



# Soulful Home

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Finding the Sacred in  
Our Everyday Spaces

September 2020 - Renewal

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# The Welcome Mat

## What Does it Mean to be a Family of Renewal?

A few years ago, working as a hospital chaplain, I was visiting with a family who had just had a baby, the couple's fifth. The father was sitting on the one, plastic couch in the room, holding his sleeping newborn swaddled in the white-with-pink-and-blue-stripes blanket known to all parents who birth in an American hospital these days. The dad's sister was there, too, and as she looked at the calm and comfortable duo, she said to him, "Number five! Guess you got this whole daddy thing pretty well figured out by now!" To which he replied, exhausted but with great surety, "No, I'm a new daddy every time."

What a beautiful perspective on parenthood! When we embrace renewal, we accept that what worked in the past may not work in the future, and we trade the confidence of experience and mastery for the release, excitement, and opportunity of beginner's mind. That kind of renewal is a gift to our kids and ourselves.

While renewal comes with a sense of excitement, it may also be hard to come by this month. The near future looms. We look ahead to a major election, and a back-to-school scenario that is far from ideal. We look around at the effects of a poorly handled pandemic response--joblessness, overwork, sickness, death, discord and strife. We look inward and worry: How much more can we take? Are we up to the task of turning our country around? Is renewal even possible?

When faced with feelings like this, it helps to remember that renewal is not a solo effort. We're not in this alone. So as you engage this packet this month, we hope you keep in mind that other UU families from all over the country are doing it, too. May this awareness of spiritual solidarity help renew your hope.

Finally, let me call special attention to this month's "On the Porch" section. In it, we challenge the notion that renewal is always about work, something that we need to add to our to do list and devote a whole bunch of extra energy toward. In contrast, we introduce you to American poet Ross Gay, who reminds all of us that sometimes the most impactful renewal moments come in the form of those so-called "unproductive" times of "lollygagging." There's something powerful in remembering that renewal is just something we make happen but also something we have to sometimes *let* happen.

As we receive renewal this month, through doing and not doing, may we also find ways to share it.

In faith,

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.

Note: Younger family members are usually, developmentally, more concrete thinkers. With that in mind, we're building up to the theme of renewal by playing around with questions of newness and hope first. You might want to choose questions from the list more or less in order, depending on your own family's needs in mind.

### Discussion Questions

1. What's new? (This is meant as a general opener to help families take the time to tell each other what's exciting and new in their lives.)
2. What part of the natural world renews you the most?
3. What's lifting your spirits lately?
4. How does newness feel in your body?
5. Do you get excited or nervous when given the opportunity to "try something brand new"?
6. What's something in your home that you'd like to "spruce up"?
7. What gives you energy again when you're tired, grumpy, or bored?
8. When you try something new, and it doesn't work out, what makes you try it again?
9. When you first wake up in the morning, what do you look forward to the most?
10. What are you hoping happens when you turn \_\_\_\_\_ (child's next birthday age)? Do you think you'll be the same person then, or somehow different?
11. When we hurt a friend's feelings or make a mistake, saying we're sorry is an important way to renew that relationship. On a scale of 1-10, how good are you at saying "I'm sorry"?

### 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 in to bed, etc. If thoughts grew or changed, notice that together, how we are all evolving beings, opening ourselves to new truths and understandings as we live our lives and connect with others.



# Around the Neighborhood

*Around the Neighborhood activities engage families with their surroundings through the lens of the theme. It's about perceiving our well-known world in new ways. As you safely move around your neighborhood during this time of Covid, these suggestions help you transform your everyday back-and-forths into a family adventure!*

## A Treasure Hunt for Renewal

With this activity, we renew interest in our own neighborhoods, which we may have gotten pretty tired of in the past six months! And, we may even be helping to renew our neighbor's faith in community.

Get a few pieces of sidewalk chalk, and choose one or more of the following types of messages to write:

1. Using a plant identification app or local wildflower field guide, label the street or sidewalk in front of as many "weeds" as you can find, helping passers-by realize that they aren't really "just weeds." If you like, you join the ranks of [rebel botanists worldwide](#) who have shared their washable graffiti on social media.
2. Chalk encouraging messages at crossings and corners where you think people will be likely to find them. [UU minister Ashley Horan](#) did this right after the presidential election of 2016, when she wanted her Muslim and immigrant neighbors to know she loved and appreciated them.
3. Write some of your discussion questions from the At the Table section for your neighbors to consider as they walk and ride around your 'hood. A couple likely choices might be, "What's new?" or "What's lifting your spirits today?"
4. Create the outlines of a picture on the sidewalk in front of or near your house. Then fill in a small part of it with color chalk. Leave the chalk there in a rain proof container with a note nearby that says: "Help finish our picture and add to it!"



# From the Mailbox

*Our mailboxes connect us to the wide world outside our Soulful Homes. Sometimes, these connections ask things of us (a donation letter or flyer encouraging us to vote), sometimes these connections offer things to us (a letter from a friend or a special delivery), and often, they do both. This new section applies this metaphor to today's call for families to engage in the work of dismantling white supremacy culture. There are so many brave, inspiring and wise leaders "sending" us messages of hope and "delivering" us ideas about what we can do to fight racism. So each month, this section will contain two "notes" from these leaders in the field of anti-racism. Every family will relate to them differently. Engage them in whatever way connects with your family best.*

## Renewal Through Meditation

Evidence for the renewing power of meditation is plentiful. Buddhist Julio Rivera designed a meditation app for People of Color, by People of Color, called [Liberate](#). The app contains dharma talks and guided meditations organized in sections such as Peace During Adversity, Get Better Rest, and For the Frontlines. Some talks and meditations are original to the app, and some are sources from elsewhere.

There are a couple of lovely meditations offered for free, such as [Ruth King's](#) 4-minute "The Joy of Gratitude." The full app is unlocked through a monthly subscription of \$10 per month, or \$72 per year.

Invitation: Listen to King's free meditation, and tell a friend how it went for you, or journal about it. If you like the app's style, you might consider subscribing and making this a spiritual practice for the month.

## Renewing Our Commitment to Education and Journalism

This past summer, U.S. Senator Tom Cotton (R-Arkansas) introduced legislation that would prohibit K-12 schools from teaching *The New York Times Magazine's* 2019 [1619 Project](#), which "aims to reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative."

Invitation: learn what resources your local school district is using to teach about slavery and its ramifications. If what you discover about your local curriculum is encouraging, share the news with friends and co-workers, and ask them to join you in reaching out to



the school board to express your support. If what you learn is less than encouraging, also share this with friends and co-workers, and consider what action you might take collectively to let your school board know that teaching factual and anti-racist history is a priority for you.

The 1619 Project brought to light the incredible power of excellent journalism to positively shape the future of a people. It was conceived of and launched by NYT staff writer Nikole Hannah-Jones, who is Black. Hannah-Jones won a Pulitzer Prize for her work on the project. If your circumstances allow, consider donating to the [National Association of Black Journalists](#) to contribute to their efforts to increase access to and diversity in this crucial field.

Finally, [The Pulitzer Center](#) has developed an impressive collection of educational resources to accompany the 1619 project, which you can use at home.



# At Play

## Playing Games with Renewal

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

### Option A: Simple Stress-busters

Children can experience stress just like adults can. And like adults, stress can “build up” over time. The list below contains several choices for releasing stress through play and finding renewal in joy and movement together. The activities are open-ended and simple, to better help children process thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and to enjoy positive social interactions. This is renewing, because that processing creates soulful space for the learning and growth yet to come.

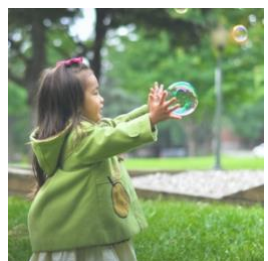
Play pretend with a couple of old phones. “Hello, is this Veterinarian Sofia? Dr. Sofia, my hippopotamus Simon isn’t feeling well. Can you come see him?”

Toss a ball or bean bag back and forth among family members. You might stop here, or the person who catches the ball shares a fact they know about \_\_\_\_\_. (Earthworms, hot air balloons, Pokémon, Covid-19, ice cream.) You could do this spontaneously, or plan for it when everyone’s gathered for a movie night or another occasion.

Blow bubbles or see if you can get a hold of some packing bubbles. Popping bubbles can be stress relieving!

Play keep-it-up with a balloon.

Lay on your backs outside on a sunny day and cloud-watch. Try to get each other to see what you are seeing in the abstract shapes.





## Option B: Screen-time energizers!

Most school kids are likely doing some form of distance learning right now or will be at some point in the fall and winter. Play with some of these energizers to help them take mind, body, and spirit breaks from so much sitting-down and concentrating. (Note that you can do most of these energizers on screen, too, so children can share them with online classmates and friends.)

Shake down -- each time, using a count of eight, shake the right arm, then the left, then the right leg, then the left, then the top half of the body, then the bottom half. Adapt this idea to the comfort and abilities of your family members.

Head and Shoulders, Knees and Toes -- You likely know this song, and it makes a great energizer by itself, but if you're up for a challenge, try to sing the song and do the motions *as a round* with as many family members as are willing! (Find the [lyrics here](#). It works well for the second person to come in during the second line of "Head and shoulders...")

Shape Up -- Take turns calling out shapes (circle, ellipse, square, triangle, rhombus, octagon, etc.) and then making those shapes with either your arms and head only (so you could do this sitting down), or your whole body.

Touch Blue -- Take turns calling out a color, texture, shape, or other category of item to touch. Again, this can be doing with lots of whole-body movement, or just from where a person is sitting. If family members are doing independent work around the same table, you might place a selection of interesting toys in the middle of the table to give them lots of options of things to touch.

The Floor is Lava -- Someone calls out, "The floor is lava!" and everyone has to quickly get off the floor and onto another surface by the count of 10. For wheelchair users, designate another area to get to, like getting to a carpet from the wooden or tile floor, or getting to one specific room such as the kitchen. For online fun, students might show their feet onscreen to prove that they're not on the lava floor!



# On the Message Board

## A Monthly Mantra

*The On the Message Board section lifts up a theme-related mantra 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.*

### September’s “Gesture” Mantra: /Brush it off/

<http://gph.is/2gXfoPv>

Or

<https://giphy.com/gifs/Yn5eftbpdqXX9WL09d>

Or

<https://gph.is/g/aNWODnJ>

This month’s mantra is actually a gesture that stands in for a big idea: sometimes a person has got to “dust off” the petty insults, assumptions, and doubts that others sling at us, and carry on with the day. The gesture--a flicking of metaphorical dirt off of one’s shoulder--is a visual cue for reclaiming one’s dignity and meeting the moment renewed.

Use one of these tongue-in-cheek gifs to remind yourself and your family members that you are not served by the words, deeds, or examples of those who neither share your values nor support you. Our moment calls for all the energy and optimism we can muster, and in order to do that, we have to renew our own and each other’s sense of self. We are bigger and brighter than the forces that would sully us!

You might introduce this gesture by telling a story of a time that you rose above another’s insult or obstacle, inserting the “dust off” to show how you handled yourself.



# 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.*

## The Renewal of Clean Water and Kindness: The Dog at the Well

For this month's bedtime ritual, we're suggesting you do a little bit of prep work to make the storytelling experience extra special.

- First, pick an evening when not much is going on. What we have described below calls for getting excited, and then calming back down, and that might take a little extra time!
- Second, have a way to watch a music video together in your child's room, or queue it up in whatever room it's convenient, and then be ready to dance your way to bed afterward!
- Third, read the linked story, "The Dog at the Well," by yourself first, so you have time to consider its theology and where your family might fit in it.

If you need to break up Parts 1 and 2 and do them on different nights, that's fine, too.

### **Part 1.a.:** A music video about being new:

Bring a couple of instruments into your child's bedroom secretly--a pot and a spoon, a harmonica, a shaker, a ukulele, whatever. As you watch this video together, Yael Naim's 2007 "New Soul" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhE7QMXRE1g>, begin playing along with the second or third chorus. Invite your child to do the same. If it feels right, listen to the song a second time and have a little dance party in their room! This part can be spontaneous and silly. A renewal of energy...AT BEDTIME?!? Yes! We are often most enlivened by surprise!

**Part 1.b.:** As your dancing, singing, playing is winding down, take a few deep breaths. Ask your child a question or two from the list below to help you transition to a quieter time for your storytelling:

Did you notice that the pictures that the singer hung up came to life, and that she could change them by painting on them? If you could paint, or draw, or in some other way create a wonderful afternoon, where would you start? Where would you be? Who would be there, too? What would you most like to be doing?

Was that a fun way to give ourselves a little boost of energy at the end of the day, a little singing and dancing? What other things give you energy and good feelings?



If a friend needed a little pick-me-up, if their spirit needed some renewal, what could you do to help them feel good?

Now, we're going to hear a story about a man who really needed to be refreshed, but he had to wait a long time for it and work hard for it. Are you ready?

**Part 2.a.:** Read this story together, here named "The Dog at the Well," and also sometimes known as "The Man and the Thirsty Dog." The story comes from the Muslim tradition. It was adapted by Marilyn McFarlane for her book, *Sacred Myths: Stories of World Religions* (Sibyl Publications, 1996). It was then republished as part of the UUA curriculum *Gather the Spirit*, by Christine T. Rafal and Richard S. Kimball.

<https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/multigenerational/gather/workshop7/149663.shtml>

After, or during, reading, you may or may not want to share one of the following statements (or your version of them) depending on the age and background knowledge of your child and your family's personal theology:

*Allah is another name for God. People who follow Islam, who are Muslim, might call God, Allah.*

*Muslims might express thanks to Allah when they're really grateful for something. Did you hear the man say, "Allah be praised!"? He was praising God for his good fortune in having found a drink right when he needed it so badly.*

*In Islam, when a person does good, kind, helpful things, it is said to please Allah. Many Muslims believe that Allah then rewards those kind and helpful people when they die by bringing them up to live in heaven.*

## **Part 2.b.:**

Ask a question from this list to close out your bedtime ritual:

The man in this story was so grateful for the cool, clean water! It said he felt much better after a drink. How do you feel if you're hungry, tired, and thirsty? How does it feel when these needs are well met for you? We might say that if we're really hungry, tired, and thirsty, and we get food, rest, and water, that we would feel renewed.

After he had his drink, the man was able to fetch water for the dog. How do you think the dog felt to get two boots full of cool, clean water? Do some animals depend on us to take care of them, or be considerate of them in the ways we live our lives? How do we do that in our family?

Where do you imagine the man was going? How do we get water when we're traveling now? Do all people have clean water to drink when they need it? Maybe we would want to say a special prayer or voice a hope that people who need water can get it.



# On the Porch

## Raising a Child of Renewal Together

*On the Porch supports sharing realizations, challenges 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) over the soulful parts of parenthood. The “A Sip of Something New” section invites you and your discussion partner to take in a new idea shared by someone else. The “Spiritual Snacks” section stimulates personal storytelling and the sharing of your own wisdom and experience.*

### A Sip of Something New

Together with your trusted friend or partner, take turns reading aloud this reflection by American poet Ross Gay. (Note: there is strong language.)

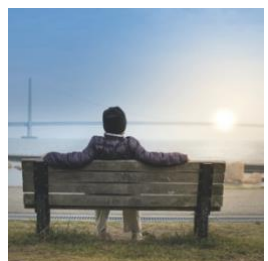
<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2019/02/11/loitering-is-delightful/>

Gay makes the case that loitering--taking one’s time, being intentionally unproductive, *lollygagging*--is a delightful form of renewal. He also describes how exercising this delight is a privilege unequally shared in America. (Note: In the piece above, Gay makes reference to a Carrie Mae Weems photograph, which can be found here:

<https://www.phillips.com/detail/carrie-mae-weems/NY010414/254>)

#### For Discussion

- Do Gay’s words reflect your experience or observations? Do they challenge any assumptions you may have been holding?
- How does the idea of “doing nothing” as a form of renewal fit with your upbringing? Were people close to you free to spend time idly, or were there judgments or unpleasant consequences for doing so?
- The photograph Gay describes (linked above) is from a photo series by artist Carrie Mae Weems called, “Mom at Work, 1974-1983.” How are work and renewal linked for you?



## 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

- Whose ways of being in the world taught you the most about the power of renewal?
- What parts of parenting renew your spirit, and which parts deplete you? How does it feel to name these aspects out loud?
- How has your pursuit of renewal changed in the last 10 years? Five years? Six months?
- Describe the last time you felt completely renewed, refreshed, reinvigorated, and ready to face whatever came next for you?
- When was a time that you were “filled up” by making renewal possible for someone else?
- What were you taught in your family of origin about the renewing power of apology? Did your parents or guardians model apology in a way you want to pass on or in a way you'd like to avoid?
- What kind of renewal do you think would be most helpful for your community right now?



# 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 in an Unexpected Season: Radish Garden in September!**

Spring and summer get all the glory for new growth, but fall, as an in-between season, offers a different kind of renewal for the garden. Amidst the expected metaphors for tucking in, quieting down, getting ready for the long sleep of winter, etc. that you’ll find this month, throw in a little surprise by growing a brand-new crop of radishes! Renewal can be a kind of rebirth, and nothing helps us to know rebirth in our bodies like planting a seed and caring for it as it sprouts and grows.

Radishes mature in 45 days or so, meaning you could start a handful of radish seeds in a small container (something that you could bring inside if you live where frost might threaten a few times in September), and have some fresh veggies to munch by mid-October.

Use this little portable garden to remind yourselves that life, growth, and renewal is happening ALL the time.

## **Renewal through Play: Break Time Ball!**

Make something special for moments of casual renewal between tasks; how about a DIY Indoor basketball hoop? [Here are two options](#) made from household items. A “ball” made from crunched-up duct tape works best, but for an eco-friendlier option, you could place the hoop over your paper recycling bin and use wadded-up paper for your challenges!



# Blessing

You who lie in sick beds,  
    And you who fear its pull,  
You who toil long hours,  
    And you whose skills long for good use,  
You who search for kinship,  
    And you who seek time alone,  
You with unanswered questions,  
    And you in whom doubts grow,  
You who, masked, have marched for change,  
    And you whose love and prayers followed them  
    down that avenue,  
May your bodies know respite,  
May your hands hold purpose,  
May your spirits lift in love,  
May your minds divine reason for hope, and  
May that hope--well placed here among us--  
Be renewed.





## 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/](https://www.instagram.com/soul_matters_circle/)

Parents and youth will want to check out our music playlists on the monthly themes.  
One playlist is one [Spotify](#) and another on our [YouTube](#) channel

### Credits

Soulful Home packets are prepared by  
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