open us to new insights, inspiring second drafts, and even thirds.

Option A: The Pluralism Within

Our [many] identities... should be praised, celebrated and paraded in the streets. They are Mardi gras and gumbo pots... refusing to be boxed in.

- [Lana Los Angeles](#)

Pluralism is most often applied to conversations about communities. But it’s just as relevant to individuals. Indeed, we don’t have an identity; we have *identities*. As Walt Whitman famously said, “I am large, I contain multitudes!”

But we rarely - if ever - step back to reflect on how those multitudes influence us and interact with each other. And without that reflective distance, our many identities end up sneaking into the driver’s wheel. So spend some time this month getting to know your many selves, your pluralism within.

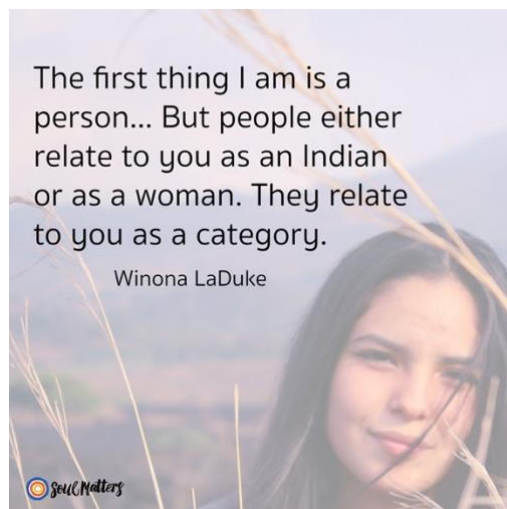
1. Start by mapping/listing as many of your identity markers as you can. We’ve put together a chart with various identity categories to help: https://docs.google.com/document/d/17LZghnZV3QnNB_zLx7ug7yDdkO9t_8RFMDvN87fBb8A/edit?usp=sharing
2. Reflect on your list of identities using this set of questions: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BCaesIU2lnY-nQRJ29iYjk7rFqEV87oogCNW7mxE19E/edit?usp=sharing>
3. Consider discussing your answers with a friend or family member, since there’s something about trying to explain our thoughts to others that clarifies and deepens those thoughts. .
4. Finally, write! Take your list of identities and reflections on them and turn them into a piece of writing. For instance, a narrative version like [this one](#) by adrienne maree brown or a poem like [this one](#) or [this one](#).

Option B: The Category Self

Winona LaDuke, Native American activist, economist, and author, wrote,

The first thing I am is a person. I am a woman. And I am part of a nation, the Indian nation. But people either relate to you as an Indian or as a woman. They relate to you as a category.

How does this quote hit you? Have you ever been treated like a category rather than a person? If so, use your writing to tell the story of it and the impact it had on you.



Option C: The Self Seen Through the Eyes of Others

Our friends and family each carry/believe/tell a different story about who we are. Use your writing this month to reflect on how you feel about one of those versions of yourself. Here are some questions to help you on your way:

Whose version of you most closely matches your authentic self? Whose version do you disagree with most strongly? Whose version challenges you to be your best self? Whose do you hope to someday become?

Option D: Your Pluralistic God

Especially in America, the “God question” is reduced to a simple, “Do you believe in God or not?” But for a great many of us that is not the question or problem we struggle with. Instead, our question is, “How can I reduce God and the Holy to a singular and unchanging thing?” For folks like this, God is many, or you might say *pluralistic*.

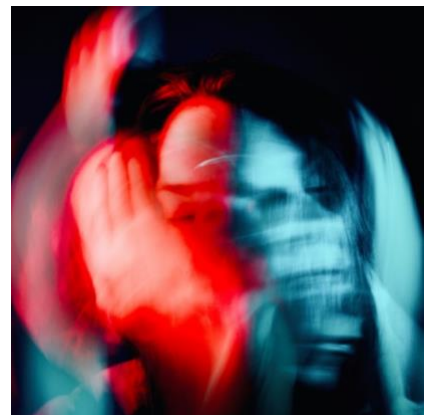
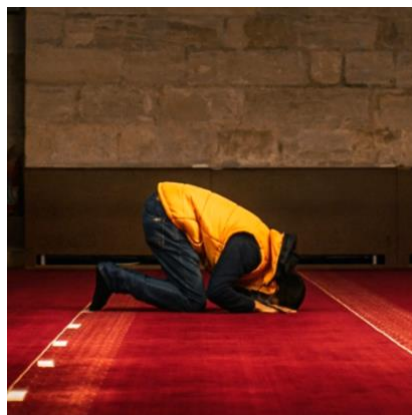
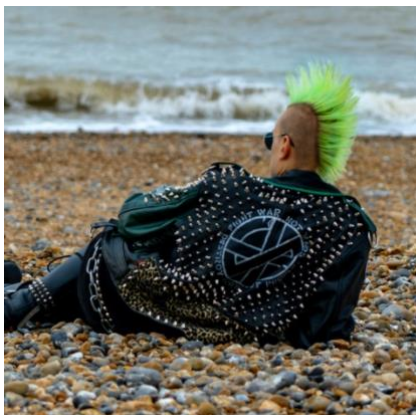
The poet, Nancy Shaffer, gets at this beautifully in her poem, *That Which Holds All*. So for your writing this month, listen to or read her poem and then think of how you might also use your writing to witness to your experience of a God who shows up in more forms than you can count.

Here is the text to Shaffer’s poem: <https://msipoems.blogspot.com/2010/07/that-which-holds-all.html>
Here it is in video and spoken form: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=3prjmO1GpBk>

Option E: Visual Prompts

This prompt is all about letting an image spark your writing. Below are a handful of pictures related to our theme of *the gift of pluralism*. Look them over until one reaches out and asks you to write about it!

For some of us, the image that stands out will take us back in time to a memory we want to write about. For others, our chosen image might inspire us to write a fictional short story based on it. For still others, a picture will evoke a new perspective about the theme that we will then tease out in our writing. *(Or maybe these pictures remind you of a favorite picture you took recently or have treasured for a while. If so, great! Write about those pictures instead.)*



Option F: A Letter to the Self You Exiled

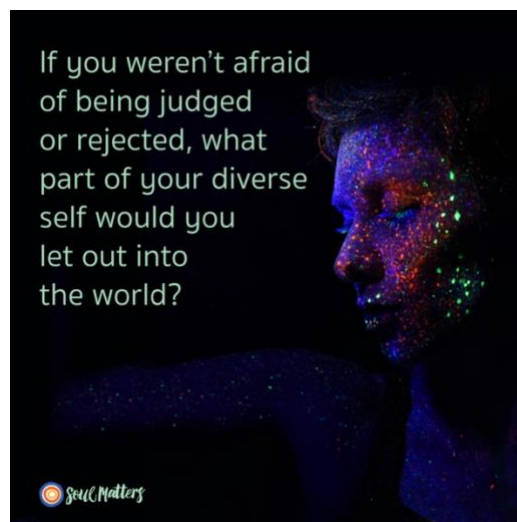
To be free, you must embrace the breadth of your own existence, without apology...

- [Julián Jamaica Soto](#)

We all have parts of ourselves that we struggle to acknowledge and embrace with compassion. So, for this writing exercise, start by figuring out which part of your multifaceted (pluralistic) self, you have the hardest time embracing. Is it your judgmental self? Your lazy self? Your vulnerable self? Your awkward-at-parties self? Your bitter self? Your easily frightened self? Your quick-to-anger self? Your jealous self? Your petty self? Your selfish self?

Then sit down and write a letter to that piece of yourself. If you're looking for some direction, try these steps:

- Begin by telling that part of you when you first noticed it and why you rejected/disowned/hid it. You may not be proud of your reasons. That's ok. Just acknowledge them.
- Then tell it why you are sorry you choose that path of rejection and how you wish you would have dealt with things differently?
- Finish by telling that part why you value it. This is a chance to articulate a more embracing and compassionate attitude toward it.



Option G: Your Fruitful Disagreement

Most of the time we think of disagreements as destructive. But they are, of course, more varied - and pluralistic - than that. For instance, some on-going disagreements are "[fruitful](#)." Instead of being sources of pain, division and discomfort, these positive-feeling disagreements enrich us and our relationship with the person we disagree with.

So, use your writing this month to tell the story of one of your fruitful disagreements and what it means to you? How has it changed you? Or changed how you view the world? How has it altered the way you argue? Is there wisdom from this fruitful disagreement that you apply to other areas of your life? What are the characteristics of a fruitful disagreement? Why would you recommend fruitful disagreements to everyone?!

Option H: Make Your Own Way

Our prompts are here to support you. So, if none of the above prompts speak to you this month, feel free to find inspiration on the theme from wherever it comes.

Whatever it is, let the gravitational pull of memory, reflection and the pulse of your personal imagination be your guide. Let love take you where it will.

Closing & Companions Words

Choose one of the pieces below that speaks to you. Read it after completing your writing projects as a way of celebrating your writing journey this month. Or read the words regularly while working on your project prompt to keep you grounded and inspired. It sometimes helps to write them out and tape them above your desk or on your bathroom mirror, living with them during the month

You have your way. I have my way. As for the right way, the correct way, and the only way, it does not exist.

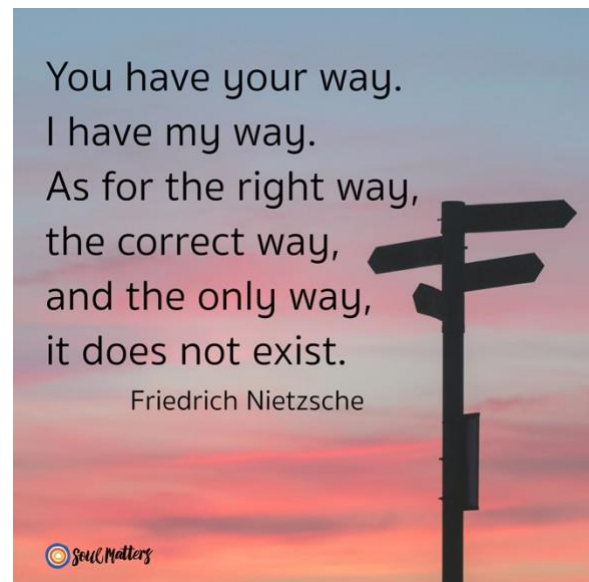
Friedrich Nietzsche

People are just as wonderful as sunsets if I can let them be. In fact, perhaps the reason we can truly appreciate a sunset is that we cannot control it. When I look at a sunset as I did the other evening, I don't find myself saying, 'Soften the orange a little on the right hand corner, and put a bit more purple along the base, and use a little more pink in the cloud color.' I don't do that. I don't try to control a sunset. I watch it with awe as it unfolds. I like myself best when I can appreciate my staff member, my son, my daughter, my grandchildren, in this same way.

Carl Rogers

To be free, you must embrace
the breadth of your own existence
without apology...
But to actually be free, you must
know and you must fight for the entire
Universes inside of everyone else.

[Julián Jamaica Soto](#)



© 2023-24 Soul Matters ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

_packets are for use only by member congregations of the Soul Matters Sharing Circle.

Learn how to join at <http://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com>