

Bulletin for Ancestors

Business

Chalice Lighting

Flame, friend of our most ancient ancestors
We kindle you now to make you visible in this time.
Yet, in truth, you burn always
In the unique worth of each person
In the moment of imagination
In the turning of the heart to sorrow or to joy
In the call to hope
And the call to justice
In the moment of recognition
And the remembrance of friendship
Burn bright before us.
Burn bright within us.
Blessed be.
Orlanda Brugnola

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Silence – holding ourselves and each other in silent support

Shared Readings

Generation to Generation

In a house which becomes a home, one hands down and another takes up the heritage of mind and heart, laughter and tears, musings and deeds.

Love, like a carefully loaded ship, crosses the gulf between the generations. Therefore, we do not neglect the ceremonies of our passage: when we wed, when we die, and when we are blessed with a child; when we depart and when we return; when we plant and when we harvest.

Let us bring up our children. It is not the place of some official to hand to them their heritage. If others impart to our children our knowledge and ideals, they will lose all of us that is wordless and full of wonder.

Let us build memories in our children, lest they drag out joyless lives, lest they allow treasures to be lost because they have not been given the keys.

We live, not by things, but by the meanings of things. It is needful to transmit the passwords from generation to generation.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry [from *Singing the Living Tradition*, Reading 649, adapted as prose]

When a society or a civilization perishes, one condition can always be found. They forgot where they came from. *Carl Sandburg*

Our greatest responsibility is to be good ancestors. *Jonas Salk*

At times it seems to me that I am living my life backward, and that at the approach of old age my real youth will begin. My soul was born covered with wrinkles—wrinkles that my ancestors and parents most assiduously put there and that I had the greatest trouble removing. *André Gide*

You live as long as you are remembered. *Russian proverb*

In all of us there is a hunger, marrow-deep, to know our heritage—to know who we are and where we have come from. Without this enriching knowledge, there is a hollow yearning. No matter what our attainments in life, there is still a vacuum, an emptiness, and the most disquieting loneliness.

Alex Haley

Deep Sharing / Deep Listening

Round 1 Share a story about one of your ancestors, perhaps one that is often retold in your family. This can be a “chosen” ancestor if you like, someone who is not part of your lineage but holds a pivotal place in your personal history. If you have brought a photograph or memento, share that also.

Round 2 Share more deeply about your ancestors (including “chosen” ones) as a result of your exploration of the preparation materials.

Round 3 As time allows, share other thoughts about your ancestry, or reflect on other stories and memories shared by others.

Closing Words

There are miles behind you
And many more ahead
As you journey on toward wholeness
May all that is good and true guide your way
May the joy of love lighten every step
And the miracle that is life be ever in your sight
Andrew Pakula

Song

The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to let the leader know if I will be absent or need to quit
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to do the reading and thinking about the topic ahead of time
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and tell only my own story to others
- to honor the safety of the group by listening to what others share with an open heart
- to refrain from cross-talk, judging, or giving advice
- to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn

Facilitator Notes for Ancestors

Before the Session

This session focuses on ancestors. Members may bring a photograph of an ancestor, or another relevant memento to be shared. Members have the option to reflect on a “chosen” ancestor (e.g., an important mentor or teacher).

Business

Chalice Lighting

Ask a group member to read the chalice lighting.

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Sharing of Joys and Concerns (each person about 2 minutes)

Silence – holding ourselves and each other in silent support (3 minutes)

Shared Readings

For this first reading *Generation to Generation*, ask members to each read a paragraph in turn.

Generation to Generation

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Alex Haley

Deep Sharing / Deep Listening

In the rounds of deep sharing, pay close attention to the allotted time so that all members have the opportunity to share. Reassure participants that they may share about “chosen” ancestors rather than “blood” ancestors if they are so moved.

Round 1 (each person about 2 minutes)

Share a story about one of your ancestors, perhaps one that is often retold in your family. This can be a “chosen” ancestor if you like, someone who is not part of your lineage but holds a pivotal place in your personal history. If you have brought a photograph or memento, share that also.

Round 2 (each person about 5 minutes)

Share more deeply about your ancestors (including “chosen” ones) as a result of your exploration of the preparation materials.

Round 3

As time allows, share other thoughts about your ancestry, or reflect on other stories and memories shared by others.

Closing Words

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Preparation for Ancestors

Who has not wondered about his or her family's past, about those ancestors who came before us? Most of us know at least something about our familial past, of the migrations and relocations, and the blending of cultures and ethnicities of our forebears. We may possess carefully researched genealogical records, or the family bible inscribed with names and dates of births, marriages and deaths. For some, family members remain close by, with multiple branches and generations living nearby, and sometimes under one roof, freely sharing family stories, photographs and histories. For others, due to reasons ranging from closed adoption records to the enslavement of ancestors, it is a struggle to piece together even the barest outline of birth families and genetic inheritance.

Whatever our circumstances, many of us yearn to “connect” with long-deceased relatives by learning more about them. We know, of course, that our ancestry affects our physical traits. Less tangible are the personality traits that seem to pass from one generation to the next in some families. There is some research (thus far, with mice) that suggests past trauma can even affect subsequent generations through changes to the genetic code. We may long to substantiate the snippets of family stories we have heard over the years. We marvel at a young man's bravery at crossing an ocean on his own in search of a better life, or a middle class woman who defies the expectations of her day by sidestepping marriage and motherhood in favor of college and a career. We may be drawn to the tragic stories, too, as we try to fathom their impact on family members so long ago. “What do I have in common with them?” we wonder. “What can I learn from this history?” Do the ripples of the past continue to affect our lives? Can the lives of those long gone family members continue to shape our identities today?

This yearning to know more about family members whom we have never met is manifested in our popular culture. We watch public television shows like *Genealogy Roadshow* and *Finding your Roots* to savor the vicarious thrill of others whose family's history is revealed through archival research and genetic testing. We may troll Internet-based genealogy databases replete with digitized records in search of our own ancestors, or pursue DNA testing. What is behind these efforts? What questions do YOU have about your family history? Are there other individuals who have been pivotal in your family history, even if they don't have an official standing on your family tree? Are there secrets you would like to uncover, or perhaps stories you would like to share with others?

Quotations and Readings

In Native American traditions and those of many indigenous people around our planet, ancestors are regarded as sacred and held with reverence in high honor. Those people who have come before us, blazed a path, and made tracks for us in the ground. . . . Why are *we* so ready to forget the past, to somehow think we are better than it, better than those who marked the trail for us? . . . We—meaning the dominant culture—remember history through wars and domination and control and by unearthing that which is “buried” and lost. Native Americans and African Americans know history through living stories, shared wisdom, and ritual. Which would you prefer? And how would you live with someone making that choice for you?

Excerpted and adapted from “Our Ancestors,” a sermon delivered by Keith Kron

Not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but also clouds their view of their descendants and isolates them from their contemporaries. Each man is for ever thrown back on himself alone, and there is danger that he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart.

Alexis de Tocqueville

If you look deeply into the palm of your hand, you will see your parents and all generations of your ancestors. All of them are alive in this moment. Each is present in your body. You are the continuation of each of these people. *Thich Nhat Hanh*

Family stories tell us who we are and to whom we belong. They cement us together in remembered intimacy. Our stories also point to the values we hold in common from family generation to family generation. *Rev. Pat Hoerl*

There are only two lasting bequests we can give our children—one is roots, and the other, wings. *Hodding S. Carter*

Every book is a quotation; and every house is a quotation out of all forests and mines and stone quarries; and every man is a quotation from all his ancestors. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Some people are your relatives but others are your ancestors, and you choose the ones you want to have as ancestors. You create yourself out of those values. *Ralph Ellison*

Questions to Ponder

1. Come prepared to discuss one or more of your ancestors. If possible, please bring a photograph or other memento of an ancestor. This can be a “chosen” ancestor if you like, someone who is not part of your lineage but holds a pivotal place in your personal history.
2. Think about one of your ancestors that you find especially intriguing. If you could bring him or her back to life for a visit, what would you like to ask? Conversely, what would you want to tell him or her?
3. What would you like your descendant to remember about you 50 or 100 years after your passing? What kind of legacy will you leave behind?
4. How much do you already know about your ancestry? Are there stories that have been passed through many generations? Is it important for you to research your family tree? If yes, why? If no, why not?
5. Has your family been touched by closed adoption records or other factors that have left you with many questions about some of your ancestors? If yes, what, if any, steps could be taken to fill in gaps in your family’s story?
6. Are there people in your past that you might consider as “chosen” ancestors? These could be spiritual leaders, former teachers, authors whose works have inspired you, etc.