
Soulful Home
Finding the Sacred in Everyday Spaces
Renewal
June 2024

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The Welcome Mat

Exploring the Gift of Renewal

Every so often, I need my faith in humanity restored, for any number of reasons ranging from the personal to the collective. I, probably like you, have a handful of strategies to deal with such moments:

- listening to music that strikes the right balance between uplifting and indulgent,
- going for a walk with the intention of getting out of my head and back into my body,
- calling a good friend and asking for five minutes of love-filled listening,
- replaying a favorite sermon from a previous Sunday’s church service recording,
- putting my bed covers out on the line to freshen up in the sun, so they smell divine and refreshing that night, helping me sleep better and more easily, and my favorite,

- inviting my teenagers to play Uno, or Taco Cat Goat Cheese Pizza, or maybe whatever multiplayer game they're into on their gaming console so I can enjoy the unstructured and unscripted company of the ones who made me a mom.

I haven't needed a serious reboot lately, for which I am so grateful, but that made this month's packet even more precious to me. You see, I have never thought of approaching that need for renewal of faith as a matter of practice or maintenance. I've always thought of it as an inevitable obstacle to get past, a fact of life that I would have to address on an as-needed basis.

And while it may be true that an occasional challenge to our belief that humans are good is to be expected, I would like to invite you into an experiment this month of exploring the theme of renewal proactively. Why? Because doing so just might strengthen our resilience when the hard times come. So to my list above, I'm adding several new ideas from this packet. I hope you'll find a few that feel right to you, too.

As you may have heard, this is the last time I will author Soulful Home. I'm making room for a new job. I want to offer you my sincerest thanks alongside this farewell. Imagining and even hearing from some of your Soulful Homes each month these past five and a half years has been my career, but it has also been my great joy, and a source of my own renewal of faith in the bold, bright, and loving future of Unitarian Universalism. Thank you for sharing this Soulful Home journey with me! If you haven't yet subscribed for the 2024-2025 year, I hope you do so soon. I'll be joining you, but this time, not as an author, but as an eager and devoted reader.

To new beginnings!

Teresa

At the Table

Exploring Renewal 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.

Discussion Questions

1. It's easy to tell when our bodies need a rest, because we get tired and maybe grumpy, but how do you know when your mind and your spirit needs a rest?
2. When you want to be with somebody fun, especially after feeling bored or unsettled or out of sorts, who do you go to? How do you ask them to spend some time with you?
3. What's the best thing about starting over again (in a game, at a new school, learning a new skill, etc.)?
4. When you first wake up in the morning, what do you look forward to the most?
5. What renews you the most: being by yourself or being around lots of people?
6. What is the best place you've taken a nap in?
7. What is something that you've been doing for a while that your parent would be brand new at, or at least way less experienced than you?
8. If you've had a really big few days, full of people and activities and events and people and more people, what kinds of things do you like to do afterward to unwind?
9. When you imagine yourself five years from now, do you think of yourself as a different person, or as the same person, just in a different body?
10. If your parent tells you that your household is having a little quiet time, what are you most likely going to do during that time?
11. When you have a memory of a hurt or a mistake that keeps coming up and bothering you, what do you do to interrupt that memory and start over?
12. What flavor of ice cream do you turn to when you need renewal?

Return to the Discussion Throughout the Week

Thoughts develop with time. Find opportunities to bring up particularly compelling questions again during the month, maybe on walks, rides home, when tucking your child into bed, etc. If thoughts grew or changed, notice together how we are all evolving beings, opening ourselves to new truths and understandings as we live our lives and connect with others.

From the Mailbox

Our "From the Mailbox" section is a monthly postcard to parents from the future world we want to create together. Each "postcard" is an invitation for families to engage in the work of dismantling white supremacy culture, and all the social and environmental harm caused by it. The postcards lift up the life of brave and prescient souls whose work has manifested the Spirit of Love and Justice. They're meant to *inspire courage*, *create interest*, and *give adult caregivers a leaping-off point* to learn more themselves and start rich conversations at home.

A Postcard of Renewal: Black healers throughout history

Dear travelers and homebodies,

I am sitting in the doctor's office with one of my children, getting a vaccine. Vaccination in America owes its start to Onesimus, the

enslaved man who in 1716 shared knowledge of the similar African practice of variolation with his owner, prominent Boston minister Cotton Mather. American medicine is full of Black healers and trailblazers who offered their great gifts to renew the health of a needful public. "Take care of yourselves, take care of each other," their voices tell us. "And when you need help, we will use our beautiful brains and hands to bring healing, even as others would prevent or make more difficult our doing so."

In what ways can you offer a gift of renewal to the world? In the individual and collective mind, body, and soul, where can you offer healing, and to whom, and when?

Love,

the Awaiting World

P.S. Listen to this excerpt from the podcast "Serum" about the Black doctor from Oklahoma, Gary Davis, who developed an early and effective serum treatment for AIDS, but who was rejected by the Food and Drug Administration and the National Institute of Health.

At Play

Playing Games with Renewal

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

Option A: New Life to Old Duds

This month, make a big, fun activity of renewing your wardrobe as a family. Find a few garments that are worn out or almost don't fit anymore, and experiment with some upcycling techniques. The classic summer turn-over is to cut off jeans or pants at the knee, allowing them to become summer shorts. Other techniques include batch dying, tie-dying, adding a patch, embroidering something fun at a pocket or hem, making a new piece out of numerous items of clothing, or making an embellished mend.

Maybe this could be an early summer play-date activity to which you invite your child's friends? A bonding activity with visiting cousins? Maybe combine it with a church R.E. summer kickoff event–dye, rinse, and dry clothes the night before, then everybody heads to church together on

Sunday? With a teenager, you might schedule a trip to a vintage or consignment shop. Each of you find something that suits you, then plan a follow-up outing to wear your items while grabbing a bite to eat.

Option B: Rainy Day Word Play

Save these for a day when the rain is replenishing the dry Earth, a phenomenon on which we all depend, but which can be a disappointment to young people with hopes of spending hours out of doors.

This word search is aimed at an elementary-aged audience, with no diagonals or backwards words so that emerging readers can get a bit of practice reading left to right and up to down. Here is the key to the word search.

Option C: Renew Your Sense of Your Own Capabilities

All of us get to thinking of ourselves as "the kind of people who would _____ and wouldn't _____." We also tend to think of ourselves as parents with a fixed list of dos and don'ts. Maybe it's time to renew and refresh those self-images! The list below is inspired by Gever Tulley's 2011 book, *Fifty Dangerous Things You Should Let Your Child Do.* Not all of these activities may resonate with you and your family, but some might, and might stretch you to think of yourselves in new and different ways. These activities are best suited to children ages 5 to 11.

Lick a 9-volt battery

Order pizza on the phone

Drive a nail

Throw rocks

Play with dry ice

Throw things from a moving car

Drop something from a high place

Burn things with a magnifying glass

Squash pennies on a railroad track

Make a slingshot

Climb a tree

Dance in the middle of a crowded place

Dam up a creek

Change a tire

Take apart an appliance

Go to the scrapyard

Learn how to walk a slackline

Visit a beehive

Make a rope swing

Play with fire

Superglue your fingers together

Sleep out-of-doors

Whittle

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:

“Let’s start over.”

This month’s mantra is perhaps our most widely applicable yet. It can be used internally and externally, with family and friends and strangers, verbally and in writing, within an existing meditation practice or completely separate from one.

You make a mistake–maybe even a big one–and your internal dialog comes at you in its most belittling and toxic voice. You can feel yourself starting to shut down with shame, overwhelm, and fear.

You, speaking to yourself: “**Let’s start over**. I made a mistake. It feels bad, and I don’t like it, and I probably could have done some things differently, which hurts to admit. But here is me accepting responsibility and beginning to move forward. Let’s start over.”

Your snap at your child, or you find yourself locked into a power struggle, or you're both proceeding through the day in a grouchy mood.

You, to your child: **"Let's start over.** How about we _____?"

Your parent calls and shares some personal information about your sibling that you suspect they may not want you to know.

You: "Mom, I can hear that you're concerned about _____, but I'm not sure she'd really want me to know that. I'd love to hear about you, though. **Let's start over.** How did you like the new restaurant you tried last week?"

"Let's start over" gives both you and the other person a warm invitation to renew your relationship, begin again and a better chance at a better outcome.

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.

Offering Renewal to Weary Travelers

Many, many cultures in the ancient world–and some in the modern world–place a great value on offering travelers the opportunity to renew themselves at one's home. This was really important before the age of cars and phones. People moved around a lot less, and it was more difficult to do–even dangerous. Strangers relied on one another for rest, food, shelter, and news from elsewhere in the region. There was also the thought that any stranger might be a prophet or God in disguise, so a host would do well to treat them with great care and respect.

In this well-known story from Hawai'i, the goddess Pele visited two neighbors, one rich and one modest. The story is called "A Calabash of Poi." A calabash is a big bowl that holds poi, or a mash made from taro root. This would have been one of the most common dishes in ancient Hawai'i and remains a staple of the luau plate.

Read here "A Calabash of Poi."

Stretching the Story

- What is traveling like in your family? Where do you usually go? How do you get where you're going? What kinds of foods do you eat on the way, or when you get there? Where do you sleep?
- What is the culture around guests in your home? When you have someone over whom you don't know very well, what kinds of things do you do differently in your home?
- When you stay at someone else's house, what makes you feel comfortable and welcome?

On the Porch

Raising a Child of Renewal 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.

Two Sips of Something New

Option 1: Renewal in the Face of the Groundhog Day Effect

The Groundhog Day Effect is an informal but commonly experienced phenomenon of feeling as if you are reliving the same day over and over, as if your life never changes and isn't moving forward in any meaningful or discernible way. The concept got some traction during the pandemic, when the daily sameness of life sheltering in place was magnified across the globe. But for many of us, the feeling continues to come and go. To gain a sense of renewal and bolster our psychological fortitude in the face of ennui or despondency, try the following exercise.

Once a week for this month, set aside a time–no more than five minutes–to ask yourself the following questions, adapted from Rabbi Dr. Ira Bedzow:

1. Am I the person I want to be right now, in this moment?
2. Did my actions this week continue to create this person I want to be, or did they detract from them?
3. Has anything challenged my values in the past week? Do I remain committed to those values, or do I want to re-examine them?

4. Did my habits this week support my connection with friends and family, or did they contribute to isolation?
5. What one thing could I do today to make my life and the lives of those around me a little different, in a positive way?
6. What's some small, fun thing I could do today?

After doing this at least two or three times, schedule your time to sit down with your trusted conversation partner. Share how the exercise of scheduling time for these big-picture thoughts went for you, and if any realizations or joy followed.

As a postscript, let this exercise be your reminder to set aside a mental health day this month, or a half-day, or a handful of hours for yourself, if at all possible. Not all of us can take a day off work and off family duties, but maybe we can queue up a favorite, uplifting podcast and linger in the parking lot at the grocery store to build a little renewal time into the errand. Or maybe instead of feeling frustrated by sleeplessness or another unwelcome wait time, we can practice a breathing meditation, or do a body scan, sending love to our own bones, muscles, organs, and skin. This, too, helps us to feel renewed!

Option 2: Color Therapy

While there isn't a scientific consensus around the use of color and light to re-energize one's self and restore a sense of balance (a therapy known as chromotherapy) the concept is nonetheless old, going back to the ancient Egyptians.

Together with your conversation partner, plan a trip to a local plant nursery, clothing store, paint store, or another place where you can encounter a variety of colors. Use this experience to identify a few colors that resonate with you in this moment.

Once you've found this color, find a way to surround yourself with those colors. For instance, invest in a box of watercolor paints or wax colored pencils and doodle, draw, or simply create blocks of color to then tape to your mirror, or in your journal, or on your car's dashboard this month. Or repaint a room or wall in your home! Or buy 2-3 t-shirts or pairs of socks and wear those colors on your body.

Check in with your conversation partner after a few days and let them know how those colors are renewing your spirit!

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. What hobby, pastime, or activity renews you now? How is that different from what hobby, pastime, or activity renewed you as a young child? As a teen?
2. What part of parenting renews you, and what part depletes you? How does it feel to give those voice?
3. When your faith in humanity is challenged, how do you restore your sense that there is good in people, individually and collectively?
4. What landscape renews you most? (For example, maybe it's the beach, the deep woodlands, a pedestrian-friendly section of your city, your child's preschool playground at peak playtime, a favorite meadow or prairie at sunrise, etc.)
5. Describe a time that offering renewal to another–filling their cup–also filled up yours.
6. School children are probably more likely to feel reflective around June, when they go from one grade to the next, rather than at the turn of the calendar year. Which grade jump felt the biggest to you? In that summer before the big jump, what did you imagine your new life as a _____-grader would be, and how did it compare to reality?
7. What defining moments in your life led you to change the way you thought of yourself? Which of those defining moments did you recognize right away as life altering? Which did you notice as life altering only years later?
8. Which metaphor seems like the right one to describe the potential of renewal in your life right now: a clean slate, going back to the drawing board, a new dawn, a grand reopening, a newborn idea, a new chapter, a fledgling bird, an untrodden path, a rising star, a flower bud, summer rain, or a clean mirror?
9. If you could go back to one period of your life to experience it anew, with fresh eyes and no previous knowledge of how things would work out, what would you do again?

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!

Renewal at the Rodeo

Be renewed by the joyful imagery of this 2019 poem by living poetry legend Marilyn Nelson, entitled "The Boley Rodeo." If your child is a Beyonce or Taylor Swift fan, be

sure to share it with them, as each of those artist's newest albums–one featuring Black rodeo culture and one thick with references to poetry–follows this piece well!

The Boley Rodeo

https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/149502/the-boley-rodeo

Renewal for Spirit and Body in Broth

In the fast-cycling foodie culture of the last couple of decades, broth had its moment, peaking in popularity with many American cooks around 2017. Just last year, a headline-friendly version of broth called perpetual stew made the rounds, fascinating readers with descriptions of infusions that were amended daily with new and different meats, herbs, and sturdy vegetables (a technique well known in many parts of Southeast Asia, African, and in medieval Europe).

But outside of the social media trend machine, broth deserves a place in our family cultures for its elegance, economy, and refreshing simplicity. Dig a little bit into your family food culture, either your chosen family, your family of origin, or your ancestral families. Find a simple broth recipe to try this month and use it as a brunch or lunch or light dinner meal. Ask your children for their impressions, and make some adjustments based on their suggestions. When you have a broth that feels just right for your family, save the recipe and use it later as a pick-me-up, a post-illness renewal, and a hug-in-a-mug!

Blessing of Renewal

> *Blessed be the forward motion of our bodies, whether by walking, running, or rolling. May our minds and bodies be renewed by the invigorating flow of blood through our beautiful vessels.*
>
> *Blessed be the crust-crackle, collard-tang, tomato-dusk, garlic-zing, poblano-smoke, miso-umami and thousands of other delights and evocations of delicacies that meet our tongues. May their nourishment renew us in body and spirit.*
>
> *Blessed be family and good friends, cherished and challenging, both. May we be renewed by their connection, companionship, and calling up to our best selves, through the days, weeks, months, and years we share.*

Blessed be the chirps, whistles, and trills of birdsong; the soft rustle of snake-slide through grass; the lulling drone of big bumble bees; the velvet plush of soft fur, wild and domestic. May the sensory pleasure of creation existing for its own sake renew our commitments to care more fully for our shared planet earth.

Blessed be music, rhythm, dance, and poetry in its many and splendid forms. May we remember that we were born by rhythmic contractions of the life force around us, and our last breaths, too, will be in harmony with this exquisite song of creation. May this memory renew our vow to live this one wild life to its fullest, and with care and devotion to ourselves, our neighbors, and the faith that holds us together.

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

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