

# Personal Reflection



## Activity

Prepared by: Root Cuthbertson 2020. Based on Jon Young 2015.

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"You can't know where you're going unless you know where you've been."  
– Jake Swamp - Tekaronieneken (1940-2010),  
Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk), Tree of Peace Society

Personal reflection can be a valuable part of a transition toward an understanding of human experience that will ideally foster deeper and more compassionate connections, for individuals, groups, and the wider world.

The following exercise is the first half of a powerful process that nature connection specialist Jon Young has been developing since he was a teenager. It is based on conversations he had with his mentors, and combines ancient wisdom with contemporary practice. Young has found this process consistently offers meaningful insights, and it has become an essential part of his and many other people's calendar year. Young believes that 'the footprints you leave tell the story of your life.' Looking back at your own tracks is one way to notice the subtle forces moving, shaping, and influencing your life; what may be moving beneath what is obvious to your own perception of yourself.

Taking time to reflect on what has happened in your life can help you begin to identify patterns and notice important connections. Reflection can help you align with your personal mission, vision, dreams, and creativity; and to find your place in the communities that surround you.

### **Practicalities**

Set aside some time, anywhere between a couple of hours and a couple of weeks, when you don't have other commitments. Avoid possible distractions, like checking your messages. Ask for support from one or more people who care about you. Ask if during this time they can look after all your responsibilities and everything left on your to-do list. While winter is a traditional time for reflection – the longer nights and shorter days can support turning inward – reflection can be done anytime and in small ways every day.



Find a comfortable place, indoors or outdoors, where you can relax and focus on reflecting. Begin with an attitude of care and respect; maybe set some intentions, or offer some gratitude. Ideally, you will be allowing valuable memories, ideas, and creativity to emerge from within you. Give yourself plenty of self-care during this time, physically, mentally, and emotionally, in whatever ways work best for you (see Self-Care series [01](#) [02](#) [03](#) [04](#) [05](#) [06](#)).

Have a journal or notebook dedicated for this purpose. You might try having art supplies or natural materials available to support any kind of creative expression that may arise for you, like mind mapping, diagramming, collaging, vision boarding, sketching, drawing, or poetry.

## First Steps

Transfer the questions below into your journal, one by one. Give each topic your attention; reflect on it for some time. Then write, draw, or creatively express your reflections on that topic. When you feel complete, move on to the next one. For each topic, reflect on a period of time in your own personal life. Start by listing key moments, maybe by time of year or by location. You may want to include events from your childhood. If you reflect often, consider the time since your most recent reflection.

How old were you? What were the circumstances? Where were you? Who was with you?

### 1. Good Times

Remember any moments when you felt most alive, connected to yourself, others, or nature. What specifically contributed to the way you felt?

What insights did you gain? What will you always do from now on? What would you like to have more of in your life going forward?

Can you identify any patterns? Has any of this happened before? In similar or different circumstances? What motivated you last time? This time?

How might this help you? Or help you to help others? Do you notice any ways you might add to the quality of your personal, family, or community life?

### 2. Obstacles

Remember any moments when you felt least alive, disconnected from yourself, others, or nature. What specifically contributed to the way you felt? What blocked you from recognizing, honoring, or remembering feeling alive and connected?

What lessons did you learn? What will you never do again? What would you like to have less of in your life going forward?

Can you identify any patterns? Has any of this happened before? In similar or different circumstances?



What limiting beliefs, patterns, or habits may be blocking you? Have you been denying or afraid to acknowledge a personal pattern that has become an obstacle? Do you have any grief or pain from the past acting as an obstacle? In your family or ancestral history? Have your personal obstacles become a force in your life that affects your choices and behaviours?

How did you overcome an obstacle? What specifically helped you to approach it?

How might being aware of this help you? Or help you to help others? Do you notice any ways you might begin to remove obstacles in your personal, family, or community life?

### **3. Synchronicities**

Carl Jung described synchronicities as connections, parallels, or interrelated phenomena that defy explanation. They can be helpful in identifying patterns, and understanding your life on a deeper level.

What synchronicities have you noticed in your life? What were the circumstances? Who was involved? Did any involve connection with nature? A plant, an animal, or a landscape? Have you had any recurring or vivid dreams? Or dreams that 'came true' in waking life?

Can you identify any patterns? Have any of these happened before? In similar or different circumstances? What did you notice last time? This time?

How might being aware of this help you? Or help you to help others? Do you notice any ways these synchronicities might affect your personal, family, or community life?

### **4. What Others Notice**

You may benefit from others who can more clearly perceive your talents, gifts, or abilities – especially if you don't like the talents you have, or feel like they are nothing special and not worth noticing.

What talents have others perceived in you? What talents do you perceive in yourself?

What do you remember others saying about your work, conduct, or creative expression? What have others consistently told you about your talents and creativity? When do people tell you that you seem most alive and connected? What patterns have your close friends and family noticed about you?

What patterns do you notice? How might being aware of this help you? Or help you to help others? Do you notice any ways your talents might add to the quality of your personal, family, or community life?



## 5. Your Path

Upon reflection, you can start to observe how the events that make patterns in your life form a path – from your childhood onward – which can help lead you into the future.

When have you most felt 'on your path,' aligned with your personal vision and mission in the world? When have you felt most fully alive and excited? When have you noticed an intersection between the familiar and the inexplicable, the known and unknown? When have you felt connected to something greater than yourself?

What patterns have you begun to notice in your life? How might being aware of this help you? Or help you to help others? Do you notice any ways your path might add to the quality of your personal, family, or community life?

## 6. Forgiveness

Forgiveness begins as an inside job, though it may be very difficult to find, for yourself or for another. Even in the most difficult circumstances, forgiveness is possible. It is a vital step in any healing process, and need not be attempted alone; seek support if you need to. You may feel anger or grief related to other people and the stories you have about their roles. Especially if others are involved, begin with forgiving yourself.

Consider the limiting beliefs, patterns, or habits you identified in Step 2. How can you begin to have compassion for yourself? To forgive yourself? Can you identify your shortcomings and the patterns that led to them? Can you empathise with your younger self? Can you understand how you did the best you could with the resources you had?

Then start to forgive others. It may not be helpful to tell someone that you are forgiving them, which can re-open old wounds. Again, forgiveness starts as an inside job.

How can you begin to let go of your stories about others? Or holding on tightly to your version of who they are? What might you gain by letting go of your stories? How might this help you?

After forgiving others for your own benefit, can you imagine forgiving them for their own sake? As humans who are struggling to find their own path?

What patterns have you begun to notice around forgiveness? How might being aware of this help you? Or help you to help others? Do you notice any ways forgiveness might add to the quality of your personal, family, or community life?



## Next Steps

Gaining insights about your past can help you plan your future trajectory. After a time of personal reflection, it is common to move into a phase of design and visioning, the second half of Jon Young's process. Drawing on the insights of your personal reflection, you can shift your focus to the future – how to begin manifesting your new ideas and visions externally in the world. This is a larger topic covered separately.

Young emphasises creativity and 'thinking outside the box': adjusting your perspective so problems become solutions, expanding what you believe is possible, giving yourself permission to think beyond the bounds of convention. Your life can be fantastic, creative, and expansive. Keep nourishing your dreams, and you can find your path and your place in the larger community of Life (see [Connection to Self, Others, World](#)).

There are many benefits to sharing some of your personal reflections with others. Consider carefully who you'd feel most comfortable sharing them with, maybe beginning with close friends and family members.

Since reflecting together can strengthen and deepen relationships, some people find it helpful to take time for personal reflection as a group, to support each other in the process. For instance, during the winter, many people take a week or more off work to spend time with their friends and families. You could suggest using some of this time for personal reflection as a group. Your first time, try inviting people who may already know each other well, or who share a love for family and community.

During a dedicated time of personal reflection, you may receive many insights, one, or none. Some insights will likely be relevant only to you and your nearest and dearest. Other insights may be relevant to share with your extended family, colleagues, allies, or extended community. For instance, you may have an idea about how your family or community could make a transition in a very specific and practical way.

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## Related Resources

Self-Care series [01](#) [02](#) [03](#) [04](#) [05](#) [06](#)  
[Connection to Self, Others, World](#)

[Empathy and Compassion](#)  
[Compassion for Challenging Behaviour](#)



## References

Young, Jon (2015). "Quick Guide to the Renewal of Creative Path." [Connection 1st Village Building membership](#).

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