



EXPLORATION

Renewal

Readings



There is in us
an instinct
for newness,
for renewal,
for a liberation
of creative power.
We seek to awaken
in ourselves a force
which really changes
our lives from within.
Thomas Merton

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1. *The Wheel of Rebirth*

by Master Hsing Yun

The wheel of rebirth is not only found in changes in the universe; it is also evident in the many changes that people experience during their lifetime, from the time of birth to the time of death. According to scientific research, there is not a single cell in the body that does not change over the course of seven years. In other words, our bodies are completely renewed every seven years. The cellular structure, perception, and cognition of all living creatures, from simple organisms to advanced humans, are constantly moving, changing, living, and dying.

This constant state of flux, renewal, and metabolic change that we experience physically (birth, old age, sickness, and death) and in our minds (the forming, existing, changing, and ceasing of thoughts) are what we call the wheel of rebirth. The wheel of rebirth is also at work in family relationships; at one time we are the children of our parents, yet another time we become the parents of our children. The changes in our economic welfare and the ups and downs of our emotions are also examples of rebirth. Nothing escapes the infinite patterns of change and renewal that are part of the wheel of rebirth.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/quotes/quotations/view/29779/spiritual-quotations>

2. *A New Social Vision*

by Jim Wallis

A prophetic politics rooted in moral principles could again spark people's imagination and involvement. We need a personal ethic of moral responsibility, a social vision based on bringing people together, a commitment to justice with the capacity for reconciliation, an economic approach governed by the ethics of community and sustainability, a restored sense of our covenant with the abandoned poor and the damaged earth, a reminder of shared values that calls forth the very best in us, and a renewal of citizen politics to fashion a new political future. But to shape a new future we must first find the moral foundations and resources for a new social vision.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/quotes/quotations/view/23945/spiritual-quotations>

3. *In Forgiveness, Renewal*

by L. Gregory Jones

The practice of forgiveness calls us willingly to do things with and for one another so that communion can be restored. Forgiveness works through our ongoing willingness to give up certain claims against one another, to give the truth when we assess our relationships with one another, and to give gifts of ourselves by making innovative gestures that offer a future not bound by the past. Being forgiven requires an ongoing willingness to honor a new claim that has been made on us, to speak with a new truthfulness, and to live in a new way with one another.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/quotes/quotations/view/10557/spiritual-quotations>

4. *The Gift of Years*

by Joan Chittister

"No one was ever so completely skilled in the conduct of life," Jonathan Swift said, "as not to receive new information from age and experience."

Diminishment is no longer the prin-

cipal characteristic of aging. On the contrary, we are now developing in ways that only a short time ago would have been considered impossible for anyone over the age of forty.

...Old age is not a free ride to irresponsibility. Now we must take our place among the sages of the world, comparing, evaluating, cajoling, and bringing experience to bear as have the elders of every generation before us.

Now, too, we have a responsibility to mentor the generations after us in the values and ideals that build a society based on equality, respect for others, and pluralism. More than that, we have the spiritual responsibility to see life as a moral force rather than simply a private enterprise.

We need to come to understand to the center of our souls that age is not a disease. It is a new experience in how to live life, how to milk it dry of goodness, of energy, of gratitude, of calm and quiet creativity.

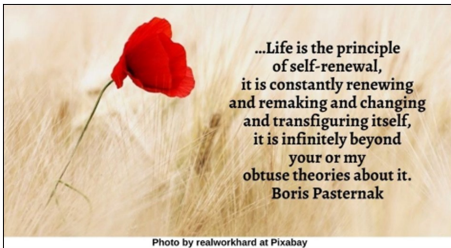
...These are the capstone years, the time in which a whole new life is in the making again. But the gift of these years is not merely being alive — it is the gift of becoming more fully alive than ever.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/reviews/view/18092>

5. *Organic Gift* by Parker Palmer

Years ago, I heard Dorothy Day speak. ...It came as a great shock when in the middle of her talk, I heard her start to ruminate about the "ungrateful poor."

I did not understand how such a dismissive phrase could come from the lips of a saint - until it hit me with the force of a Zen koan. Dorothy Day was saying, "Do not give to the poor expecting to get their gratitude so that you can feel good about yourself. If you do, your giving will be thin and short-lived, and that is not what the poor need; it will only impoverish them further. Give only



if you have something you must give; give only if you are someone for whom giving is its own reward.”

When I give something I do not possess, I give a false and dangerous gift, a gift that looks like love but is, in reality, loveless—a gift given more from my need to prove myself than from the other’s need to be cared for.

One sign that I am violating my own nature ...is a condition called burnout. Though usually regarded as the result of trying to give too much, burnout in my experience results from trying to give what I do not possess—the ultimate in giving too little!

...When the gift I give to the other is integral to my own nature, ...it will renew itself—and me—even as I give it away.

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/v2/read/view.php?tid=2105>

6. *Making a New Start*

by Patty De Llosa

Making a new start isn’t starting ‘again.’ There’s no ‘again’ about it. New is new. But by now I’ve learned how quickly I slip back into the old, so making a new start needs constant renewing. That means I have to work at the ‘new’ part when everything calls me back to old ways. As F. M. Alexander said, “Change involves carrying out an activity against the habits of life.”

I’m hard put to find words to describe this active work of renewal, so I’ll try to recount the experience itself. First, there’s the moment of truth: I’ve connected with my life on a deeper level than before. Then there’s the vision awakened by the experience. I’ve understood something and been given a new opportunity to live by it, to base my life on that vision.

...I call my new way to work with it “planting seeds of change.” Every time I wake up to the Old, I find some way to plant a seed of New, even if

there’s little else I can do against the force of habit.

...When will these new seeds sprout? How big will the fruit or flower be? No idea. Perhaps it’s not for me to know at my level of engagement. But I decide to trust that planting new seeds into the old way of doing things will say ‘yes’ to the deep wish to live differently.

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/v2/read/view.php?tid=713>

7. *The Porch Swing*

by Terry Hershey

“In the latter years of her life, in the backyard of her home in northern Florida, my grandmother had a porch swing. She liked to sit and swing and hum old church hymns such as ‘Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me.’ I can still see her there, wearing a white scarf over her head, a concession to chemotherapy’s unrelenting march. When as a young adult I visited her, she would always ask me to sit with her on the swing for a spell. She would pat my leg and call me ‘darlin.’

“As long as my grandmother lived — and in spite of her pain — there was always a place for me on the swing. If I were asked to explain grace, I would paint the picture of my grandmother’s swing. There, I never had to deliberate or explain or worry, regardless of the weight I carried. The porch swing — my grandmother’s presence — bestowed grace without conditions.

“And I am here today because of that porch swing. I am here today because of a sanctuary.

“Everyone has a sanctuary, if only in the mind. Even if we can’t say what it is, we know of its power. It is a place where we feel grounded, unhurried, and renewed. We go there whenever we can, which never seems often enough. Or that’s what we tell ourselves.

“A sanctuary is a place that restores us, replenishes us, nourishes us. In this renewal, we are reminded, once again, of what really is important.

Source: *Sanctuary: Creating a Space for Grace in Your Life* by Terry Hershey



Wisdom Story

The Two Lumberjacks by unknown

It was the annual lumberjack competition, and the final was between an older, experienced lumberjack and a younger, stronger lumberjack. [The one] ... who could fell the most trees in a day would be the winner.

The younger lumberjack ... went off into the wood and set to work straight away. He worked all through the day.... He could hear the older lumberjack working ...and ...felt ...more confident with every tree he felled that he would win.

At regular intervals throughout the day, the noise of trees being felled coming from the other part of the forest would stop. ...This meant the older lumberjack was taking a rest, [while he used] ...his ...youth and strength and stamina to keep going.

At the end of the competition, the younger lumberjack felt confident he had won.

...At the medal ceremony, he stood on the podium ...expecting to be awarded the prize of champion lumberjack. Next to him stood the older lumberjack who looked surprisingly less exhausted than he felt.

When the results were read, ...he was devastated ...that the older lumberjack had cut down significantly more trees than he had. He turned to the older lumberjack and asked: “How can this be? I heard you take a rest every hour and I worked continuously through the day. What’s more, I am stronger and fitter than you old man.”

The older lumberjack turned to him and said, “Every hour, I took a break to rest and sharpen my saw.”

Source: <https://wisdomtrove.com/rest-and-renewal-stephen-covey/>

Snippets

“Everything that changes and ends evokes the archetype of renewal.... To let go of having things remain the same, to be open to change, to accept the varieties of human predicaments as fully legitimate, is rebirth into a spiritual



world. The fact of renewal is itself an antidote to despair, a foundation for our belief that we never give up on the potential for redemption in anything or anyone.” *David Richo*

“Our personal and social problems can be solved only in the context of religion, because these issues are all so deep that they transcend psychological and technological solutions. We need nothing less than a renewal of religious imagination.” *Thomas Moore*

“Listening to music from the Celtic version of the Secret Garden eases my soul when I am tense. A short walk in the woods detoxifies my spirit when I’m preoccupied with the sadness, futility, and fear I have encountered. Renewal zones are essential, then, if we are to remain vital, compassionate and grateful in life.” *Robert J. Wicks*

“The *art* of gardening, of participating in the annual cycle of the seasons and watching things grow, has become a perennial source of peace, inspiration, and personal renewal.” *Diane Dreber*

“I began to learn about change, to see that loss and eventual renewal were not interruptions of life, they were life. Stricken, opened up in a new way, I saw how things on the outside could transfigure me inside, permit me to feel things I hadn’t known were there, raise possibilities I hadn’t imagined.” *Jon Katz*

Almost all mythic cosmogonies begin with water. It is the primeval element, ‘the face of the deep,’ the formless potentiality that preexists the created world and sustains it’s being. ‘Water flows,’ wrote the religious historian Mircea Eliade, ‘it inspires, it heals, it prophesies. By their very nature, spring and riv-

er display power, life, perpetual renewal; they are and they are alive.”

Brian Doyle

“Many individuals become exhausted and depleted either by their jobs or by relationships they are in. It becomes more and more difficult to experience enthusiasm, pleasure, and even the will to go on. At that time many feel that a rest, break, or renewal is the best cure for this feeling. Although these can be beneficial, it’s important to note that the deepest cause of burnout is unacknowledged anger....” *Brenda Shoshanna*

“The different dimensions of sabbath rest involve two stages. The first is simply letting go, renouncing our normal routines and work.... The second stage moves beyond this negative freedom to a positive internal response. It involves letting ourselves be in that fresh space in such a way that we realize appreciatively and joyfully our holy connectedness.” *Tilden Edwards*

“I remembered a poem from Rilke in which he suggests that our simple beholding of the object of our delight gives it meaning and brings it to a new birth. It is a healing thought that I gave some kind of completion to that small flower simply by noticing it.”

Macrina Wiederkehr

“Even when we’re most sure that love can’t conquer all, it seems to anyway. It goes down into the rat hole with us, in the guise of our friends, and there it swells and comforts. It gives us second winds, third winds, hundredth winds. It struck me that I have spent so much time trying to pump my way into feeling the solace I used to feel in my parents’ arms. But pumping always fails you in the end. The truth is that your spirits don’t rise until you get way down. Maybe it’s because this — the mud, the bottom — is where it all rises from.”

Anne Lamott

We often think that this wheel turns at death, but Yun reminds us that it is constantly turning throughout all the changes in our lives. As he concludes, “Nothing escapes the infinite patterns of change and renewal that are part of the wheel of rebirth.” Pointing to parts of the wheel he states, “The changes in our economic welfare and the ups and downs of our emotions are also examples of rebirth.” What would you add as examples of change, rebirth, and renewal that may often go unnoticed or unremarked? With regard to emotions, what do our ups and downs tell us about the progress of our life?

- In reading #2, Jim Wallis writes that the only way that a new social vision and reality can be fashioned is by “a renewal of citizen politics to fashion a new political future.” What are your concerns about the state of politics today in the country? In the world? What are the barriers to “a renewal of citizen politics?” The possibilities? How has “a personal ethic of moral responsibility” been strengthened? Undermined?
- In reading #3, L. Gregory Jones writes about the importance of forgiveness “so that communion can be restored.” How can forgiving or being forgiven lead to renewal? He suggests that forgiveness requires the willingness “to live in a new way with one another.” Do you agree? Why or why not? What can get in the way of doing this?
- In reading #4, Joan Chittister writes about aging and concludes that, “These are the capstone years, the time in which a whole new life is in the making again.” Do you regard aging in the way she does? Why or why not? Why is the process of renewal difficult as we age? Why is renewal important despite the challenges as we age?
- In reading #5, Parker Palmer writes about the nature generosity. He condemns “a gift given more from my need to prove myself than from the other’s need to be cared for,” and challenges the common

Questions

- In reading #1, Master Hsing Yun writes about the wheel of rebirth.

I realized, it is not the time that heals, but what we do within that time that creates positive change.
Diane Dettmann



Photo by Bru-NO at Pixabay

understanding of burnout: giving too much. He concludes that when we give authentically that the experience renews us. Do you agree? Why or why not? How would you contrast burnout with renewal?

6. In reading #6, Patty De Llosa writes about making a new start and quotes F. M. Alexander who said, "Change involves carrying out an activity against the habits of life." How do the habits of life keep us stuck and interfere with a quest for renewal? Her strategy is to "plant seeds of change." What seeds of change have you planted in your life? What flower blossomed as a result, if any? Do you agree with her "that planting new seeds into the old way of doing things will say 'yes' to the deep wish to live differently?" What in you has desired renewal? What more was needed to bring about renewal?
7. In reading #7, Terry Hershey writes, "Everyone has a sanctuary, if only in the mind. Even if we can't say what it is, we know of its power. It is a place where we feel grounded, unhurried, and renewed." For him it was his grandmother's swing, but it also seems obvious that his grandmother was also a sanctuary. What places and people have been sanctuaries for you? Did they support renewal in you from time to time? Why or why not? If yes, how?

The following questions are related to the

Readings from the Common Bowl.

8. David Richo writes about "the archetype of renewal." He writes, "renewal is itself an antidote to despair." What are some of the things that prompt a desire for renewal? How hard is it "to let go of having things remain the same, to be open to change, to accept the varieties of

9. Thomas Moore asserts that "Our personal and social problems can be solved only in the context of religion." Do you agree? Why or why not? Do you agree with him that the issues we face "are all so deep that they transcend psychological and technological solutions?" Why or why not? If this is true, where can we look for solutions? He concludes that, "We need nothing less than a renewal of religious imagination." Do you agree. How would this help? What should such "a renewal of religious imagination" look like?
10. Robert Wicks writes about the benefit he receives from listening to music or walking in the woods, which he calls "renewal zones." What are some of your renewal zones? How do they benefit you?
11. Diane Dreher recommends gardening as a source of personal renewal because it connects a person more closely the annual cycle of the seasons and the process of planting, growth, and harvest. Do you agree? Why or why not? Are there other activities that provide this kind of connection? As an example, being a parent.
12. Jon Katz came to understand "that loss and eventual renewal were not interruptions of life, they were life." Do you share that understanding? What experiences led you to this understanding?
13. Brian Doyle suggests water as a metaphor for renewal, especially as a spring or river, which are sources of perpetual renewal. Is water a useful metaphor of water for you? Why or why not? What other metaphors from nature do you think are useful in terms as a renewal? Are there other metaphors apart from nature that you think are useful for understand-

ing renewal?

14. Brenda Shoshanna suggests that "the deepest cause of burnout is unacknowledged anger." Do you agree? Why or why not? Regardless of the cause, renewal is important in the face of burnout. When unacknowledged anger is part of the problem, what pieces should the work of renewal involve?
15. Tilden Edwards points to the sabbath as an important resource in renewal. Have you utilized the sabbath as a resource, either for a day or in terms of shorter pauses to pursue renewal? What value have you found in letting go of things that can burden? Have you had experiences of what Edwards called "holy connectedness?" If yes, were these in nature, in solitude, or elsewhere?
16. Macrina Wiederkehr writes about "our simple beholding of the object of our delight." This beholding "gives it meaning and brings it to a new birth." How can our "beholding" of something or someone contribute to their renewal or new birth? How can "beholding" some of beauty or value contribute to our own renewal?
17. Anne Lamott suggests that love is a formidable source of renewal. She writes that love "goes down into the rat hole with us, in the guise of our

...The tree ...stands tall, ready to bear the burden of winter, for it knows that through hardship comes renewal. D.J. Niko



Photo by cocoparisienne at Pixabay

friends, and there it swells and comforts. It gives us second winds, third winds, hundredth winds." Have you been renewed by love? If yes, how? If no, do you think it is possible? Why?