

On the Journey

2020 Mar

Exploring themes for deepening wisdom

Redemption



Opening Words

“O God, root and source of body and soul, we ask for boldness in confronting evil. When you are within us, we have the power to counter all that is untrue. O Parent of all humankind, may we redeem our failings by the good work that we do.” — Khasi Unitarian Prayer

Check In

Share a time when you believed you were redeemed after a mistake.

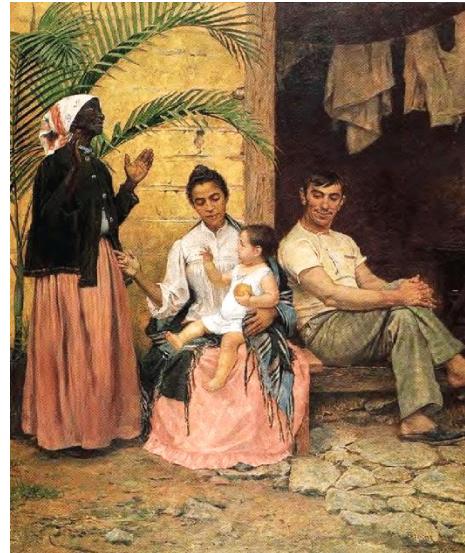
Last Month

Further reports on last month's “God” spiritual exercise?

Defining Moment

Redemption (noun) (via Dictionary.com)

1. an act of redeeming or atoning for a fault or mistake, or the state of being redeemed.
2. deliverance; rescue.
3. (In theology) deliverance from sin; salvation.
4. atonement for guilt.
5. repurchase, as of something sold.
6. paying off, as of a mortgage, bond, or note.
7. recovery by payment, as of something pledged.
8. conversion of paper money into specie.



A Redenção de Cam (The Redemption of Cam) by Modesto Brocos

SYNONYMS: retrieval · recovery · reclamation · repossession · recoupment · return · rescue · repurchase · exchange · swapping · bartering · cashing in · conversion · trade-in · paying off · paying back · discharge · clearing · squaring · honoring · quittance · fulfillment · carrying out · making good · execution · performing · accomplishment · achievement · observance · meeting · satisfying · adherence to (via Oxford Dictionary)

ORIGIN: mid-14c., “deliverance from sin,” from Old French redemcion (12c.) and directly from Latin *redemptionem* (nominative *redemptio*) “a buying back, releasing, ransoming” (also “bribery”), noun of action from past participle stem of *redimere* “to redeem, buy back,” from *red-* “back” (see *re-*) + *emere* “to take, buy, gain, procure” (from PIE root **em-* “to take, distribute”). The *-d-* is from the Old Latin habit of using *red-* as the form of *re-* before vowels. In the Mercian hymns, Latin *redemptionem* is glossed by Old English *alesnis*. (via etymonline.com)

Poems of Redemption

Dover Beach

By Matthew Arnold (1867)

The sea is calm tonight.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanchèd land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

From Anthem

By Leonard Cohen (1992)

Ring the bell that you can ring
There is no perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in

What's Broken

By Dorianne Laux (2007)

The slate black sky. The middle step
of the back porch. And long ago
my mother's necklace, the beads
rolling north and south. Broken
the rose stem, water into drops, glass
knobs on the bedroom door. Last summer's
pot of parsley and mint, white roots
shooting like streamers through the cracks.

Years ago the cat's tail, the bird bath,
the car hood's rusted latch. Broken
little finger on my right hand at birth—
I was pulled out too fast. What hasn't
been rent, divided, split? Broken
the days into nights, the night sky
into stars, the stars into patterns
I make up as I trace them
with a broken-off blade
of grass. Possible, unthinkable,
the cricket's tiny back as I lie
on the lawn in the dark, my heart
a blue cup fallen from someone's hands.

Ejaculation, Reply, and Song

By Richard Wilbur (2007)

THE POET

How oft, retiring from the dusty road
To rest a moment in the forest's shade,
The footsore traveler has set down his load
And, couched upon some bank of mosses, heard.
Thrilling the silence of a far, dim glade.
The music of the ocka-ocka bird!

THE SCIENTIST

How "oft," you ask, has such a thing occurred?
The answer to your question, Sir, is never.
Art follows nature or it is absurd.
No reputable ornithologist
Mentions that name in any text whatever.
The ocka-ocka bird does not exist!

THE MOCKINGBIRD

Chip-chip. Tu-wit-a-wee. Ocka-ocka.

Housekeeping

By Natasha Trethewey (2000)

We mourn the broken things, chair legs
wrenched from their seats, chipped plates,
the threadbare clothes. We work the magic
of glue, drive the nails, mend the holes.
We save what we can, melt small pieces
of soap, gather fallen pecans, keep neck bones
for soup. Beating rugs against the house,
we watch dust, lit like stars, spreading
across the yard. Late afternoon, we draw
the blinds to cool the rooms, drive the bugs
out. My mother irons, singing, lost in reverie.
I mark the pages of a mail-order catalog,
listen for passing cars. All day we watch
for the mail, some news from a distant place.

Good Bones

By Maggie Smith (2016)

Life is short, though I keep this from my children.
Life is short, and I've shortened mine
in a thousand delicious, ill-advised ways,
a thousand deliciously ill-advised ways
I'll keep from my children. The world is at least
fifty percent terrible, and that's a conservative
estimate, though I keep this from my children.
For every bird there is a stone thrown at a bird.
For every loved child, a child broken, bagged,
sunk in a lake. Life is short and the world
is at least half terrible, and for every kind
stranger, there is one who would break you,
though I keep this from my children. I am trying
to sell them the world. Any decent realtor,
walking you through a real shithole, chirps on
about good bones: This place could be beautiful,
right? You could make this place beautiful.

Concord Hymn

By Ralph Waldo Emerson

Sung at the Completion of the Battle Monument, July 4, 1837

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood
And fired the shot heard round the world.
The foe long since in silence slept;
Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;
And Time the ruined bridge has swept
Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

On this green bank, by this soft stream,
We set today a votive stone;
That memory may their deed redeem,
When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

Spirit, that made those heroes dare
To die, and leave their children free,
Bid Time and Nature gently spare
The shaft we raise to them and thee.

Why I Voted the Socialist Ticket

By Vachel Lindsay (2005)

I am unjust, but I can strive for justice.
My life's unkind, but I can vote for kindness.
I, the unloving, say life should be lovely.
I, that am blind, cry out against my blindness.
Man is a curious brute—he pets his fancies—
Fighting mankind, to win sweet luxury.
So he will be, though law be clear as crystal,
Tho' all men plan to live in harmony.
Come, let us vote against our human nature,
Crying to God in all the polling places
To heal our everlasting sinfulness
And make us sages with transfigured faces.

Good Friday

By Maria Melendez Kelson (2014)

Jesus, I want my sins back.
My prattle, pride, and private prices —
climbing, clinching, clocking —
I might loan you a few for the evening,
so you don't show up at your own crucifixion
naked of all purpose.
But for God's sake, don't spill any
redemption on them! They're my
signature looks. Body by Envy.

Make up & wardrobe provided by Avarice. Lord,
if you take away my inordinate cravings,
what the hell's left? Do you know
how much I paid for my best rages?
I want them all back if they're
so To Die For. Else shred my palms,
wash my face with spit, let the whip
unlace my flesh and free the naked blood,
let me be tumbled to immortality
with the stew of flood debris
that is my life.

Redemption Quotations

“Love has within it a redemptive power. And there is a power there that eventually transforms individuals. Just keep being friendly to that person. Just keep loving them, and they can't stand it too long. Oh, they react in many ways in the beginning. They react with guilt feelings, and sometimes they'll hate you a little more at that transition period, but just keep loving them. And by the power of your love they will break down under the load. That's love, you see. It is redemptive.” — Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Action is redemption.” — Emily Dickinson

“True redemption is...when guilt leads to good.”
— Khaled Hosseini

“I think redemption is about righting a wrong, and in that pursuit it's about trying. You can stumble, you can make mistakes, but it's about trying to do the right thing.” — Michael B. Jordan

“I believe that the world was created and approved by love, that it subsists, coheres, and endures by love, and that, insofar as it is redeemable, it can be redeemed only by love.” — Wendell Berry

“Mere improvement is not redemption, though redemption always improves people.” — C. S. Lewis

“Redemption comes to those who wait, forgiveness is the key.” — Tom Petty

“Seeking to forget makes exile all the longer; the secret of redemption lies in remembrance.”
— Richard von Weizsaecker

“To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.” — Lewis B. Smedes

“I tell you to keep going, not because it's easy. Not because it doesn't hurt. I tell you to keep going because there's no other way. To stop is to die. Life is in motion. In growth. In change. Life is in seeking and in finding. Life is in redemption. Each moment is a new birth. A new chance to come back, to get it right. A new chance to make it better.”
— Yasmin Mogahed

“I believe in the forgiveness of sin and the redemption of ignorance.” — Adlai E. Stevenson

“Everything which is done in the present, affects the future by consequence, and the past by redemption.”
— Paulo Coelho

“I guess darkness serves a purpose: to show us that there is redemption through chaos. I believe in that. I think that's the basis of Greek mythology.” — Brendan Fraser

“Most of the heroes of Scripture rose to their greatest victories after their worst mistakes.” — Rick Joyner

“In the long run, the power of kindness can redeem beyond the power of force to destroy. There is a vast reservoir of kindness that we can no longer afford to disregard.”
— John MacAulay

“No human being is so bad as to be beyond redemption.”
— Mahatma Gandhi

“Hell is yourself and the only redemption is when a person puts himself aside to feel deeply for another person.”
— Tennessee Williams

“The problem of restoring to the world original and eternal beauty is solved by redemption of the soul.”
— Ralph Waldo Emerson

“A good act does not wash out the bad, nor a bad act the good. Each should have its own reward.”
— George R.R. Martin

“God creates out of nothing. Wonderful you say. Yes, to be sure, but he does what is still more wonderful: he makes saints out of sinners.” — Soren Kierkegaard

“There's no need to talk about it, because the truth of what one says lies in what one does.” — Bernhard Schlink

“Was it you or I who stumbled first? It does not matter. The one of us who finds the strength to get up first, must help the other.” — Vera Nazarian

“We can be redeemed only to the extent to which we see ourselves.” — Martin Buber

“No matter what a waste one has made of one's life, it is ever possible to find some path to redemption, however partial.” — Charles Frazier

“Your dignity can be mocked, abused, compromised, toyed with, lowered and even badmouthed, but it can never be taken from you. You have the power today to reset your boundaries, restore your image, start fresh with renewed values and rebuild what has happened to you in the past.”
— Shannon L. Alder

“In the end, it is our defiance that redeems us.”
— Mark Rowlands

Redemption

By Alex Lickerman, MD
(from imaginemd.net)

Over a decade ago, I did something about which I remain ashamed to this day: I broke a promise to someone in a way that hurt her terribly. I rationalized my decision by arguing that I hadn't wanted to make the promise in the first place but had been pressured into it. Many of the people in my life agreed at the time that for a variety of reasons my action was more than justified, framing the situation in different terms that made it seem more palatable. But ultimately I was unable to make peace with it. I couldn't escape the notion that to break a promise in order to meet self-serving ends (as was the case here) is rarely justifiable.

Yet break it I did. In Buddhist terms, I was immersed in the world of Hunger, overwhelmed by my desire to gain something I wanted at the time more than anything (I don't offer this as an excuse, but rather as an explanation). Luckily for me, though, breaking my promise created such dissonance that I was bounced out of Hunger, came to recognize just how much my desire had taken me over, and in so doing, regained enough self-control to regret what I'd done and vow never to do it again. (My apology came far too late, however; the relationship was destroyed.)

I lived with guilt over this for a long time, the apology I'd offered failing to free me from it, finding myself at times caught in a painful loop of self-recrimination. How, I wondered, could I be redeemed?

Finding Our Way to Redemption

Whenever a news story breaks about someone committing a heinous crime, I wonder about the possibility of redemption and how we achieve it. I wonder too if most of us don't carry around a secret harm we once did someone, a harm that, if we allow ourselves to ruminate over, risks our losing faith in our own goodness and even the health of our self-esteem. For anyone who remains haunted by a past act they regret or by which they feel permanently stained, I'd like to offer the following thoughts:

Our intent is the most critical component of our actions. Why did we do what we did? Was it for self gain or because we were trying to do what we thought was right and either inadvertently or regretfully injured the person we were trying to help? If the latter, we must embrace the fact that our intentions were good and that sometimes the most compassionate action looks, and even *is*, injurious on the surface (think of painful but necessary medical procedures). We may find ourselves tripped up in our attempts to reach this perspective by the complexity of the context in which we acted, finding it sometimes hard to figure out exactly how pure-hearted our intentions were. But if we can focus on those *intentions* rather than on their *results* (over which we rarely have complete control), we may learn we have nothing to regret at all.

Human beings are inherently neither good nor evil but display equal capacity for both. We often have as many impulses driving us to care for others as we do to harm them, and all of us have, at one time or another, done both. To label anyone, even the most despicable of figures, as purely evil is to delude ourselves (something we do, perhaps, to explain how people can commit the atrocities of which history is chock full). Certainly one could argue that in some people the capacity for good

remains so deeply buried as to be nonexistent. And many if not most evil-doers have died without ever redeeming themselves, making the redemption of such people a rarity. Yet as I never know which of my patients who smoke will be among the rare 2% who actually follow my advice to stop, none of us know that the evil-doer alive in front of us today won't at some point have an experience that brings home to him the horror of his actions. Redemption, therefore, remains a possibility for us all.

The path to redemption is difficult but not impossible to follow. We must fully recognize that we've done wrong; fully accept responsibility for having done it; determine never to do it again; apologize to those we've done it to (if appropriate); and resolve to aim at improving ourselves in the general direction of good. Interestingly, it was the last step, my conscious affirmation to become a person who would strive only to do good (even knowing I would at times fail), that enabled me to forgive myself and find redemption in my own eyes.

In Buddhism there exists an important principle known as "from today onward," which essentially says that to dwell unduly on the past negates the idea that we can change and improve ourselves in the future. We can't escape the effects of our past causes, of course, but we can aim to be transformed by them in a way that strengthens the good in us.

Even in the act of standing against evil, a Buddha would recognize an evil-doer for what he truly is: a profoundly misguided child. For who but a child would think he could build his happiness on the misfortune of others? Just as adults readily recognize immature and underdeveloped thought processes in children, so too does a Buddha recognize delusion as the root cause of the evil that people do, delusion about the true nature and dignity of life. Which is why even in the act of condemning an evil act a Buddha continues to revere the life of the person who commits it, never forgetting that the shattering of delusion, no matter how deeply entrenched in a person's life, is always possible—and with it, therefore, redemption.

There Is No Easier Way

By Elizabeth Nguyen

(from *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*)

I once saw a little sign, carved in wood, that read, "There is only the hard way." Many of us have been harmed by theology that told us that suffering was a sacrifice that would bring us closer to God. Many of us were told that our suffering would redeem us, even when we knew that actual redemption would have been to be free from the suffering to begin with. Many of us are only here because of the sacrifices of others. So much of what is possible to carve out in this world requires some giving up, some letting go, some sacrifice.

That is the truth of that little wooden sign: there is no easy way. There is only the hard way. In particular, the work of justice often asks us to do impossible, hard, terrifying things. There is no easier way. There is only this one hard way. Folks with more privilege sometimes get caught up here. "If it's hard, maybe we are doing it wrong," we tell ourselves. We are lulled by our experiences of

choosing between a hard choice and an easier one. Folks with less privilege know that many of our choices are between a horrific choice and a horrific choice. We learn to live with that and keep going.

Many of us want to do the right thing, the just thing, the generous thing, and also to not have to give anything at all. We want to share our opinions but not actually donate our evenings, our weekends, our doing-dishes-while-on-the-conference-call to get to understand the work enough to be able to offer meaningful thoughts. We want people to trust us and let us shape the vision but not actually risk inviting folks out to tea, dinner, beers, or church to build a relationship that endures and carries us forward. We may want to post the cute meme without actually making the phone call to the city councilor or state representative. We want to be part of that powerful, courageous, game-changing, direct action without the long-past-midnight planning meetings, the messy decision making, the frayed relationships, and the constant wondering if this is even worth it. We want to talk about being bound together in interdependence but do not actually want to give our guest room to a stranger, give a paycheck to someone we've never met, or turn our schedule inside out to do what needs to be done.

The word *sacrifice* might be too much mess for some of us, too tainted by oppression and coercion. What matters more is that we are willing to live our lives in the shape of what is being asked, not hope that what we are asked to do will fit the shape of our lives.

The Possibility of Redemption

By Robin Tanner

(from Braver/Wiser)

“Once you do away with the idea of people as fixed, static entities,
then you see that people can change, and there is hope.”

—bell hooks

“Is your congregation handicap accessible?”

“Yes, it is,” I replied.

“Great. I’ll see if my wife will bring me on Sunday.”

There he was the very next Sunday. Over the next few months, I learned a lot about John. A Vietnam veteran who returned home to serve as a police officer for twenty-five years, John had spent his entire life (outside of his time in Vietnam) in one place, one church, one town.

He had an urgency to tell me his story, because his health was not good. He found himself in the midst of a spiritual quest. He no longer believed the same truths of a conservative Christianity that his family did.

Over the next two years, I spent time with his family. They were all exceptionally kind and pleasant, but beneath the surface was John’s anxiety about their reaction to his beliefs, his grief over his terminal diagnosis, and their fear for his salvation. Add to that my own anxiety that John might have a death without suffering.

The day before John died, I was there, offering him a meditation about transitioning, while his childhood minister stood beside me offering a prayer. At the funeral, it struck me that many people there saw one version of John: he was fixed in their minds as they first knew him.

It's not unusual. We have narratives that guide the way we experience and know one another. In my own life, people often get frozen at a point for me.

One of my mentors, the Rev. Dr. William Barber, often reminds me that in movement work, "you must always believe the redemption of your enemy is possible."

This year, I've resisted a New Year's resolution. My usual Type A nature doesn't want to map out a new skill or goal, but this I think would sustain me more than home organization: to believe and experience people in my life as multidimensional; to hold out the possibility of redemption, and in so doing to live into the fullness of universalism, even for the enemy far—and within.

A Victim Treats His Mugger Right

Produced for *Morning Edition* by Michael Garofalo, March 28, 2008

Julio Diaz has a daily routine. Every night, the 31-year-old social worker ends his hour-long subway commute to the Bronx one stop early, just so he can eat at his favorite diner.

But one night last month, as Diaz stepped off the No. 6 train and onto a nearly empty platform, his evening took an unexpected turn.

He was walking toward the stairs when a teenage boy approached and pulled out a knife.

"He wants my money, so I just gave him my wallet and told him, 'Here you go,'" Diaz says.

As the teen began to walk away, Diaz told him, "Hey, wait a minute. You forgot something. If you're going to be robbing people for the rest of the night, you might as well take my coat to keep you warm."

The would-be robber looked at his would-be victim, "like what's going on here?" Diaz says. "He asked me, 'Why are you doing this?'"

Diaz replied: "If you're willing to risk your freedom for a few dollars, then I guess you must really need the money. I mean, all I wanted to do was get dinner and if you really want to join me ... hey, you're more than welcome.

"You know, I just felt maybe he really needs help," Diaz says.

Diaz says he and the teen went into the diner and sat in a booth.

"The manager comes by, the dishwashers come by, the waiters come by to say hi," Diaz says. "The kid was like, 'You know everybody here. Do you own this place?'"

"No, I just eat here a lot," Diaz says he told the teen. "He says, 'But you're even nice to the dishwasher.'"

Diaz replied, "Well, haven't you been taught you should be nice to everybody?!"

“Yea, but I didn’t think people actually behaved that way,” the teen said.

Diaz asked him what he wanted out of life. “He just had almost a sad face,” Diaz says.

The teen couldn’t answer Diaz — or he didn’t want to.

When the bill arrived, Diaz told the teen, “Look, I guess you’re going to have to pay for this bill ‘cause you have my money and I can’t pay for this. So if you give me my wallet back, I’ll gladly treat you.”

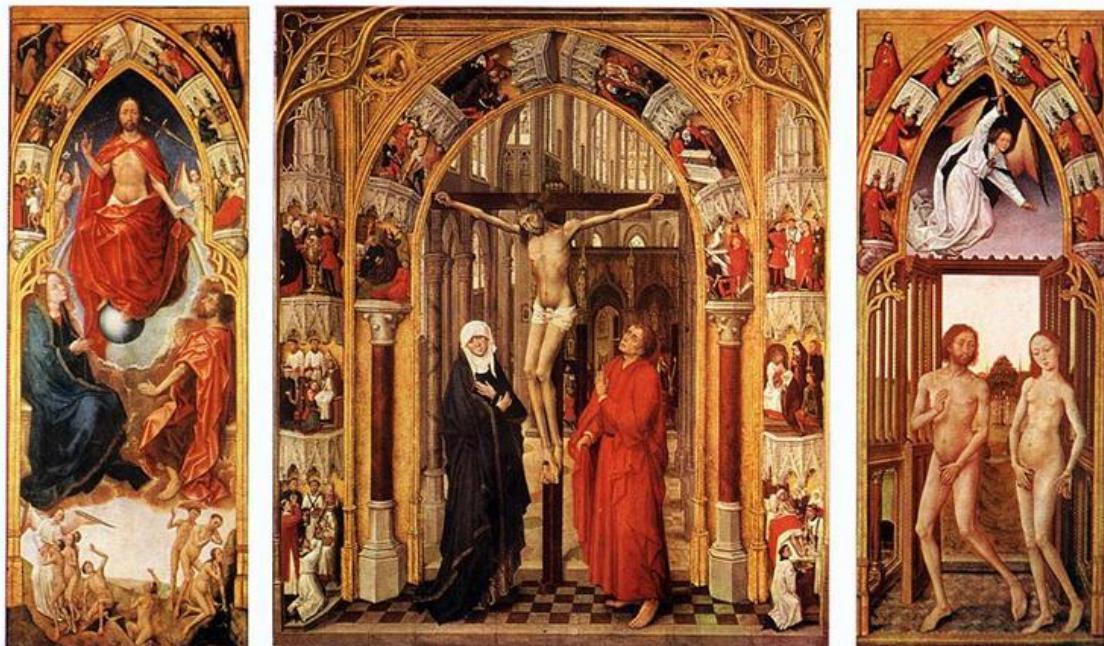
The teen “didn’t even think about it” and returned the wallet, Diaz says. “I gave him \$20 ... I figure maybe it’ll help him. I don’t know.”

Diaz says he asked for something in return — the teen’s knife — “and he gave it to me.”

Afterward, when Diaz told his mother what happened, she said, “You’re the type of kid that if someone asked you for the time, you gave them your watch.”

“I figure, you know, if you treat people right, you can only hope that they treat you right. It’s as simple as it gets in this complicated world.”

Note: In 2018, Unitarian Universalists sought a path for redemption and restorative justice for four young adults who mugged two UUA employees at General Assembly 2017 in New Orleans. To read more about this incident, please see Elaine McArdle’s article “New Orleans activists urged restorative justice for assailants who attacked two UUA employees” at UUWorld.org.



“Triptych of the Redemption” by Rogier van der Weyden

Redemption for All Generations

Use these resources to engage in cross-generational conversations.

In the Car

Check out the Spotify playlist “Redemption Songs” that includes music by Tracy Chapman, Nina Simone, Bruce Springsteen, Adele, Norah Jones, and others

Watching a Movie

Wall-E (2008) - G
It's a Wonderful Life (1946) – not rated
To Kill a Mockingbird (1962) – not rated
Groundhog Day (1993) - PG
Cry Freedom (1987) – PG
Gandhi (1982) – PG
Liar Liar (1997) – PG-13
Just Mercy (2019) – PG-13
Endgame (2009) – PG-13
Selma (2014) – PG-13
Shawshank Redemption (1994) – R
The Milagro Beanfield War (1988) - R

Online Resources

[5 Strategies to Help Kids Resolve Conflict](#), PBS
[The 8 Keys to Resolving Family Conflict](#),
Mediate.com
[Toolkit for Restoring Justice](#), Teaching
Tolerance
[Conflict Resolution Resources for Children](#),
Peaceworks Peace Education Foundation
[BLUUbox](#), Black Lives of UU monthly family
resources for understanding, inclusion, justice

Books and Other Resources

Trouble at the Watering Hold: The Adventures of Emo and Chickie by G.Relyea and J. Weiss
Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most by D. Stone, B. Patton, S. Heen
The Little Books of Justice and Peacebuilding Series, Eastern Mennonite University (many topics)
Voices from the Margins: An Anthology of Meditations, Jacqui James & Mark Morrison-Reed (eds.)
Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness, Carolyn Forché (ed.)

At the Dinner Table

Table Blessing:

To those of us whose lives have been hidden from society, from those we love, from ourselves - we join in solidarity.

To those of us who have resisted isolation and stood up to fear - we give heartfelt affirmation.

In honor of those of us who have courageously, joyfully, burst into the fullness of our identities - we offer gratitude and blessing.

— Molly Fumia

Conversation Starter:

We can explore redemption with children and youth through our UU practice of covenant and returning to right relations when we stumble.

We create covenants with family and friends as we discuss and negotiate the nature of our relationships and depth of our interdependence.

When there is conflict, we are invited to consider restorative practices that call us back into covenant, to foster understanding and deepen relationships.

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A: Justice is Redemption

Our faith calls us to action, to ‘love the Hell out of this world.’ Whether you are involved in a social justice team or are active in other ways, or are seeking ways to do the work of justice, know that at its heart, this work is about redemption – putting right what is wrong, helping those who seek a new and healthier path.

Keep on doing that work! And take a few minutes to journal about the connections you can make between the justice work you do and this theme of redemption.

Also, visit Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism (BLUU), whose #BLUUSupports initiative highlights “a different project, program or organization each month that aligns with our Unitarian Universalist principles and the principles of Black Lives of UU.” To learn more, visit <http://blacklivesuu.com/bluusupports>.

Option B: Fixing is Redemption

Fix or mend something! Whether it’s an appliance, a household repair, or mending some clothing, take your time and mend thoughtfully. Think about what it means to help the broken be whole again – for your personal use, but also for the planet.

If you are so inclined, consider using unexpected colors/materials in your mending – for example, colorful tape to hold something together, sparkly threads in the mended garment. In this way, you are visibly resisting disposable culture and the harmful myth of perfection.

Your Question

Don’t treat these questions like “homework” or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the one question that “hooks” you most and let it lead you where you need to go. Which question is calling to you? Which one contains “your work”?

1. How do you personally define “redemption”?
2. The religious tradition of your youth – especially if not Unitarian Universalism – may have had its own understanding of redemption that differs from the concepts we have been exploring here. How do you define what you were taught, and how does what you believe now about redemption differ? What does it mean to understand redemption differently?
3. How does redemption differ from forgiveness? From atonement? From reconciliation? What connections and distinctions do you make?
4. What are the signs of redemption in our work of justice? Is redemption achieved or gradually worked on over time?
5. How do you know when you’ve been redeemed? How do you tell another that they have?
6. Are there any circumstances where a person is unredeemable? What is the line for you?
7. As always, if none of the above questions connect with you, identify your own.

Check Out

What do you take with you from this time together?

Closing Words

“Though you’ve broken your vows a thousand times, come yet again. Come.”

—Rumi



On the Journey is produced by the Unitarian Universalist congregations of Westchester County, New York for use in small groups. Each month (ten months a year) explores a different theological or spiritual theme.

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