

THE JOURNEY: A Guide for Reflection

Grounding

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Are you grounded?

It's a question that can land very differently, depending on one's age. To a child or teen, it's most likely a question about punishment—about whether someone is being disciplined for having broken some rule.

But to an adult (and arguably for younger people, too), the question “*Are you grounded?*” can mean so much more: Are your feet firmly planted? Are you connected to what most deeply sustains you? Are you staying close to home, to the heart of things? Are you in touch with the spirit of life, which lives and moves and has its being in you?

The process of grounding—of becoming grounded—is a spiritual practice itself; and there are countless ways to go about it. For some, it's a state of being reached through regular meditation or prayer. For others, it's in more physically active pursuits, from running to yoga to hiking in the great outdoors. For others, it's in tending relationships, in nurturing the ties that bind us together.

At the dawn of a new year, may you give thought and intention to becoming more grounded. Because, in my experience, people who are grounded have a better sense of who they are and what they are capable of. They are more resilient, better equipped to meet life as it comes. That is my new year's wish for you all.

In faith and love,
Shawn

Questions to Live With



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1. Are you grounded? How so?
2. What does it mean to you to feel yourself grounded? What are the signs you depend on to know?
3. What spiritual practices help you to feel most grounded? How do they work?
4. What gets in the way from you feeling as grounded as you'd like to be?
5. Has the feeling of being grounded changed for you over time? Have the things that once caused you to feel grounded changed? Is feeling grounded easier or harder to reach these days? Why do you think that is?
6. If not one of the above, what is your question about grounding this month?

For Inspiration

Be humble for you are made of Earth. Be noble for you are made of stars.

- Serbian proverb

As I grow to understand life less and less, I learn to live it more and more.

- Jules Renard

When someone is properly grounded in life, they shouldn't have to look outside themselves for approval.

- Epictetus

As a way of life, a middle path is an ongoing task of responsiveness and risk, grounded on a groundless ground. Its twists and turns are as turbulent and unpredictable as life itself.

- Stephen Batchelor

Perhaps the most important thing we bring to another person is the silence in us, not the sort of silence that is filled with unspoken criticism or hard withdrawal. The sort of silence that is a place of refuge, of rest, of acceptance of someone as they are. We are all hungry for this other silence. It is hard to find. In its presence we can remember something beyond the moment, a strength on which to build a life. Silence is a place of great power and healing.

- Rachel Naomi Remen

To dwell in the here and now does not mean you never think about the past or responsibly plan for the future. The idea is simply not to allow yourself to get lost in regrets about the past or worries about the future. If you are firmly grounded in the present moment, the past can be an object of inquiry, the object of your mindfulness and concentration. You can attain many insights by looking into the past. But you are still grounded in the present moment.

- Thich Nhat Hanh

Sublime places repeat in grand terms a lesson that ordinary life typically introduces viciously: that the universe is mightier than we are, that we are frail and temporary and have no alternative but to accept limitations on our will; that we must bow to necessities greater than ourselves... This is the lesson written into the stones of the desert and the ice fields of the poles. So grandly is it written there that we may come away from such places not crushed but inspired by what lies beyond us, privileged to be subject to such majestic necessities. The sense of awe may even shade into a desire to worship.

- Alain de Botton

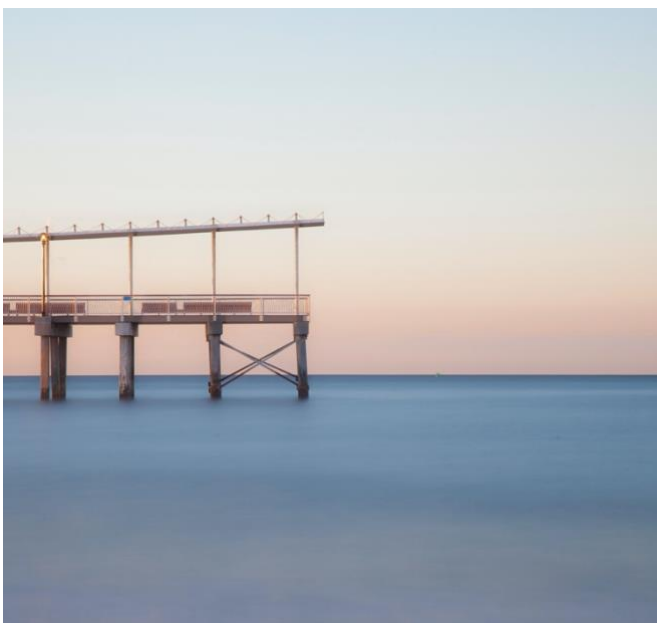


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As a personal or family ritual, have a meal in silence from time to time. Often the pressures of daily life can make meals a stressful routine. Or we can get so caught up in all the events of the day that we forget to take the time to enjoy our food. The tendency is to hurry through dinner so we can then dash off to the evening's activities. We often rush through meals, talking a mile a minute and later don't even remember what we ate, or how it tasted. Rather than mindlessly diving into the food, you could genuinely but silently express your own gratitude for the meal, and accept on an inner as well as a physical level the benefits of the sustenance it will provide. Then make a point of being aware of the food, and of savoring each bite. It's amazing how much you can hear when no one is saying anything.

- Elaine St. James

I found one of my best teachers on the boardwalk at Coney Island many years ago. It was December, and I was doing a story about how the homeless suffer in the winter months. He and I sat on the edge of the wooden supports, dangling our feet over the side, and he told me about his schedule, panhandling the Boulevard when the summer crowds were gone, sleeping in a church when the temperature went below freezing, hiding from the police amid the Tilt-A-Whirl and the Cyclone and some of the other seasonal rides. But he told me that most of the time he stayed on the boardwalk, facing the water, just the way we were sitting now, even when it got cold and he had to wear his newspapers after he read them. And I asked him why. Why didn't he go to one of the shelters? Why didn't he check himself into the hospital for detox? And he stared out at the ocean and said, "Look at the view, young lady. Look at the view." And every day, in some little way, I tried to do what he said. I tried to look at the view. That's all. Words of wisdom from a man with not a dime in his pocket, no place to go, nowhere to be. Look at the view. When I do what he said, I'm never disappointed.

- Anna Quindlen

Whether something lasts or not has nothing to do with whether it's made of stone or steel or wood or fabric. A house built all in wood can be a monument that lasts for hundreds of years because it seduces people to live in it, to use it and maintain it. Eternity depends on whether people are willing to take care of something. In Greece, ordinary white houses are repainted every year. Today we are often told to use materials and structures that are free of maintenance. But no building can be neglected entirely. We need constantly to renew our relationships—to the houses we live in, to our friends, to our own bodies—all the time, every day.

- Werner Herzog

I only know that what matters is unsayable. And yet, every attempt to reveal it helps us live, the way every plant grows by reaching for a light it can't see or name. God is such a sun. Truth is such a sun. Love is such a sun. And each of these—God, Truth, and Love—is just a temporary name for something too big to stay named.

I only know that to be alive and to gather meaning from living, we're asked to throw our words and feelings and questions, like wood, onto the fire of all that's unsayable—to keep the shimmer of what matters before us.

- Mark Nepo



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Joy of life seems to me to arise from a sense of being where one belongs, of being foursquare with the life we have chosen. All the disconnected people I know are trying sedulously to be something they are not, to do something they cannot do. Contentment, and indeed usefulness, comes as the infallible result of great acceptances, great humilities – of not trying to make ourselves this or that (to conform to some dramatized version of ourselves), but of surrendering ourselves to the fullness of life – of letting life flow through us.

- David Grayson

“Next Time” - Mary Oliver

Next time what I'd do is look at
the earth before saying anything. I'd stop
just before going into a house
and be an emperor for a minute
and listen better to the wind
or to the air being still.

When anyone talked to me, whether
blame or praise or just passing time,
I'd watch the face, how the mouth
has to work, and see any strain, any
sign of what lifted the voice.

And for all, I'd know more – the earth
bracing itself and soaring, the air
finding every leaf and feather over
forest and water, and for every person
the body glowing inside the clothes
like a light.

“Kindness” - Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

Consider the tulip,
how it rises every spring
out of the same soil,
which is, of course,
not at all the same soil,
but new. How long ago
someone’s hands planted a bulb
and gave to this place
a living scrap of beauty.

Consider the six red petals,
the yellow at the center,
the soft green rubber of the stem,
how it bows to the world. How,
the longer we sit beside it,
the more we bow to it.

It is something like kindness,
is it not? The way someone plants
in you a bit of beauty—a kind word,
perhaps, or a touch, the gift
of their time or their smile.
And years later, in the soil that is you,
it emerges again, pushing aside
the dead leaves, insisting on beauty,
a celebration of the one who planted it,
the one who perceives it, and
the fertile place where it has grown.

“Drink Your Tea” - Thich Nhat Hahn

Drink your tea slowly and reverently,
as if it is the axis
on which the world earth revolves
- slowly, evenly, without
rushing toward the future;
Live the actual moment.
Only this moment is life.



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Optional Spiritual Exercise



Photo by kpncnha Oathnha on Unsplash

This month's spiritual exercise is an opportunity to start 2023 with a renewed sense of being grounded. Your challenge is to come up with a new way to get there—to switch things up. If meditation is your go-to, give yoga a try instead. If you swim to feel grounded, try praying instead (or in addition to). Or spend time with someone half your age, really listening to what matters to them. Or give yourself over to your senses, focussing with intention on the taste of every morsel that lands on your tongue or the scent of everything that passes through your hands during the course of a day. Whatever you do, try something new. Then reflect on your experience. And, if moved to do so, share your reflection with the members of your Journey Group.

Join Us

Join a Journey Group

Journey Groups are a great way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with small group of people for a couple of hours each month. Groups meet online on Zoom and are scheduled at different times during the month.

For more information, visit our website firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/ or look for the link in *First Light*.

Upcoming Themes

February – Love | March – Anger | April – Welcome | May – Freedom

Upcoming Services | Sundays at 10:30 a.m.

January 1 | “Hearts Ablaze”
Rev. Shawn Newton

January 8 | “Lives Lived”
Rev. Shawn Newton & Rev. Lynn Harrison

January 15 | “Turn, Turn, Turn”
Rev. Shawn Newton

January 22 | “Bringers of the Dawn”
Rev. Shawn Newton

January 29 | “How People are Like Mushrooms, and Like Neurons”
Jim Mason

The Journey Team

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