

Reflections: Celebrating Life's Journey
Nov 12, 2023

- Samhain season - a time to look back and forward
- Personal Note:
 - Celebration of 60 years
 - Looking back on life: birthday as a time for reflection
 - Things I did that I learned from:
 - 20's - education, marriage, toastmasters
 - 30's - spirituality, paganism, vision quest
 - 40's - reinvention, career, community-building
 - 50's - retirement, friend and family deaths
 - 60's - ???
 - Things I still need to work on
- Unitarian Perspective
 - celebrating birthdays recognizes and honors each person's unique journey
 - central theme of birthdays: commitment to personal growth and self-discovery
- Pagan Perspective
 - recognizing personal milestones
 - celebrate interconnectedness of all living things
 - parallels between appreciation of nature's rhythms and the annual cycle of human life marked by birthdays
 - value of learning from the past to create a more harmonious and sustainable future
- Celebration and Ritual
 - birthdays are celebrated around the world
 - transcend religious and cultural boundaries
- Spiritual Significance of Birthdays
 - birthdays mark the passage of time
 - reflection on
 - personal growth
 - life's lessons
 - significance of another year lived

- Reflection on Personal History
 - engage in personal reflection and self-examination
 - acknowledging past mistakes and successes as a way to learn and grow
- Reflective Power of Nature
 - wisdom of the seasons
 - changing seasons = impermanence of life and the need to adapt and learn
 - continuous cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth
 - annual rhythm of our lives
 - nature mirrors our own journey of growth and change
 - Dormancy:
 - natural world prepares for winter: dormancy and rest
 - slowing down of the Earth
- September review: shadow work
 - confront their inner challenges and darkness
 - reflects how nature prepares for the winter months
 - symbolic darkness of November
 - find wisdom and growth within
- Self-Feedback
 - self-reflection as a means of personal growth
 - Feedback = mirror that reflects strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for development
 - Examine motives and results
 - When reflecting on *how* something went, self-feedback comes naturally
 - When we own our outcomes, we naturally ask ourselves what we could have done differently or better
 - Build our confidence
 - Ever given yourself a pep-talk?
 - useful form of self-feedback
 - Focus on improvement
 - we can't work on everything at once!
 - internal prioritization

- thinking about what we do well and/or want to improve
- Negative self-feedback: what NOT to do
 - Use of 'should'
 - Tell yourself you “should” have done this or “shouldn’t” have done that
 - Beating yourself up, for not meeting the standards you have set for yourself
 - Putting negative and derogatory labels on yourself, eg pathetic, useless, idiot
 - Making sweeping generalizations about yourself, based on a very specific event,
 - “I am always doing this,” “I never learn,” “Everything is ruined”
 - When you are so critical of yourself, you will tend to behave in particular ways – often engaging in unhelpful behaviors
 - Withdraw or isolate yourself from family or friends,
 - Try to overcompensate for things,
 - Neglect things (opportunities, responsibilities, self-care), or
 - Be passive rather than assertive with others
 - unhelpful thoughts and behaviors contribute to feeling depressed, low, sad, guilty
 - this is confirmation that your negative core beliefs are true
- Positive Self-Feedback; What to do
 - Ask yourself
 - How did that _____ go? What went well? What could I have improved? Which parts surprised me about that result or interaction? Where is my weakness? Where was my confidence high (or low), and why?
 - Listen to yourself
 - Don’t just ask yourself a rhetorical question
 - Consider the questions you ask yourself and take your answers and insights to heart

- Just like all other forms of feedback, for self-feedback to be helpful, it must be heard and valued
 - Try something
 - Test it! Try something new (or repeat something you previously tried) based on self-feedback insights
 - Start over
 - feedback loop, applied based on your reflection and feedback
 - creates greater self-awareness, improved performance and results
- Evaluation:
 - Personal success: something that made you feel good
 - What aspect of it made it feel so good?
 - Did you do it for yourself or others? Was it attached to a moral?
 - Did you feel completely satisfied with it when it was over?
 - Personal failure: something that made you feel not-so-good
 - what aspect of them made it FEEL so bad?
 - Were these experiences/failures things you could have controlled?
 - have you identified any lessons you can learn from the experiences?
 - Why did these experiences affect you so much?
 - Consider how experience is influenced by your personal values, desires, and expectations of life
- Celebrating Personal Growth
 - personal growth and self-discovery: a birthday theme
 - reflect on life journey, lessons learned, aspirations for the future
- Setting Intentions for Growth = Goals
 - for personal growth and transformation
 - for a more balanced and mindful future
 - intention-setting aligns with a reflective journey
- Embracing Feedback from others
 - When looking at self performance/results, might not always know how to proceed, or we may want feedback from others

- giving feedback to ourselves can lead us to ask for feedback from others
 - Self-feedback with intention of improvement leads to seeking out and listening to feedback, perspective, and advice of others
 - Be open to feedback from others, whether it's praise or constructive criticism
 - Learn from both positive and challenging feedback as a means of personal evolution
 - Community and interpersonal connections play role in facilitating the process
- Rituals of Self-Reflection
 - rituals incorporated into birthday celebrations
 - reflections on the past year(s)
 - setting intentions for the year(s) ahead
 - Rituals and practices can be incorporated into one's life to promote self-reflection
 - divination/rune casting
 - Use not as magical, predictive tools, but for self-realization
 - Cannot look forward without looking back
 - Most professional readers ask questions
 - Can't see the path forward without seeing where you've been
 - Mirror work - scrying
 - Seeing your own face before you can see any kind of future
 - meditation
 - other spiritual tools to enhance self-awareness and personal growth
- Ancestral Connections:
 - honor and connect with our ancestors
 - ancestral veneration can deepen one's spiritual practice
 - seek wisdom from experiences and lessons of forebears as a means of personal growth

- ancestral wisdom as a source of guidance for the present and the future
 - Not just magick, e.g. Napoleon Hill, Think and Grow Rich (1937)
 - Lincoln, Edison, Ford, et al
 - Actually listening to ancestral voices
 - Extends the use of feedback
- Macro-reflection and feedback
 - Environmental stewardship:
 - learn from past ecological mistakes and take action to protect the Earth for future generations
 - promoting environmental awareness and sustainable living
 - Politics, war, human rights, et al
- Rituals of Gratitude and Giving
 - When something works, express gratitude (it's still feedback)
 - gratitude for the gifts of the past year
 - consider ways to give back to the Earth, the community, or those in need
 - rituals or practices that can be incorporated into birthday celebrations and daily life to express gratitude and promote generosity
 - setting intentions for the year ahead, aligning with values of personal growth and positive change
- Conclusion
 - themes
 - personal growth/ community enhancement
 - Reflection/feedback
 - value of learning from the past to create a more harmonious and sustainable future
 - We *know* this. But do we practice it?
 - Things to do
 - embrace birthday - or any day - as opportunity for self-reflection

- embrace the mirror of feedback as a powerful tool for evolution
- set intentions for personal and collective growth
- embrace the cycles of life and nature, and how they fit our own lives
- honor ancestors

Closing Words:

- gratitude for everyone's presence
- reflect on personal and collective history
 - importance of learning from the past to create a more balanced and sustainable future
 - draw inspiration from nature, ancestral wisdom, and the cycles of life
- continue personal journey of growth and self-reflection, guided by the mirror of feedback and the wisdom of spirituality
- embrace the interconnected cycles of life, self-discovery, and giving back to the Earth and the community