

Lent 1

Week of February 26, 2012

Genesis 9:8-17/Psalm 25:1-10/1 Peter 3:18-22/Mark 1:9-15

Welcome to Lent through Easter!

If you're beginning a new group, please consult the Online Introduction as a "coaching companion" for necessary preparations or as a reminder. It contains these helpful articles:

- ~ Art as a Spiritual Resource
- ~ Leading Meditative Spirituality Groups
- ~ Guidelines for Faith Conversations
- ~ Worship Tables and Meditation Space
- ~ Preparing a Meditative Space at Home
- ~ Sample Letter to Participants
- ~ Sample Notices for Church Newsletters
- ~ Labyrinth Patterns to Use

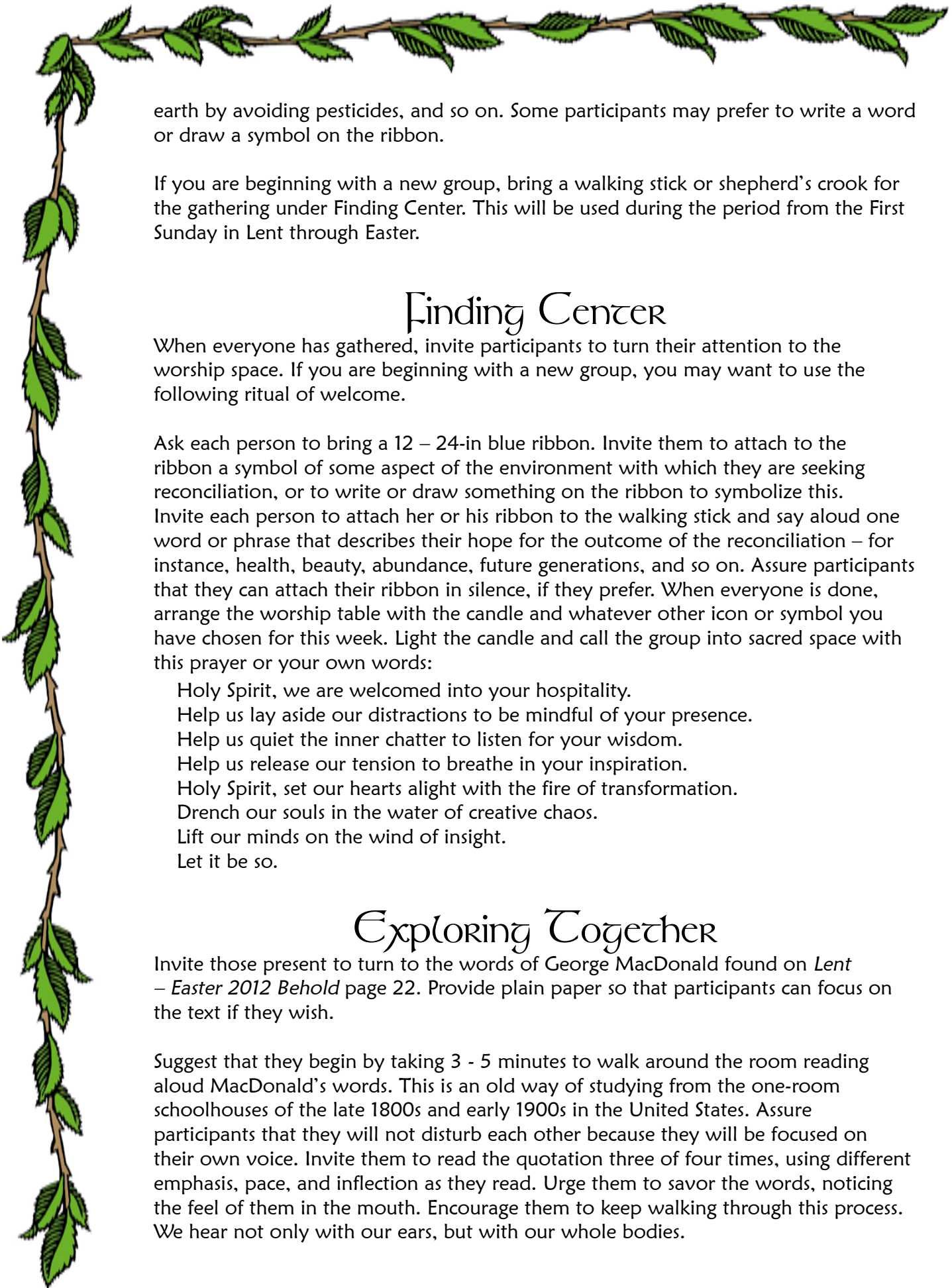
Preparing the Space

Prepare the worship table as a focus for the group. Suggestions for a basic worship table for Lent are included in the Online Introduction. Additions for this week might include:

- ~ Bowl or font of water.
- ~ Pile of rainbow ribbons.
- ~ Map.
- ~ Icon of Jesus being baptized.
- ~ Photos of baptisms from different traditions.
- ~ Bowl of sand and rocks.

Other symbols or icons may suggest themselves as you pray and read the scriptures in preparation.

In advance of your first gathering, ask each person to bring a 12-24-in blue ribbon and to attach a symbol of some aspect of the environment to which the participant yearns to be reconciled. For instance, a picture of a water bottle might symbolize a desire to be appreciative and thoughtful about the use of water; a ladybug might symbolize the commitment to respect the



earth by avoiding pesticides, and so on. Some participants may prefer to write a word or draw a symbol on the ribbon.

If you are beginning with a new group, bring a walking stick or shepherd's crook for the gathering under Finding Center. This will be used during the period from the First Sunday in Lent through Easter.

Finding Center

When everyone has gathered, invite participants to turn their attention to the worship space. If you are beginning with a new group, you may want to use the following ritual of welcome.

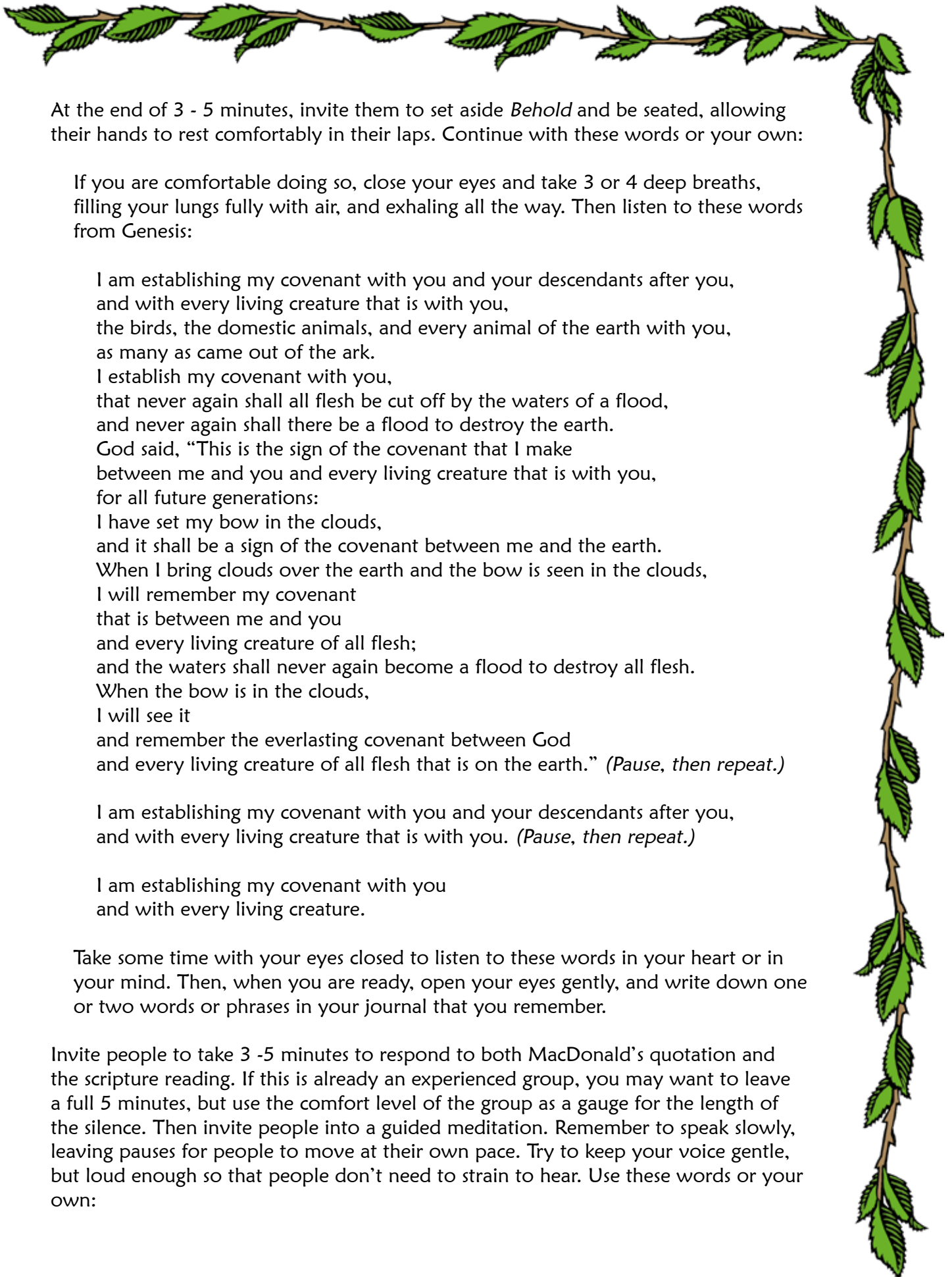
Ask each person to bring a 12 – 24-in blue ribbon. Invite them to attach to the ribbon a symbol of some aspect of the environment with which they are seeking reconciliation, or to write or draw something on the ribbon to symbolize this. Invite each person to attach her or his ribbon to the walking stick and say aloud one word or phrase that describes their hope for the outcome of the reconciliation – for instance, health, beauty, abundance, future generations, and so on. Assure participants that they can attach their ribbon in silence, if they prefer. When everyone is done, arrange the worship table with the candle and whatever other icon or symbol you have chosen for this week. Light the candle and call the group into sacred space with this prayer or your own words:

Holy Spirit, we are welcomed into your hospitality.
Help us lay aside our distractions to be mindful of your presence.
Help us quiet the inner chatter to listen for your wisdom.
Help us release our tension to breathe in your inspiration.
Holy Spirit, set our hearts alight with the fire of transformation.
Drench our souls in the water of creative chaos.
Lift our minds on the wind of insight.
Let it be so.

Exploring Together

Invite those present to turn to the words of George MacDonald found on *Lent – Easter 2012 Behold* page 22. Provide plain paper so that participants can focus on the text if they wish.

Suggest that they begin by taking 3 - 5 minutes to walk around the room reading aloud MacDonald's words. This is an old way of studying from the one-room schoolhouses of the late 1800s and early 1900s in the United States. Assure participants that they will not disturb each other because they will be focused on their own voice. Invite them to read the quotation three or four times, using different emphasis, pace, and inflection as they read. Urge them to savor the words, noticing the feel of them in the mouth. Encourage them to keep walking through this process. We hear not only with our ears, but with our whole bodies.



At the end of 3 - 5 minutes, invite them to set aside *Behold* and be seated, allowing their hands to rest comfortably in their laps. Continue with these words or your own:

If you are comfortable doing so, close your eyes and take 3 or 4 deep breaths, filling your lungs fully with air, and exhaling all the way. Then listen to these words from Genesis:

I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you,
and with every living creature that is with you,
the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you,
as many as came out of the ark.

I establish my covenant with you,
that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood,
and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.

God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make
between me and you and every living creature that is with you,
for all future generations:

I have set my bow in the clouds,
and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.
When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds,

I will remember my covenant
that is between me and you

and every living creature of all flesh;
and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

When the bow is in the clouds,

I will see it

and remember the everlasting covenant between God
and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." (*Pause, then repeat.*)

I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you,
and with every living creature that is with you. (*Pause, then repeat.*)

I am establishing my covenant with you
and with every living creature.

Take some time with your eyes closed to listen to these words in your heart or in your mind. Then, when you are ready, open your eyes gently, and write down one or two words or phrases in your journal that you remember.

Invite people to take 3 -5 minutes to respond to both MacDonald's quotation and the scripture reading. If this is already an experienced group, you may want to leave a full 5 minutes, but use the comfort level of the group as a gauge for the length of the silence. Then invite people into a guided meditation. Remember to speak slowly, leaving pauses for people to move at their own pace. Try to keep your voice gentle, but loud enough so that people don't need to strain to hear. Use these words or your own:



Close your eyes again, if you are comfortable doing that. Or you may prefer to use the flame of the candle as a focal point to help your mind be still. Become aware of your breathing and allow it to be slow and deep, until you feel centered and calm.

Let yourself imagine it is morning and you awaken, aware that you have been called to begin a journey today. Before you get out of bed pause and pay attention to what you are feeling. Perhaps it is excitement, or anticipation, nervousness, wonder, concern, happiness. Is it only one emotion, or are there several? Notice how this feels like other journeys in the past, and notice how it feels different.

You rise and make preparations to be gone for some time. When you are ready, pick up the backpack by the front door, cross the threshold, and set out with an easy stride. You may begin on familiar streets, but very shortly – in the way of a dream – you find yourself on a wide forest path. You are not sure where you will end up, but you are certain of your direction and your path.

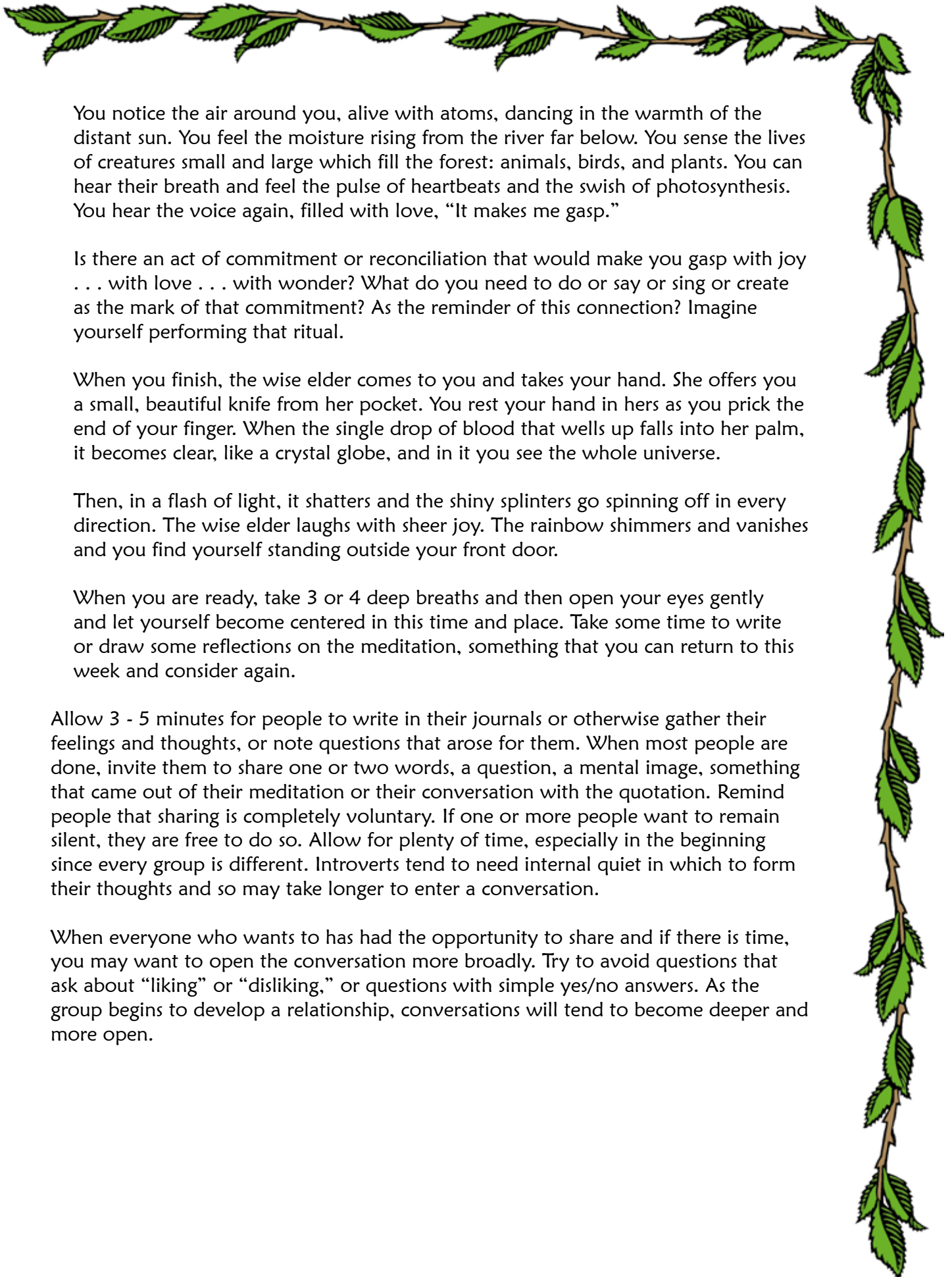
The day warms as the sun gets higher, but walking is comfortable and easy. You feel the strength in your body and know it can carry you for many miles. After a time, the trees draw back and you find yourself at the top of a cliff, looking across a deep valley with a river running through it. Beyond the valley is a range of mountains. This is a place of immense beauty and you know that you are meant to rest here.

Take off the backpack and take a drink of water from your bottle. Perhaps you pull out an apple or a sandwich and eat, watching birds floating on the thermals out over the valley. As you watch, you can see that it is raining in the distance, over the mountains. In time, the rain ends and a perfect double rainbow forms in the sky. In your heart, you hear the words, “I remember my covenant. I remember and the very thought of it makes me gasp.”

A voice speaks near you and you turn to see a wise elder standing beside you looking across the valley. “Do you notice that it is a double rainbow?” she asks. “Is there a covenant that you need to make?”

Sitting on the ground, you become aware of the life of the earth supporting you: of insects and worms. Of minuscule life forms slowly and patiently breaking down the leaves on the forest floor. Of the soil cradling tiny pockets of air. Of roots running everywhere, shaping the soil into ground. You allow your senses to open further. You become aware of rocks beneath you, shifting a hairsbreadth. Of infinitesimal chips being washed away as the underground streams bathe them.

You dive deeper to where the rock becomes liquid. You hear the voice in your heart again, “I remember my covenant and the very thought of it makes me gasp.” What are you feeling as your sense of self expands to become one with the earth? Pause and breathe with the feelings.



You notice the air around you, alive with atoms, dancing in the warmth of the distant sun. You feel the moisture rising from the river far below. You sense the lives of creatures small and large which fill the forest: animals, birds, and plants. You can hear their breath and feel the pulse of heartbeats and the swish of photosynthesis. You hear the voice again, filled with love, “It makes me gasp.”

Is there an act of commitment or reconciliation that would make you gasp with joy . . . with love . . . with wonder? What do you need to do or say or sing or create as the mark of that commitment? As the reminder of this connection? Imagine yourself performing that ritual.

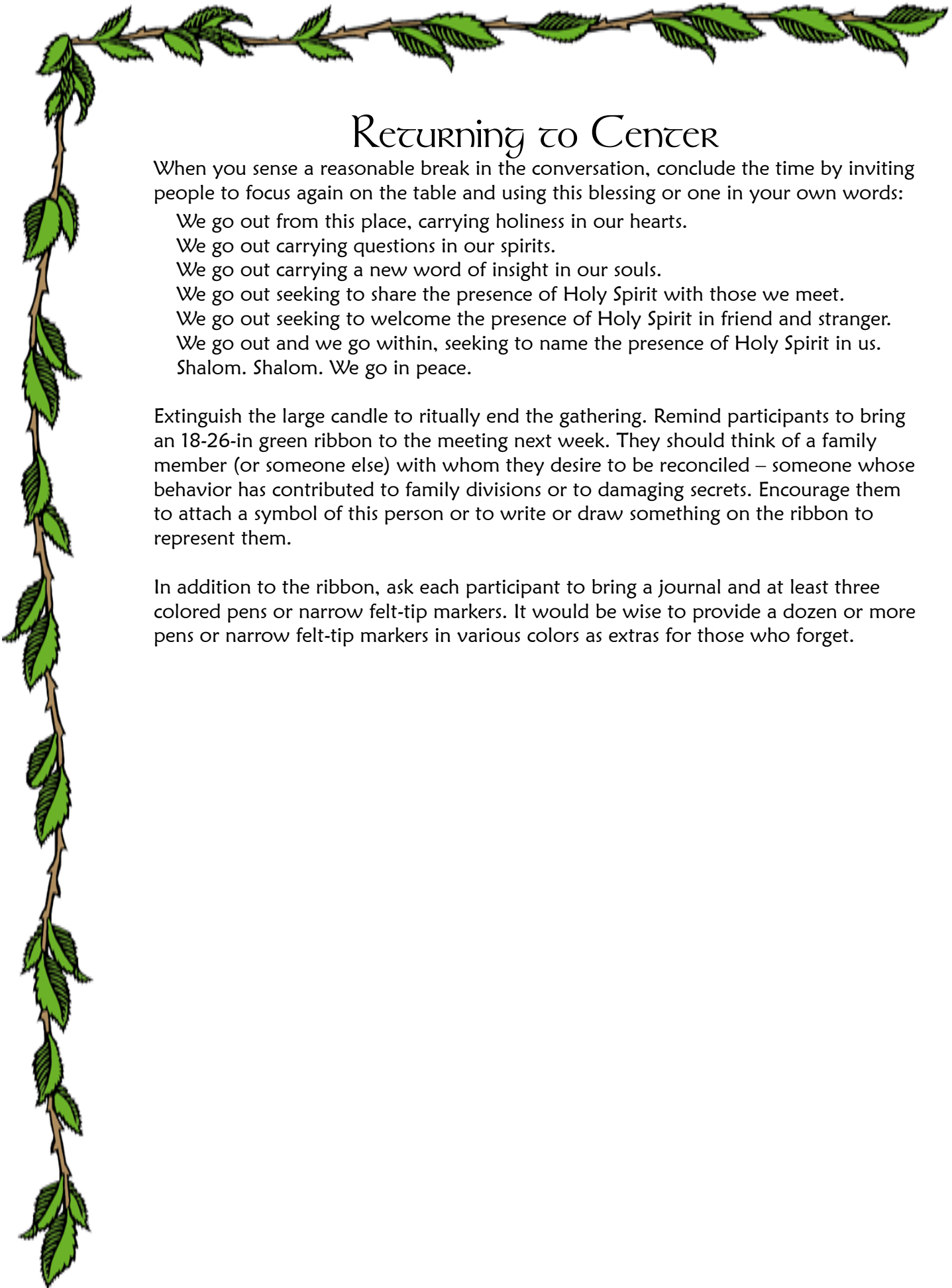
When you finish, the wise elder comes to you and takes your hand. She offers you a small, beautiful knife from her pocket. You rest your hand in hers as you prick the end of your finger. When the single drop of blood that wells up falls into her palm, it becomes clear, like a crystal globe, and in it you see the whole universe.

Then, in a flash of light, it shatters and the shiny splinters go spinning off in every direction. The wise elder laughs with sheer joy. The rainbow shimmers and vanishes and you find yourself standing outside your front door.

When you are ready, take 3 or 4 deep breaths and then open your eyes gently and let yourself become centered in this time and place. Take some time to write or draw some reflections on the meditation, something that you can return to this week and consider again.

Allow 3 - 5 minutes for people to write in their journals or otherwise gather their feelings and thoughts, or note questions that arose for them. When most people are done, invite them to share one or two words, a question, a mental image, something that came out of their meditation or their conversation with the quotation. Remind people that sharing is completely voluntary. If one or more people want to remain silent, they are free to do so. Allow for plenty of time, especially in the beginning since every group is different. Introverts tend to need internal quiet in which to form their thoughts and so may take longer to enter a conversation.

When everyone who wants to has had the opportunity to share and if there is time, you may want to open the conversation more broadly. Try to avoid questions that ask about “liking” or “disliking,” or questions with simple yes/no answers. As the group begins to develop a relationship, conversations will tend to become deeper and more open.



Returning to Center

When you sense a reasonable break in the conversation, conclude the time by inviting people to focus again on the table and using this blessing or one in your own words:

We go out from this place, carrying holiness in our hearts.

We go out carrying questions in our spirits.

We go out carrying a new word of insight in our souls.

We go out seeking to share the presence of Holy Spirit with those we meet.

We go out seeking to welcome the presence of Holy Spirit in friend and stranger.

We go out and we go within, seeking to name the presence of Holy Spirit in us.

Shalom. Shalom. We go in peace.

Extinguish the large candle to ritually end the gathering. Remind participants to bring an 18-26-in green ribbon to the meeting next week. They should think of a family member (or someone else) with whom they desire to be reconciled – someone whose behavior has contributed to family divisions or to damaging secrets. Encourage them to attach a symbol of this person or to write or draw something on the ribbon to represent them.

In addition to the ribbon, ask each participant to bring a journal and at least three colored pens or narrow felt-tip markers. It would be wise to provide a dozen or more pens or narrow felt-tip markers in various colors as extras for those who forget.