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## Stability Amidst Change: A Journaling Workshop

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In the early weeks of a new year, and in the season of Epiphany, come gather your stirrings, hopes and leadings through a gentle, restorative time of presentation, poetry, easy written exercises, and sharing. This quiet, reflective time will use easy writing prompts to help us become more aware of the stirrings in our lives. "Stability Amidst Change" may seem like a paradox, but in fact both these aspects of our life partner in many ways.

*Journaling... a way to rest... listen... learn... receive... discern... and to pray.*

*"...what we will be has not yet been revealed..." 1<sup>st</sup> John 3:2*

**"Listen to your life.** See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and the pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness; touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it, because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace."  
- Frederick Buechner

"To the end of our days we never quite forget that we carry within us all there is of beauty and terror, of frailty and eternity, of the cosmos in a fleeting pinpoint of awareness, and of the seed of a divine child born in our own soul."  
- Marv Hiles, All the Days of My Life

### Opening Prayer

**Give me a candle of the Spirit, O God,  
as I go down into the deep of my own being.  
Show me the hidden things,  
take me down to the spring of my life,  
and tell me my nature and my name.  
Give me freedom to grow so that I may become  
my true self—the fulfillment of the seed  
which You planted in me at my making.  
Out of the deep I cry unto thee, O God.**

- George Appleton

*"I would love to live like a river flows,  
carried by the surprise of its own unfolding."*

- John O'Donohue

## **Prompt #1. Quieting and Welcoming ...**

Come and find the quiet center  
in the crowded life we lead,  
find the room for hope to enter,  
find the frame where we are freed:  
clear the chaos and the clutter,  
clear our eyes, that we can see  
all the things that really matter,  
be at peace, and simply be.

Silence is a friend who claims us,  
cools the heat and slows the pace,  
God it is who speaks and names us,  
knows our being, touches base,  
making space within our thinking,  
lifting shades to show the sun,  
raising courage when we're shrinking,  
finding scope for faith begun.

In the Spirit let us travel,  
open to each other's pain,  
let our loves and fears unravel,  
celebrate the space we gain:  
there's a place for deepest dreaming,  
there's a time for heart to care,  
in the Spirit's lively scheming  
there is always room to spare!

- Shirley Erena Murray

### **Quick Journaling:**

Circle a word, a phrase that catches your attention or lights up for you. Jot down any thoughts you have...

## Prompt #2. Tracking the Change

"Do not remember the former things,  
Or consider the things of old.  
I am about to do a new thing;  
Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
And rivers in the desert."

- Isaiah 43: 18-19, NRSV

To be hopeful, to embrace one possibility after another that is surely the basic instinct - crying out: High tide! Time to move out into the glorious debris. Time to take this life for what it is!

- Barbara Kingsolver

### Things to Think

Think in ways you've never thought before  
If the phone rings, think of it as carrying a message  
Larger than anything you've ever heard,  
Vaster than a hundred lines of Yeats.

Think that someone may bring a bear to your door,  
Maybe wounded and deranged: or think that a moose  
Has risen out of the lake, and he's carrying on his antlers  
A child of your own whom you've never seen.

When someone knocks on the door, think that he's about  
To give you something large: tell you you're forgiven,  
Or that it's not necessary to work all the time, or that it's  
Been decided that if you lie down no one will die.

- Robert Bly

**Journaling questions... What new things are being revealed to you? Any new sources of sustenance?**

**How are you being asked to look at things differently? The radical welcome of surprise in the Bly poem... what does it say to you?**

**Did you discover a new capacity during 2022 you did not know you had?**

A suddenly apt quote:

**"Life has a heroic dimension that begs another set of questions."** - E.O Wilson

**What "other set of questions" are you asking yourself these days... or are being asked of you?**

### **Prompt #3. Sensing the Stability...**

*"... there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling she had had once today, already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that remains for ever after."*

- Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

Clarissa Pinkola Estes compares our multiplicity to a New Mexican house:

*"Like the pueblos and casitas in New Mexico, the psyche is always in at least three stages—the old fallen down part, the part you live in, and the part under construction. It is like that."*

- Women Who Run with the Wolves

#### **Questions for Journaling**

What "part" or chapters or themes or tensions are you "living in?"

What is the old fallen down part that maybe you have moved out of?

Have you really moved, or do you still linger there?

Finally, what is the part of you is excitedly "under construction" or that wants to be?

#### **Your "Stability Checklist"**

What are some of things that you call on, or practice, or reach for in times of anxiety and change? What steadies you, and reminds you that you are on solid ground after all?

*"All we can say for sure is that a mystery courses through us, seeking its own fullest incarnation, and that whenever we serve the mystery within we experience a linkage to the mystery outside. When we stand in conscious relationship to this mystery, we are more deeply alive."*

- James Hollis, "Swamplands of the Soul"

## Prompt #4. Integrating Stability and Change...

We may not create epiphanies, but we respond to them. Epiphanies grab a hold of us; we can't shake them. Epiphanies ask something of us. The star is an invitation, a calling to do something — to act.

These verses from Isaiah, traditionally read at Epiphany, underscore this:

*Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*

*We arise; we shine* — glory entices us, *woos* us, into the light. **We don't just observe. Epiphany embraces and vivifies us.** — Diana Butler Bass, from her blog

*Ahead of them went the star that they had seen at its rising,  
until it stopped over the place where the child was.*

- Matthew 2.9

### Rogue Star

Odd star, no?

Rose in the east (all things rise in the east)  
but scooted westward for the magi to follow—  
then stopped.

Not easy for a star above a rotating planet.

Stopped and stooped, apparently:

low enough to hover over a single house.

A star that nobody else, including Herod,  
seems to have noticed.

A rogue star, noncompliant with the laws of stardom.

Step over the ashes of the arguments of the literalists.

Take the story as it is.

The revelation of God will come to you  
in ways that make no sense,  
cannot be explained, exploited, or replicated—  
heck, you can't even talk about it sensibly.

But it is there, and it shines— in an unassuming baby,  
a tender conversation, a healing, a feeling,  
a fleeing family, somehow luminous,  
a moment when the earth seems to hold you gently,  
or just staring out the window and knowing something  
unnameable, warm and attractive.

The star will go ahead of you, it will stop over you,  
it will wink but not go out. It will go on.

Let your heart be led by the rogue star of God.

- Steve Garnas-Holmes

## **Prompt #5. Moving into Action...**

"When you turn around, starting here,  
lift this New Glimpse that you found;  
carry into evening all that you want from this day."

- William Stafford

**"Dare to declare who you are.  
It is not far from the shores of silence to the boundaries of speech.  
The path is not long, but the way is deep.  
You must not only walk there, you must be prepared to leap."**

- Hildegard of Bingen

**Look well to the growing edge!** All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born; all around us life is dying and life is being born. The fruit ripens on the tree, the roots are silently at work in the darkness of the earth against a time when there shall be new leaves, fresh blossoms, green fruit. Such is the growing edge! It is the extra breath from the exhausted lung, the one more thing to try when all else has failed, the upward reach of life when weariness closes in upon all endeavor. This is the basis of hope in moments of despair, the incentive to carry on when times are out of joint and men have lost their reason, the source of confidence when worlds crash and dreams whiten into ash. The birth of the child — life's most dramatic answer to death — this is the growing edge incarnate. Look well to the growing edge!

- Civil Rights theologian Howard Thurman

### **Questions for Journaling:**

The glimpse... the leap... your call to manifest...

What most wants to come with you from your writing today into this new year?

What is your "growing edge," and how can you "look well to it?"

## Benediction and Closing...

### The Little Duck

Now we're ready to look at something pretty special.  
It is a duck,  
riding the ocean a hundred feet beyond the surf.  
No it isn't a gull.  
A gull always has a raucous touch about him.  
This is some sort of duck,  
and he cuddles in the swells.

He isn't cold,  
and he is thinking things over.  
There is a big heaving in the Atlantic,  
and he is a part of it.

He looks a bit like a mandarin,  
or the Lord Buddha meditating under the Bo tree.

But he has hardly enough above the eyes  
to be a philosopher.  
He has poise, however,  
which is what philosophers must have.

He can rest while the Atlantic heaves,  
because he rests in the Atlantic.

Probably he doesn't know how large the ocean is.  
And neither do you.  
But he realizes it.

And what does he do, I ask you?  
He sits down in it!  
He reposes in the immediate as if it were infinity  
– which it is.  
He has made himself a part of the boundless  
by easing himself into just where it touches him.

I like the duck.  
He doesn't know much,  
but he's got religion.

- Donald C. Babcock, poet, minister and professor of Philosophy

## **Listening for God: Ways to gather the day...**

*"The moment that might easily pass unnoticed or be misunderstood is just as much an invitation from God as the grander moments of our lives. Our God is a dancing God who moves us in unexpected patterns, introduces us to unlikely partners, and encourages us to take new steps—all that we might dance life more fully."*

— Jean M. Blomquist, *Weavings*, Dec/Jan 1989

## **Reviewing your day or week, can you trace the hand of God...**

- Messengers throughout the day: persons sent to you
- People you helped
- People who helped you
- Other ways you were used in the world
- Things you are grateful for
- Surprises
- Interruptions
- Intuition
- Conversations
- Messages: Encouragement, guidance, warnings
- Dreams
- Events--large and small
- Hunches
- Signals from your body
- Music
- Reading
- Aspects of nature / weather
- A "still, small voice"
- Scripture
- Humor
- Longings and Needs
- Icons or symbols: things that assumed significance
- New thoughts, possible actions, attitudes, questions

*"A journal is a tool for self-discovery, an aid to concentration, a mirror for the soul, a place to generate and capture ideas, a safety valve for the emotions, a training ground for the writer, and a good friend and confidant."*

- Ronald Klug, How to Keep a Spiritual Journal

## **Resources for further exploration...**

### **Books for Inner Work**

Robert Johnson, Inner Work

Ronald Klug, How to Keep a Spiritual Journal

Richard Peace, Spiritual Journaling: Recording Your Journey Toward God

Ira Progoff, At a Journal Workshop: Writing to Access the Power of the Unconscious and Evoke Creative Ability

Finding Jesus, Discovering Self by Caren Goldman and William Dols

The Artist's Rule: Nurturing Your Creative Soul with Monastic Wisdom by C.V Painter

### **The Examen... a form of which is in your handouts... a way to review your day**

The book Sleeping with Bread by Denise and Mark Linn looks at the ways God is at work in our lives, through an examination of the day's events.

### **Books for transitions and challenging times**

Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes by William Bridges

The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief by Jan Richardson

Mystical Hope: Trusting in the Mercy of God by Cynthia Bourgeault

Swamplands of the Soul: New Life in Dismal Places by James Hollis

Healing Through the Dark Emotions by Miriam Greenspan

The Places that Scare You and When Things Fall Apart by Pema Chodron

Dropping the Struggle by Roger Housden

Falling Upward by Richard Rohr

Broken Open: How Difficult Times Can Help Us Grow by Elizabeth Lesser

In the Shelter: Finding a Home in the World by Padraig O'Tauma

On the Brink of Everything by Parker Palmer

Bittersweet: How Sorrow and Longing Make Us Whole by Susan Cain

### **Website sources**

Steve Garnaas-Holmes. Sign up at [www.unfoldinglight.net](http://www.unfoldinglight.net) for daily poems.

Jan Richardson.com. Amazing treasure trove...

katebowler.com and any of her books, including "No Cure for Being Human"

Linda Graham, Resilience expert: [lindagraham-mft.net](http://lindagraham-mft.net)

### **You are the ongoing resource...**

"The ways of service are infinite and left to the imagination. Let us not wait to be instructed in how to serve. We invent and we live the new heavens and the new earth each day of our lives... if we don't love, God remains without an epiphany. We are the visible sign of his presence and we make him alive in this infernal world where it seems that he is not. We make him alive each time we stop next to a wounded person."

- Annalena Tonelli in the book about her life of service, "Stronger Than Death" by Rachel Pieh Jones

