



Touchstones Project

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

January 2022

Renewal



Introduction to the Theme

Renewal. It is the key to the process of life and is deeply embedded in the fabric of reality. We see it as the spinning earth alternates between light and darkness, and in the circadian rhythm, that 24-hour cycle that shapes the physiological process of living beings. We see it in the process of photosynthesis and in the ebb and flow of tides. We see it in the cycle of seasons: seed to plant, plant to blossom, blossom to fruit, fruit to seed. We see it in procreation as one generation gives birth to the next generation. We see it in each night's sleep, as we are renewed physically in the interplay of hormones and more, and psychologically through the levels of sleep and the process of dreaming. We see it in the processes of circulation, respira-

tion, and digestion.

Nicola Yoon writes, "I read once that, on average, we replace the majority of our cells every seven years. Even more amazing: we change the upper layers of our skin every two weeks. If all the cells in our body did this, we'd be immortal. But some of our cells, like the ones in our brains, don't renew. They age, and age us. In two weeks, my skin will have no memory of [your] ...hand on mine, but my brain will remember. We can have immortality or the memory of touch. But we can't have both."

Often when we are in need of renewal, we wander into the world of nature. There the ocean tide calls to us; here we walk along the rushing springtime brook; there we sit with our back against a favorite tree; here we wander up a mountain trail; there we breathe in the morning air in springtime; here we follow the flight of geese coming or going, it does not matter which; there we walk across newly fallen snow, the only muffled sound made by our feet; here

(Continued on page 6)

Renewal & Repairing the World

Renewal is the way of the Earth: through seeds that burst, grow, bloom; through fallen leaves that become compost enriching the soil; through heavy snows pruning trees by breaking weaker branches and conserving soil moisture; through periodic fires renewing diverse ecosystems; through small floods cleansing rivers; and other natural processes. We would do well to understand that we need renewal, individually and collectively. Renewal can come through rest, a walk in the woods, by observing the Sabbath and keeping it holy, by time spent with family or friends conversing, sharing a meal, or both. We are not the Energizer Bunny. We cannot go on endlessly. Renewal is a process of repair of body, mind, and soul. Only through self-care will we have the motivation and capacity to work to repair the world.

A Theme-Based Ministry Project

This project is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian Universalist congregations.

Wisdom Story

Bridge Building

by Daniel, adapted

Sitting beside a stranger, the man began to talk.

Once upon a time – "practically in another life," the man said – he'd done a lot of things right. He'd married his high school sweetheart and had two kids with her, children who were the world to him. He'd also built a successful fishing business. He was happy beyond words.

"Then God laughed," he continued. "The world caved in around me. With it, fell my family, my business, and my health. And one day I found myself, alone, at the bottom of the world. Everything I had worked for, everything I had loved was gone."

"I cried for seven years," he said.

On a day that looked like any other, the man stopped crying. He looked at himself in the mirror. He saw grey hairs he didn't remember. He saw wrinkles and a sadness that had become his only friend in his despair.

He closed his eyes, shattered the mirror with his fist, and tried to catch his breath. When his heart calmed, he decided that the years that were gone weren't important. "Age may wear away my body, but it will never dent my soul."

"So, I walked outside the shelter where I'd been staying to the place where my fishing business once lay. It had long been abandoned, and there was nothing left except old rotting lumber. That was all I needed."

The man went to work the next day. For seven years, he worked... building a bridge. The bridge was close to the water, and extended outward toward a

(Continued on page 2)

Repairing the World

Another & Another

(Continued from page 1) **Bridge Building**



white house on the other side of the lake. When the bridge was finished, he walked on it toward the white house where his remaining child lived. He hadn't waited seven more years to see his child though. Rather, his child had spent the last seven years helping his father build that bridge.

The child lived with his mother and the mother's new husband. But every day, the child helped his father build the bridge that drew him and his father closer together, and drew both of them closer to the white house where his mother had moved to after his brother had tragically died. His mother married a man who didn't remind her of the son she had lost.

When the bridge was complete, the man didn't stop building bridges. The second bridge was one that reconnected a community with a bridge builder who was once a fisherman. The third bridge connected two communities that once lived far apart. The one after that connected four families who didn't know they were related. And one day, many years later, the man opened his eyes in an ashram, and noticed a stranger next to him. He smiled, and told this story.

"So, what brought you here?" the stranger asked, after the man finished speaking. "I'm building another bridge," he said with a chuckle. Then he closed his eyes again, and the stranger noticed a slight smile on his gentle face as he drifted back to wherever he goes to build his bridges.

Source: <http://blog.placeboeffect.com/bridge-building-a-story-about-renewal/>

Hardship/Possibility

A Vision

Wendell Berry

If we will have the wisdom to survive, / to stand like slow-growing trees on a ruined place, / Renewing, enriching it, / If we will make our seasons welcome here, / Asking not too much of earth or heaven. / Then a long time after we are dead / the lives our lives prepare will live here, / Their houses strongly placed upon the valley sides, / Fields and gardens rich in the windows. / The river will run clear / as we will never know it, / And over it, bird-song like a canopy. / On the levels of the hills will be green meadows, / Stock bells in noon shade / On the steep slopes where greed and ignorance cut down the old forest, / An old forest will stand, / Its rich leaf-fall drifting on its roots. / The veins of forgotten springs



will have opened. / Families will be singing in the fields. / In their voices they will hear a music risen out of the ground. / They will take nothing out of the ground they will not return, / whatever the grief at parting, / Memory, native to this valley, / will spread over it like a grove, / and memory will grow into legend, / legend into song, song into sacrament. / The abundance of this place, / the songs of its people and its birds, / will be health and wisdom and indwelling light. / This is no paradisaal dream. / Its hardship is its possibility.

Source: *A Vision, Work Song, Part 2 in Clearing, Selected Poems*, Harcourt (New York, NY), 1977

Poet, novelist, and environmentalist, Wendell Berry lives on a farm in Port Royal, Kentucky. He holds deep reverence for the land and is a staunch defender of agrarian values.



Sabbath Time

Be Still, Rest, Shalom

Occasionally we reach the end of a day, a week, a season, or a year and find ourselves overwhelmingly exhausted. *Be Still... Rest... Shalom.*

This is not simply the exhaustion of the body, which sleep might restore, but the exhaustion of the soul. *Be Still... Rest... Shalom.*

How hard to praise life's gifts when we are haunted by such incredible burden. How difficult to recognize joy or possibility, to experience contentment or purpose, to consider self-care a necessity rather than a luxury. *Be Still... Rest... Shalom.*

At times like these, sleep becomes an escape from such weariness, but not its cure. At times like these, we continue to sleep while we are awake. We call this sleep depression, the physical, emotional and spiritual numbing that masks our pain and suffering at such great cost. *Be Still... Rest... Shalom.*

To reach this state, whether by overwork, stress, fear, doubt or loss, is to also realize that an essential balance in our life has been lost. There is no quick fix to such spiritual dis-ease. *Be Still... Rest... Shalom.*

In times such as these, let us pray for salvation, not for a superficial religiosity, but for the healing and wholeness that is our birthright and our destiny. *Be Still... Rest... Shalom.*

Let us not surrender to despair, but to Life itself. *Be Still... Rest... Shalom.*

Let us enter Sabbath time, that respite of prayer, meditation, stillness, and quiet that can restore our soul. *Be Still... Rest... Shalom.*

Be still, that you might become mindful of your sorrow and your joy. Be still, that you might come to know the deepest longings of your heart. Be still that you might become open to the healing possibilities in you and around you.

Rest. Set your burdens aside that this time might bring you deep renewal.

Shalom. In stillness and rest may you come to know a peace that passes understanding.

Source: Touchstones

Readings from the Common Bowl

Day 1: "The possibility of renewal exists so long as life exists. How to support that possibility in others and in ourselves is the ultimate question." Gabor Maté



Day 2: "The care of the Earth is our most ancient and most worthy, and after all our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it and to foster its renewal is our only hope." Wendell Berry

Day 3: "Renewal of the mind is good for the soul because it allows you to be focused and gain understanding of your life choices. It allows you to renew your spirit and become uplifted, filled with hope." Amaka Imani Nkosazana

Day 4: "Each harvest renews promises made in the spring. We live with the continuing cycle. This gives us a taste of eternity." Don Kladstrup

Day 5: "Every individual needs revolution, inner division, overthrow of the existing order, and renewal...." C.G. Jung

Day 6: "With every breath, the old moment is lost; a new moment arrives. This is meditation. This is renewal. This is life." Lama Surya Das

Day 7: "We must always change, renew, rejuvenate ourselves; otherwise, we harden." Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Day 8: "Inside myself is a place where I live all alone and that's where you renew your springs that never dry up." Pearl S. Buck

Day 9: "I can hardly wait for tomorrow; it means a new life for me each and every day." Stanley Kunitz

Day 10: "Renew thyself completely each day." Henry David Thoreau

Day 11: "He found that worry was a completely renewable resource. The more he had, the more he got." Alex London

Day 12: "It is not so much for its beauty that the forest makes a claim upon ...[our] hearts, as for that subtle something, that

quality of air, that emanation from old trees, that so wonderfully ...renews a weary spirit." Robert Louis Stevenson

Day 13: "The mountain has left me feeling renewed, more content and positive than I've been for weeks, ...as if my eyes have opened once again." Richard Nelson

Day 14: "Amazingly, even in midst of trauma, people continue to smile, to love, to celebrate, to create, and to renew." David B. Feldman

Day 15: "Renewal requires opening yourself up to new ways of thinking and feeling." Deborah Day



Day 16: "Every breath is a sacrament, an affirmation of our connection with all other living things, a renewal of our link with our ancestors and a contribution to generations yet to come." David Suzuki

Day 17: "When it seems humanly impossible to do more in a difficult situation, surrender yourself to the inner silence and ... wait ...for a renewal of inner strength." Paul Brunton

Day 18: "She imagined herself as some sort of vessel to be filled up with love. But it wasn't like that. The love was within her all the time, and its only renewal came from giving it away." Kim Edwards

Day 19: "The obstacles in our path are ...redirecting us. Their purpose ...is to point us toward new routes to our happiness, new possibilities, new doorways." Barbara De Angelis

Day 20: "It is through beauty, poetry and visionary power that the world will be renewed." Maria Tatar

Day 21: "You're spending your life without renewing it. ...You're spending

your vitality without making any. Can't go on you know." D.H. Lawrence

Day 22: "People even more than things have to be restored, renewed, revived, reclaimed and redeemed and redeemed and redeemed. Never throw out anybody." Sam Levenson

Day 23: "Taking time to rest, renew, and refresh yourself isn't wasted time. Recharge. Choose what energizes you." Melody Beattie

Day 24: "Genius is the ability to renew one's emotions in daily experience." Paul Cézanne

Day 25: "Life lived amidst ...busyness needs leisure. Leisure that ...renews. Leisure should be a time to think new thoughts, not ponder old ills." C. Neil Strait

Day 26: "There is nothing like a newborn baby to renew your spirit—and to buttress your resolve to make the world a better place." Virginia Kelley

Day 27: "Let go of your disappointments, mistakes and failures. May you find complete healing, renewed spiritual strength, and courage to begin again." Lailah Gifty Akita

Day 28: "I do think you have to change with the times in a way that renews your core essence, not abandons it. To change for the sake of change—without an anchor—that is mere faddishness. It will only lead you further astray." Richard Morais

Day 29: "It is so important that we renew our minds constantly 'coz by doing so we'll be able to see things as they are, not as they might seem. If we renew our minds, we have a better chance at seeing the opportunities hidden within each storm...." Rafael Garcia

Day 30: "Dreams are renewable. No matter what our age or condition, there are still untapped possibilities within us and new beauty waiting to be born." Dale Turner

Day 31: "With each breathe we take, we renew our commitment to stay in life. With each thought we think. ...we decide what kind of life we will live." L.G. Space



Celebrating the Present Moment

(five minutes)

The *Examen* begins with gratitude for the gifts of life (or, as

Andrew Walker writes, God's gifts) rather than "focusing on the past (letting ourselves be distracted by memories or by nostalgia), or by looking towards the future (occupied by hopes and fears which our attention will do nothing to change), or by making comparisons with other people or current situations ('if only that were different')." Walker continues, "The gratitude expressed is a sign of the giftedness of time, of the truth that lies beneath the surface of things, and of an offering back of the gift to the giver. Our self or soul holds the conductor's baton: we can begin to pay attention to the music." As you sit in silence, consider these questions: What are you thankful for, and why? How have you been blessed? What gifts have come to you as a function of grace, that is, unbidden and unexpected?

Articulating Desire and Disposition

(five minutes)

Walker writes, "In the second step, we pray for enlightenment, we establish the priority we are giving to the uncovering of meaning. This is both a duty and a joy, a felt want, and an injunction to which we commit ourselves." Wisdom does not come easily, and when it does, it is grounded in an enlightened awareness and humility. In this stage, we give voice to our desire to grow beyond ourselves, to cultivate emotional intelligence, to nurture spiritual maturity, and to become more compassionate, regardless of how we put these desires into words.

Reviewing the Past

(ten minutes)

Typically, the *Daily Examen* is a spiritual practice that comes at the end of the day, although St. Ignatius recommended that it be done twice a day. This third stage is the central part of the *Examen*, the stage that takes the most time. Walker writes, "In the regular review of our day fostered by the *Ignatian Examen*, we reflect on the time just past and thus are brought to a place of listening and seeing with diminished ego. Over time we become more and

more able to discriminate [and] to discern [as] our potential as human beings ...becomes ever more liberated. In the process of reviewing the events, occurrences, encounters, and experiences of whatever period of time has been chosen, all the associated feelings, connections, thoughts and deeper feelings become more apparent. There may then emerge an awareness of themes and patterns, of ongoing motives and interests—all the more so if we make this prayer regularly, sustaining the practice of reflection. We can become ever more sensitive to both the positive and the negative forces that lie beneath the surface of things...."

How has that which is most precious and profound been active in our life during the day? We may call this God, our ultimate concern, our values, love, or whatever else conveys for us a sense of ultimacy. Call to mind the thoughts, feelings, and actions that seem to stand out the most. How did you attend to Life during the day and how did you respond? The *Examen* also asks us to consider daily the nature of our relationship with ourselves and with others. We are invited without apology or defense to see what is truly in us. The point of this is neither to justify nor excuse our actions on the one hand, nor to beat ourselves up for what we have done or failed to do, on the other. It is an exercise in self-knowledge.

Releasing Joy and Sorrow

(five minutes)

Walker writes, "The fourth stage involves our ...expressing what the review has touched in us. ...The review, with its insights and increased levels of awareness, may well provoke a strong affective [i.e., emotional] response. ... Like a kind of childbirth, this will sometimes be messy and not entirely comfortable. The ...process [according to Jerome Sayer] 'offers a fuller sense of being alive from moment to moment and this is worth the frequent pain of deeper self-awareness.' Pain, guilt, and sorrow may be evoked, but always against a background of thanksgiving and hope. These feelings need to be expressed and ...released."

Examen of Consciousness

The *Examen of Consciousness*, or *Daily Examen*, is a prayerful spiritual practice that encourages us to bring the character of our day and our being into greater awareness.

It was originally developed as the *Examen of Conscience* by St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) (pictured below), the



founder of the Society of Jesus (i.e., the Jesuits). It is part of the *Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola* (Spanish original: *Exercitia spiritualia*, composed from 1522–1524), which are a set of Christian meditations, prayers, and mental exercises divided into four thematic "weeks" of variable length, designed to be carried out over a period of 28 to 30 days. While the original themes will not resonate with most Unitarian Universalists, this adapted *Examen of Consciousness* is a spiritual practice that recommends itself for our consideration.

This adaptation draws upon a 2003 article by Andrew Walker entitled, *Daydreaming Revisited: A Psychology for the Examen Explored*. The *Examen of Consciousness* has five stages, the titles of which are from Walker's article. As Walker writes, the "self or soul needs to be nurtured and shaped because it is always in the process of being formed. Its ability to be aware needs refining; its skill in co-ordination and integration needs fostering." The *Examen of Consciousness* is a thoughtful process for renewal.

The Teaching Bean

Rev. Elizabeth Tarbox



When I was a child, my step-mother gave me and my sister each a lima bean. She showed us how to dampen some blotting paper and line a jam jar with it, and how to place the bean carefully between the

blotting paper and the jar. She told us to stand the jars on the windowsill in our bedroom and keep the blotting paper wet, and watch to see what would happen.

A little later I took my bean out and polished it with a bit of furniture polish. It was all shiny now and smelled much better than my sister's bean.

In a few days my sister's bean swelled and a strong white root pushed out of the bottom of the bean. My bean just sat there. A week later my sister's



bean sprouted a green shoot that forced its way up and out of the top of the jar. My bean did nothing, but began to look wrinkly. In another week my sister's jar was full of roots and shoots and the bean was ready to be planted. My bean shriveled up and fell to the bottom of the jar and I threw it away.

...But spirits are not like beans... They may shrivel with neglect, but as long as life persists there is the chance to wash off the polish and redeem the growing thing inside.

Source: *Evening Tide*, Elizabeth Tarbox, Skinner House Books, Boston, 1998.

Family Activity:

Take What You Need

Invite your children to list and discuss those things that they need to feel good, to be strong, to be happy, to have confidence, to care for others, etc. These might include

- ◆ Love
- ◆ Peace
- ◆ Kindness
- ◆ Help
- ◆ Hope



Then create posters with tear-off tabs with these things and post them in your home and in public places, so people can be reminded of what they need for renewal. Visit the posters and see what tabs people have taken.



Source: <http://carlabirnberg.com/2016/02/15/teaching-self-care-to-children/>

A Journey through Trees

Roger Deakin



To enter a wood is to pass into a different world in which we ourselves are transformed. It is no accident that in the comedies of Shakespeare, people go into the greenwood to grow, learn and change. It is where you travel to find yourself, often, paradoxically, by getting lost. Merlin sends the future King Arthur as a boy into the greenwood to fend for himself in *The Sword and the Stone*. There, he falls asleep and dreams himself, like a chameleon, into the lives of the animals and trees.

...The Chinese count wood as the fifth element, and Jung considers trees an archetype. Nothing can compete with these larger-than-life organisms for signaling the changes in the natural world. They are our barometers of the weather and of the changing seasons. We tell the time of year by them. Trees have the capacity to rise to the heavens and connect us to the sky, to endure, to renew, to bear fruit....

...When Auden wrote, "A culture is no better than its woods," he knew that, having carelessly lost more of their woods than any other country in Europe, the British take a correspondingly greater interest in what trees and woods they still have left. Woods... have become the guardians of our dreams of greenwood liberty, of our wildwood, feral, childhood selves.... They ...are repositories of the ancient stories, of Icelandic myths of *Ygdrasil*, the Tree of Life, Robert Graves's *The Battle of the Trees* and the myths of Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough*. The enemies of the woods are always enemies of culture and humanity.

Source: http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/640461.Roger_Deakin

Spirit of Life, Come unto Me

(Continued from page 1) **Intro to the Theme**

we see the crocus pushing through the springtime snowfall; there we watch the sunset in a thousand shades of red and orange painting the horizon; here we drink water drawn from a deep well in an oaken bucket and find that it quenches both a physical and spiritual thirst, there we see dew glistening on the web of a spider in the morning light, and so it goes.

In each of these we are renewed. "Spirit of life, come unto me," and it does in myriad ways with its ability to heal and renew. As Wendell Berry wrote, "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



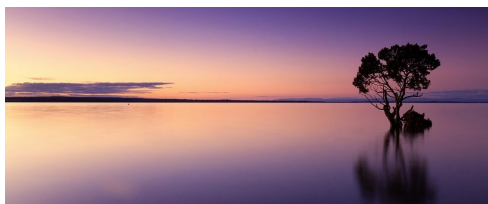
things / who do not tax their lives with forethought / of grief. I come into the presence of still water. / And I feel above me the day-blind stars / waiting with their light. For a time / I rest in the grace of the world, and am free."

In religious terms, we also know the value of renewal beyond our excursions into nature. We recommend the keeping of the Sabbath, the importance of pilgrimage, the discipline of meditation, the process of journaling, the practice of prayer, and the renewal at the center of worship. Each of these is entered through stillness and silence. Yet as T.S. Eliot, "Where shall the word be found, where shall the word / Resound? Not here, there is not enough

silence."

At times the world is too much with us. Its busyness and noise overwhelm us. The static of the world echoes in our mind disrupting any possibility of inner peace. When this happens, as it does all too often, we are urged to seek renewal in silence. Take a moment or several and simply stop striving, stop doing, stop thinking. Attend instead to the rhythm of your breathing or the beating of your heart as you seek to slow down. It takes an act of will to find your center-point, to become still, to allow yourself to rest in the silence. In this silence is renewal. This is one of the gifts of prayer, of meditation, this beautiful silence. By itself, silence does not bring renewal, but it creates the conditions out of which renewal emerges. In silence, we can lower our defenses against the world and direct that energy to the process of renewal. In silence, we can rediscover our essence. In silence, we can enter into prayer or meditation and go deeper as we contemplate matters of consequence in place of the trivia of the world. In silence, we replace human doing with human being.

This is true, even in worship. As Unitarian Universalist minister Jacob Trapp wrote, "Let this house be quiet. Let our minds be quiet. Let the quietness of the hills, the quietness of deep waters, be also in us: So quiet that the noise of passing events and present anxieties, of random recollections and wandering thoughts, is stilled; So quiet that the... stillness is like music; So quiet that we feel the very being which is the life of us all; So quiet that we are renewed, we feel at one with all others, at home in a tabernacle of stillness; So quiet that we let the ripples of this pool of quietness and healing pass through us and out into the world." In stillness and in silence, renewal.



Countless Paths

Self-Care

Rev. Tom Owen-Towle

If we ignore our spirit or ravage our body, enslave our heart or vacate our mind, avoid our conscience or forfeit our soul, we're literally abusing the singular gift of creation that is you, that is I.

...The virtue of self-care isn't the same as being stuck on yourself. The extremes of narcissism and neglect are dead-ends, whereas self-fulfillment is a central mark of being religious.

...A major dis-ease of contemporary American society is being worn-out, whether it comes from physical exhaustion, emotional stress, compassion-fatigue, or a world-view of cynicism. The gauge for too many ... reads "nearly empty"—empty of passion, rest, and spirit.

...Those who work themselves to the bone nowadays are often accorded more esteem than those seeking a balanced life.

...To be sure, some burnout comes with the territory of being a morally sensitive person. There exists in the robust religious life what Hans Selye called *eustress* (good stress) and *distress* (unhealthy stress). The art of balanced self-care is ...to embrace the former and diminish the latter.



As we all know, unless there's some tension in the strings, the violin ...can't be played. Stress or tension is a precondition for growth. Therefore, depth theology seeks a rhythm of peace and unrest, serenity and struggle.

...No uniform self-care program will work for everyone. We're all different and disciplines that succeed for you won't necessarily bring me growth. The paths toward self-nourishment are countless. ...

We're beckoned to nourish on a daily basis the entirety of our beings—body, spirit, heart, mind, soul, and conscience.

Source: *Theology Ablaze* by Tom Owen-Towle, Flaming Chalice Press, San Diego, 2011

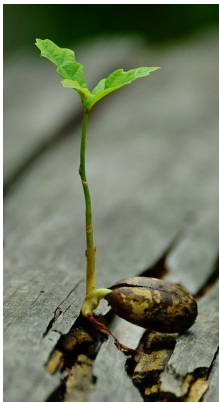
Reverence for Life

Practice Renewal

Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, adapted

- ◆ Give your full attention to whatever you are doing, and you'll recognize the constant renewal of life all around you.
- ◆ Walk the path of beauty.
- ◆ Live in the present.
- ◆ Open your heart, mind, and soul to the pain of the world. Bring suffering beings back to the land of the living.
- ◆ Cultivate the art of making connections. Bring the walls of separation down.
- ◆ Enthusiasm is the mark of a life-giver. Laugh and sing and relish life.
- ◆ Faith enables you to live with confidence amidst doubt and paradox.
- ◆ Every time you forgive someone, renewal is in the making.
- ◆ Practice gratitude and you are slaying the death-dealing forces of boredom, despair, and taking-things-for-granted.
- ◆ Bring hope to someone in despair, bring healing to those in conflict.
- ◆ When you can welcome guests and ideas with graciousness, you are participating in a new world of hospitality.
- ◆ When you give full rein to your imagination, you are opening the gates of creativity.
- ◆ Your work for justice, freedom, and equality makes you a life-giver.
- ◆ Your little acts of kindness tenderize the world and add to the fund of good will.
- ◆ Listen to others, the universe, and your inner voice, and you'll be privy to resurrections when they happen.
- ◆ Welcome changes—big and small—in your experience and signal your receptivity to transformation.
- ◆ Practice reverence for life.

Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/naming-the-days/view/10963/easter-resurrection-as-a-spiritual-practice>



Grounding the Whole Experience

(Continued from page 4) **Examen**

As you reflect on the experiences of the day that is ending, what feelings are related to those different experiences? A common prompt for the emotional palette is as follows:

- ◆ Sad (unhappy, miserable, down, low, gloomy)
- ◆ Mad (angry, cross, annoyed, furious, enraged)
- ◆ Bad (scared, worried, guilty, anxious)
- ◆ Glad (happy, overjoyed, peaceful, content, rapt)

Identify the feelings that accompanied your day. Name them. Feel them again. Consider why these particular feelings were evoked. And then let them go.

Orientation, Integration, (and Right Intention)

(five minutes)

Walker writes, "This final step is essential as a means of grounding the whole experience. It may, as Ignatius suggests, take the form of a resolution or a commitment; it is always a matter of turning attention outwards and to the future. We come more to life through ... [the *Examen*] in order to help others, live more fully; our reflection is in the service of our action; as we explore our identity, our choices...."

In many ways this fifth stage is about setting right intention for the future, especially for the next day. It is a meditation (or prayer) of aspiration. In light of what the day has been, what do we aspire to for tomorrow? What in us or in our relationships with others needs attention or healing? Focus on these intentions and hold them in your heart for a few minutes.

Walker concludes, "The *Examen* helps us discern the good forces that are at work in the conscious and unconscious processes of our lives, and to sense how we remain, both individually and corporately, wonderfully... [connected to life]."

Journaling

(time varies)

While not a formal part of the *Examen of Consciousness*, you may want to record the most striking points of your daily *Examen* in your journal. This can be just simple



notations or a more extended dialogue with yourself, with others, and/or with the precious and profound, regardless of what you call it (e.g., Spirit of Life, God, etc.) It is a way of turning inward. Virginia Stem Owens wrote, "Like a lathe, a journal forces us inward to the heart of the wood." As we write, our thoughts and reflections take a more concrete form. They also form a trail of bread crumbs that we can trace backward to see themes emerging, concerns or sorrows that persist, or the process by which some important issue was resolved over time. If it makes sense, end the writing with an aspiration that has arisen out of your reflection on the day.

Tips for the Examen

- ◆ Do daily at the same time.
- ◆ Use free association and suspend judgment.
- ◆ Note the significant (spiritual) events of the day.
- ◆ Ask questions of life.
- ◆ Reflect on relationships with self/others/the divine.
- ◆ Was there a theme to the day?
- ◆ Set intentions for the next day in terms of who you aspire to become.
- ◆ At least once a week go back and read through what you have written, if you add journaling to this practice, to make you more consciously aware of what shape your journey is taking.

Source: Touchstones

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion Renewal

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “When we live without listening to the timing of things, when we live and work in twenty-four-hour shifts without rest—we are on war time, mobilized for battle. Yes, we are strong and capable people, we can work without stopping, faster and faster, electric lights making artificial day so the whole machine can labor without ceasing. But remember: No living thing lives like this. There are greater rhythms, seasons and hormonal cycles and sunsets and moonrises and great movements of seas and stars. We are part of the creation story, subject to all its laws and rhythms.” *Wayne Muller*

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake) (adapted) (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “Every morning I was renewed, though. Air and light healed me, over and over. I got to where I depended on it. When I was feeling my worst, I would step out into the yard and put my hands on the branches of the little redbud. It made me feel like I was saying a prayer, to do this. I know that sounds like foolishness, but that little tree was like an altar for me. I stood there in the cold of early winter, wishing for the redbud to bear leaves so that I might put my face against them.” *Silas House*

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. When you need to be spiritually refreshed, renewed, re-born, what do you do?
2. Think of a time in your life when it felt like things were falling apart. Where did you go? What did you do? How did you let go? How did you find renewal?
3. What brings you joy, balance, centering, peace, relaxation, recreation, renewal?
4. What external and internal factors influence the amount of time you have or take for renewal?
5. If you had more time for renewal, what would you do?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice

(Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Closing Words Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Cracks Shine Like Gold

Japanese Bowl

Peter Mayer

I'm like one of those Japanese bowls
That were made long ago
I have some cracks in me
They have been filled with gold

That's what they used back then
When they had a bowl to mend
It did not hide the cracks
It made them shine instead

So now every old scar shows
From every time I broke
And anyone's eyes can see
I'm not what I used to be

But in a collector's mind
All of these jagged lines
Make me more beautiful
And worth a much higher price

I'm like one of those Japanese bowls
I was made long ago
I have some cracks you can see
See how they shine of gold

Source: <http://ambitioninthecity.com/2013/06/07/japanese-bowl-reflections-of-a-poem-by-peter-mayer/>



Attribution for Images

Page 2: Bridge to the Sands, photo by Neil Williamson, September 24, 2014, (CC BY-SA 2.0), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/neillwphoto/15191150490>

Page 2: Enchanted, photo by Richard Walker, April 15, 2012, (CC BY 2.0), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/richardwalkerphotography/12098714004>

Page 3: Round Melon Shape Bowl, by Wicker Paradise, August 25, 2013, (CC BY 2.0), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/wicker-furniture/9592646138>

Page 3: Renewal, photo by Gustaaf Prins, March 14, 2011, (CC BY 2.0), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/zoeff/5532832266>

Page 5: Pole Lima Bean, D.M. Ferry & Co., 1921, Public Domain

Page 5: Bean, photo by Stephanie Vacher, April 19, 2008, (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/trufflepig/2425847667>

Two photos of girls at <http://carlabirnberg.com/2016/02/15/teaching-self-care-to-children/>

Page 5: Trees, photo by Valiphotos on Pixabay

Page 6: Great Blue Heron, photo by Matthew Olson, October 10, 2014, (CC BY 2.0), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/matthewolsonphotography/15320242157>

Page 6: Tree, photo by Cleverpix on Pixabay

Page 6: Bench & Bike, photo by RoonZ-nl on Pixabay

Page 7: Seedling, photo by congerdesign on Pixabay

Page 7: Journaling, photo by Pexels on Pixabay

Page 8: Kintsugi Bowl, photo by MartySeb on Pixabay