

## **January Theme**

### ***Redemption: The Practice of Starting Over***

#### **Introduction**

Definitions of redemption, our theme for January, include: 1. the action of saving or being saved from sin, error, or evil and 2. the action of regaining or gaining possession of something in exchange for payment, or clearing a debt. We find it used in compelling titles and themes of numerous media.

In Bob Marley's "Redemption Song", he sang about freedom and called upon the listener to recognize one's own agency as a path to redemption. In the movie "Shawshank Redemption" protagonist Andy Dufresne, He regains possession of his freedom and humanity through determination and reliance on inner strength. We hear him say to a fellow convict: "Remember that hope is a good thing, Red, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies".

In on-line games such as "Red Dead Redemption", a player can choose for a character to be cleared of his debt or to create more evil through criminal activities. In virtual realities, gamers can roll out a new character, reset the game, delete and reinstall apps and open a new account. Technology offers a pretend world in which players decide upon codes of morality and punishment. In the gaming world when the player is not satisfied with an outcome, they can start over.

In real life our actions have real consequences. Life does not give us the option to delete past actions or experiences. We do, however, have the opportunity to decide how we respond in the present moment. We may deeply regret actions which have harmed ourselves or others. By holding on to feelings of loss, guilt and shame we erect barriers to moving forward. Recognizing feelings and acknowledging actions is, for many, essential to seeking forgiveness, or redemption. Finding a means of saving ourselves or being saved from pain, guilt or shame takes on different meanings for each of us.

Faith views around redemption are diverse. For some, redemption comes from restoring honor after wrongdoing. Buying back one's worth may come from making amends to others through actions or words. It may involve committing to rehabilitation or a plan prescribed by another or others. Some believe redemption and a promise of life everlasting are secured by proclaiming Jesus Christ to be their lord and savior. Redemption may come with a plan of action following deep reflection and soul searching, individually or collectively. Others believe that only you know what you have done that causes suffering for yourself or others and you are the sole architect of your own salvation.

In many cultures and religions, a new year is considered a time to contemplate ways we would like to start over. In addition to the first day of January, Chinese New Year, Rosh Hashanah and Muharram are times that encourage taking stock of experiences and actions. Whether through prayer, cleansing rituals, committing to resolutions or other traditions such times offer opportunity to consider our actions and our place in an imperfect world. Our UU principles provide some guidance as we nudge our growing edges toward right relations with ourselves and others. In "Litany of Atonement" Reverend Robert Eller-Isaac, offers us these words:... "I forgive myself, I forgive you; We begin again in love."

#### **Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, or with each other:**

What might be barriers to offering one's self or others redemption?

How can you offer yourself redemption?

This month's theme was composed by Jane Detwiler and the Worship Associates.

What experience of redemption include? (suffering?, an act? a process?)  
What are your thoughts on starting over and making up for past debts and what has informed your beliefs?  
What thoughts/beliefs do you have about redemption as an endgame?  
How can redemption serve relationship?  
How can our faith community provide a space for redemption and starting over?

## **Quotes and Short Readings:**

### **Reading #637 A Litany of Atonement, from Singing the Living Tradition**

For remaining silent when a single voice who have made a difference  
*We forgive ourselves and each other and begin again in love.*  
For each time that our fears have made us rigid and inaccessible  
*We forgive ourselves and each other and begin again in love.*  
For each time we have struck out in anger without just cause  
*We forgive ourselves and each other and begin again in love.*  
For each time our greed has blinded us to the needs of others.  
*We forgive ourselves and each other and begin again in love.*  
For the selfishness which sets us apart and alone  
*We forgive ourselves and each other and begin again in love.*  
For falling short of the admonitions of the spirit  
*We forgive ourselves and each other and begin again in love.*  
For losing sight of our unity  
*We forgive ourselves and each other and begin again in love.*  
For those and for so many acts both evident and subtle which have fueled the illusion of separateness  
*We forgive ourselves and each other and begin again in love.*  
~ Rev. Robert Eller-Isaacs

“A good act does not wash out the bad, nor a bad act the good. Each should have its own reward.”  
~ George R.R. Martin, *A Clash of Kings*

“Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.”  
~ Maria Robinson

“Behold, I will do a new thing; now shall it spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.” Isaiah 43:19 American Standard Version (ASV)

The Worship Associates are: Tom Bolton, Alexandra Businger, Alan Cantor, Jane Detwiler, Rita Ghilani, Masha Hoeffy, Margaret Homer, Maria Kempner, Julien Lafleur, Marty Nickerson, Jennifer Ollington, and Penn Young.