

Preparation for Second Chances / Turning Points

How many times have you wished you could start over, hit the “reset” button in your life? A specific event – a devastating loss or unexpected gift – may bring an opportunity to reexamine and reevaluate circumstances and future actions. Or a gradual increasing restlessness or unease with a living situation or level of (un)happiness in life may precipitate a “turning point.” This can be a crucial time to reflect and draw on our inner resources of strength, courage, and hope for a better life to move us toward that goal. Reflection may also result in the realization that help is necessary to provide insight and direction, physical resources, or emotional support.

Many spiritual traditions include the concept of turning points. Most Christians believe that accepting Christ offers the promise of salvation, quoting Jesus: “You must be born again.” The Buddhist Eightfold Path promises liberation from the cycle of rebirth, while pagan and nature-centered traditions include rituals and celebrations of the changing of the seasons. We reference these spiritual traditions when we acknowledge sources for redemption and renewal in our lives. Since many UU’s come from other churches that impose specific beliefs and discourage questioning, the fourth principle, “A free and responsible search for truth and meaning,” may be viewed as a second opportunity to regain a faith foundation or reestablish a spiritual connection with others.

As narrators of our own stories, we can edit them at any time, removing meaningless parts and focusing on the lessons we’ve learned or the blessings we’ve received. In his song “Working on my Rewrite,” Paul Simon sings of someone attempting to change his life story:

I’ll eliminate the pages
Where the father has a breakdown
And he has to leave the family
But he really meant no harm

Gonna substitute a car chase
And a race across the rooftops
Where the father saves the children
And he holds them in his arms

Disabling mental illness may mean that relationships cannot endure without change. Situations such as abuse, criminal behavior, or dissolution of trust may mean that no second chance is advisable. In such situations, individuals may have to move on in their lives for another chance for themselves.

Every second a seeker can start over,
For his life’s mistakes
Are initial drafts
And not the final version.
Sri Chinmoy

Every second we have a second chance to do something we haven’t done yet. That’s why it’s called a second and not a first. *Robert J. Braathe*

We cannot start over, but we can begin now, and make a new ending. *Zig Ziglar*

All my life, I have been a celebrant of Halloween. For me, it is the most important day of the year, the turning point in the old pagan calendar. *John Burnside*

At Jupiter, we're surprised in many, many different ways, and we overturn a lot of our long-held beliefs. But ... we, as scientists, don't bemoan overturning a long-held belief. We, instead, celebrate the success of a new understanding. *Jack Connerney, NASA scientist on the Juno mission*

I've learned that making a "living" is not the same thing as making a life. I've learned that life sometimes gives you a second chance. I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands; you need to be able to throw some things back. *Maya Angelou*

I believe in second chances, I just don't think everyone deserves one. *Author unknown*

In a chronically leaking boat, energy devoted to changing vessels is more productive than energy devoted to patching leaks. *Warren Buffett*

Questions to Ponder

1. In a "rewrite" of your own story, what chapters would you be tempted to "throw in the trash?" What might keep you from doing so? Which parts of your story are you ready to let go of to make room for new pages?
2. What second chances have you granted yourself or others? How have these results influenced subsequent decisions you have made about second chances?
3. Close relationships typically go through ups and downs and sometimes must be ended. Think of a time someone close to you has crossed a line you thought "unforgiveable." Reflect on what made you think a second chance was or was not possible.
4. Many personal turning points are stimulated by specific points in time: "milestone" birthdays, historical events, family crises or celebrations. What events in your life have helped shape your outlook on life or offered a different perspective of yourself or others?
5. Perhaps your family has stories of second chances or turning points, stories that have passed through generations. How have you been affected by the expectations attached to such stories? What is a second chance story that you wish future generations to learn from?
6. If you are looking for a second chance or turning point in your life now, what is it?

Words of the Day

Before coming to the gathering, think of a few words, phrases or metaphors to describe turning points in your life. Or think of a second chance you have given someone else or yourself. The prompt for the Words of the Day activity will be to complete either or both of these sentences:

"Something that sparked a turning point in my life was when I ..."

"I gave myself or someone else a second chance when I ..."