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Twelve Vows in the Eternal Now

Fractal Cathedral -- Artist unknown but deeply appreciated

By Dennis Rivers, with suggestions from Maía, Gene Knudsen Hoffman, and Paloma Pavel, and inspirations from Joanna Macy, John Seed, Duane Elgin, Matthew Fox and the work of many spiritual communities over the period 2004-2022.

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https://EarthPrayer.net/library/twelve-vows-in-the-eternal-now.pdf

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1. TURNING TOWARD, AND LIVING IN, REVERENCE FOR THE WEB OF LIFE, PEOPLE AND COSMOS

I open my heart to consider, to delight in,
to nurture, and to celebrate
the beauty, integrity and well-being of all life-forms and natural systems:
people of all ages, kinds and races,
animals and plants, lands and seas, rivers and mountains,
which co-exist with me now
and which will come after me into the far future.

These I take to be my kin,
expressions of the same Heart of Being,
the same Living Universe,
of which my life is an expression.

Painting by Meganne Forbes
(used with permission)
www.meganneforbes.com

2. DEEPENING MY SERVICE TOWARD, LIVING IN, AND CELEBRATION OF, THE HIGHEST GOOD OF ALL

Understanding and embracing the infinite interwovenness
of my life with the life of all creatures great and small,
I commit myself to serving the living Web of Life and People,
to hearing the pain of both people and our sister and brother life forms in distress,
to finding the path of service that is right for me,
and to inviting, joining, encouraging, and accompanying others
to do the same.

Painting by Meganne Forbes
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3. EMBRACING SAINTS, EXEMPLARS, AND FUTURE BEINGS

I open my heart to receive the grace
of all those who have walked before me
on the paths of courage, compassion, caring, creativity and truthfulness.
I open my life to receive the empowering gift of their lives and their love for all.

I open my life to be a window of nurturing mercy
that future generations of people, animals, plants, oceans, rivers and mountains,
may be born into a green Earth capable of sustaining life in all its richness
and not a nightmare world poisoned by industrial and nuclear wastes,
and genetic damage.

I embrace all saints as my parents.
I embrace all life forms, as long as the Earth shall endure, as my children.

Chambered Nautilus Canvas Print / Canvas Art by Ev Cabrera Marinucci

4. QUESTIONING AS A PATH OF TRANSFORMATION

Mindful of the ways
that answers can become meaningless without the questions that evoked them,
and that even great truths can become lifeless dogmas,
I embrace the practice of creative, open-ended, questioning
of self, of others and of institutions
as a way of deepening my engagement with the ongoing quest
for a wiser and more compassionate world.

Following in the spirit of the teachings of Jesus and Gandhi
"to be the change you want to see,"
I open my heart to translate every "Thou Shalt…" and "You must..."
into "How will I…?" and "How will we, together,…?"

Image from Pinterest – Artist Unknown

Solomon Ibn Gabirol, the Spanish poet and philosopher
wrote: "We are wise only while in search of wisdom; when
we imagine we have attained it, we are fools."
(*Day By Day*, Rabbi Chaim Stern, p.295)

"The power to question is the basis of all human progress." -Indira Gandhi

5. CULTIVATING COMMUNITY, FRIENDSHIPS AND TEAMS-OF-TWO

I commit myself to befriend others
who love, serve and celebrate the Web of Life and People,
and to work with others to build
cooperative communities of mutual support,
in widening circles,
that honor and encourage such love, service and celebration.

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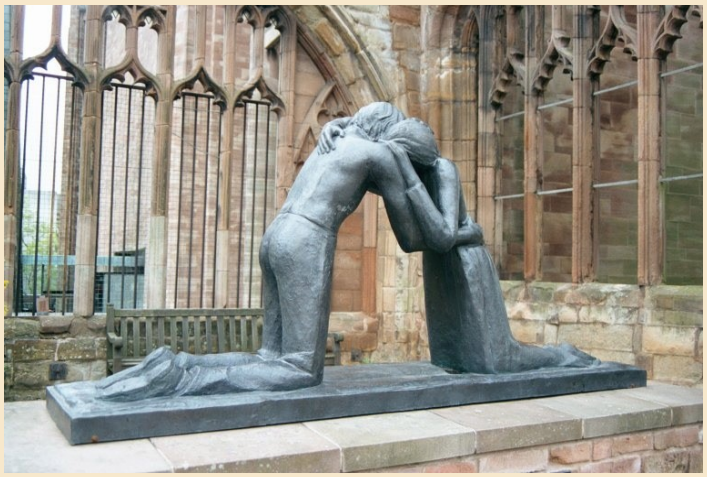
6. DEEPENING GRATEFULNESS AND PRESENCE

Learning of the countless ways
that people, the Earth, and the Universe support my life,
I open my life this moment and this day
to expand the circle of my gratefulness
by becoming more fully present to each moment of the life that is given to me,
and by surrounding with mercy and lovingkindness
all that is wounded and incomplete in myself,
all that is wounded and incomplete in others, and
all that is wounded and incomplete in the world,
that we might journey together
into a deeper completeness.

From: http://favimages.com/image/177841/ Artist unknown.

7. DEEPENING FORGIVENESS

Learning from the way that nature starts anew each year
I open my heart to the new possibilities hidden in each moment
and I open my heart this moment and this day
to grow in my forgiveness of others,
to make amends for my mistakes,
and to ask others to forgive me when I have injured them.



Reconciliation
St. Michael's Cathedral, Coventry, UK
Designed by Josefina de Vasconcellos

8. EMBRACING UNIQUENESS AND VARIETY

Understanding that nature thrives in variety,
I open my heart to celebrate and learn from difference,
as well as to delight in agreement,
and I affirm the rightness of each person to find their own path of service,
and their own unique vocabulary and community
with which to express their love for and concerns about the Web of Life.
I will affirm and bless all those who leave my familiar circle to follow their own path.

Artist unknown but greatly appreciated.

9. EMBRACING CHANGE

Understanding that nature is a continuous flow of change and renewal,
I open my life to acknowledge all that is changing in my life and world,
and to the periodic reevaluation of all my commitments:
to organizations in which I may participate,
to points of view that I may hold
to the social roles that I may play, and positions of influence that I may occupy,
to citizenships and affiliations that may claim my allegiance
to all the forms of work and ownership through which I participate
in the economy of the world.

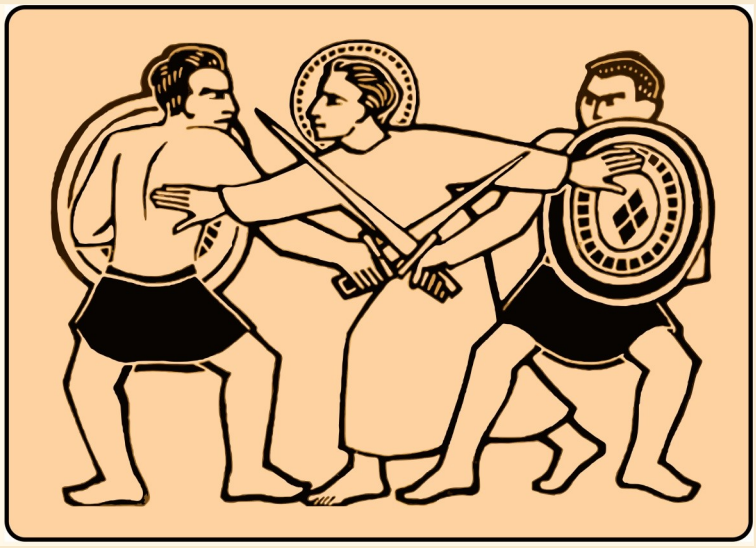
May all of the dimensions of my life
be continuously transformed
by the practice of lovingkindness.

Turbulent Flow – Painting by Amelia Ferrugia

10. TRAVELING THE ROAD OF PEACE, NON-VIOLENCE & CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Understanding that human conflicts in a technologized world
have ever more drastic consequences for both people and the Web of Life,
I commit myself to work for the peaceful resolution of conflicts
between persons, between nations and between humans and other species.

Following the saints of all religions,
and my own deepest inner guidance,
I renounce the intention to injure others,
and as part of that process, I commit myself to facing,
acknowledging and working through,
my own anger, fear, greed, ignorance,
self-deception, unfulfilled needs, lack of skill,
and lack of creative engagement,
such as they may be,
and also the same, of my culture and my country.



Saint Telemachus the Peacemaker
who, according to a bishop in the early Church, was killed in 391 AD as he tried to interrupt a gladiatorial contest. His act of love and courage inspired the Roman Emperor Honorius to issue a ban on gladiatorial fights, which ended in 404 AD.
(1939 book illustration by religious artist Ade Bethune)

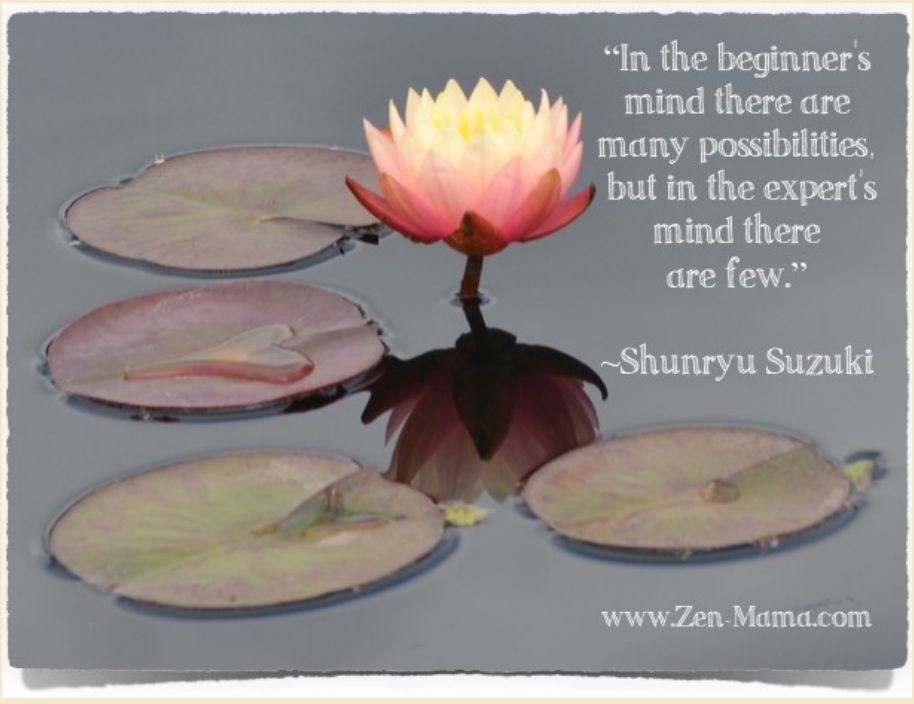
11. EMBRACING THE LIFE OF JOY AND SORROW, PASSION AND COMPASSION, AND THE CREATIVE POLARITIES OF LIFE

Learning from the cycle of the seasons
that holds both the harshness of winter and the pleasure of springtime
I open my heart to embrace more fully
all the joys and sorrows
of my life,
of all people,
and of all Life.

From: https://positiveprovocations.com/2017/07/25/joy-and-sorrow-are-inseparable/

12. BEGINNER'S MIND: EXPLORATORY SPIRAL OF NEW BEGINNINGS

Understanding the limited capacity of words to hold spiritual meanings,
and understanding the temptation to try to complete with words
what can only be completed in living,
I affirm these Green Vows/Openings of the Eternal Present
as a way of mobilizing my inner resources
to continue my path of exploration, action, embodiment, and dialogue,
my path of compassion, reflection, and celebration.
I make and hold these aspirational declarations
as beginnings rather than endings,
as not completing, resolving, or even fully describing
any of the themes they name.
I open my heart and mind
to affirm and learn from all that is reverential toward life
in every tradition and culture,
and to evolve new affirmations and practices
as my reverence for life deepens.



From: http://www.zen-mama.com/2015/06/be-your-own-super-hero-with-beginners-mind/

Reflection on the Twelve Vows

These twelve new openings/vows/intentions/aspirations
are born of both joy and sorrow.
They express the new love of nature, and concern for the well-being of nature,
that has emerged in the last half century, beginning with writers
such as Rachel Carson, Loren Eisley, and Thomas Berry.
The same time period has also witnessed the rise
of religious fanaticism around the world, of creeds gone mad,
and, in the sexual abuse of children by clergy,
the tragic betrayal of entire religious communities
by their vow-bound and creed-bound leaders,
calling into question the entire process
of taking vows and reciting creeds.

Propelled by these powerful conflicting currents
of hope and tragedy, we invite you to explore with us
a spirituality of compassion in the eternal present,
in which traditional vows about the future
have been prayerfully re-imagined as openings in the present.
(The world-wide collapse of vowed promises
suggests to me that there may even be an unconscious ego inflation
in imagining that the person of today can make binding commitments
for the person who will emerge twenty years from now.)

Our approach is, “open to it today, celebrate it today, practice it today”
rather than “promise it forever”.
Thus, one way of exploring these openings
is to read them each morning on waking up.
This is the one day we have been given by Mother Universe
in which to increase the total amount of kindness in the world.

We also invite and encourage each person to find the rhythm of affirmation
that expresses their heart's deepest yearning
for communion with the Web of All.

Also, as you explore these openings,
please feel free to re-write them in your own vocabulary,
as often as the spirit moves you.
May they become your lifelong friends.

No person by force of will can force a fruit tree to bear fruit.
But we can water the tree, learn of its needs, and provide them, as much as we can.
And in time the tree will blossom.
So it is, I believe, with our own hearts.

About Dennis Rivers

Dennis Rivers, MA, is a systems analyst, computer programmer, writer, mandala maker, and spiritual activist, who lives in Eugene, Oregon. (Dennis prefers to write in the first person, so the rest of this summary biography will use "I" rather than "he".)

In the course of my restless, curious, and somewhat chaotic seventy-seven years, I have earned degrees in business (from UCLA), religious studies (UC Santa Barbara), and communication studies (Vermont College Graduate Program). I also did graduate work in sociology (UC Santa Barbara), theology (Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley), and counseling (Antioch University). I feel that all this wide-ranging study was great preparation for becoming a writer and editor. I needed some time, quite a bit of time, to find my own voice.

I am now the writer/editor/librarian of several large public-service web sites, including LiberationTheology.org, NewConversations.net (communication skills), EarthPrayer.net (green spirituality), and EarthCitizens.net (peace, ecology and Earth Citizenship). Among the many jobs and work assignments I have had, I worked for fifteen years developing online courses for a small graduate program, hence my interest in curriculum development and online education for the Great Turning.

My books include ***Prayer Evolving: Five Explorations into the Future of Prayer***, ***The Seven Challenges Workbook: Communication Skills for Success at Home and at Work***, and two widely distributed manuscripts, one on the topic of conscientious objection, and one on the topic of reverence for life as a spiritual path. My participation in the Vietnam War turned me into a lifelong peace / forgiveness / reconciliation activist.

The deepest influences on my thinking and writing have been two ecologists, Joanna Macy and Thomas Berry, and four psychologists, Carl Rogers, Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow and Robert Kegan. I am also deeply grateful for the personal and intellectual encouragement that I received from three religious studies professors: Drs. Ramon Panikkar, Richard Comstock and Walter Capps. They encouraged me to keep on wrestling with deep questions, such as what does it mean to be a fully human person in a country and world addicted to war and oppression. That process of wrestling is still going on, as you can see from this document.

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May you be a blessing

to all those who walk beside you

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