**Starting-Over Guidesheet #4**

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**Plump Up Your Soul!**

***Judith Couchman***

Last Friday I felt pressed by deadlines. I thought I needed to work into the evening, but I’d promised to attend my great niece’s school play and didn’t want to miss it. Working up to the last minute, I flew out the door in time to meet up with my niece and her preschool daughters. (Their dad, coming from work, joined us at the school.) Settling into an auditorium seat, I still thought about the pile-up on my desk.

It didn’t take long, though, for work to fade into the background. As one great niece nestled on my lap, another plopped in the aisle, and the third took the stage, I felt the stress-grip on my shoulders ease. I applauded my great niece’s role as a hissing snake, and accepted her mother’s invitation to eat out at a Mexican restaurant.

Instinctively, I almost declined the dinner invitation, thinking about my writing deadline. I needed to work! But I couldn’t turn down the imploring faces, and headed for the restaurant. It sounds corny, but during that meal something shifted in my soul. I felt lighter, refreshed, happy. At least three times I said something like, “Wow, I needed this!” I slept well that night and the next morning, revising a manuscript didn’t look so daunting.

Unwittingly, I’d plumped up my soul.

Working harder or even smarter isn’t always the best approach to accomplishing long-term tasks. Taking time off, doing the things we love, can revitalize a project or a long-term goal better than relentlessly churning. We need time to plump up the soul, to fill up our inner selves with what we love. This refuels us for our busy schedules, for the difficult and unwanted tasks. Plumping up the soul also keeps us from grinding ourselves into dust. When we endlessly work or fuss, we hit the law of diminishing returns. Mentally, emotionally, and physically, we diminish ourselves.

Given my personality type, I need to continually remind myself of this, especially when a deadline chases me. But it’s also good advice when we’re starting over. Transitioning to a new phase in life demands thought, action, and consultation. It can also produce doubt, worry, depression, and exhaustion—even if it’s a good transition. We need to take care of ourselves, to pursue what delights us.

**Choosing to Pursue Delight**

Plumping up the soul is a proactive choice. Don’t confuse it with escapism or denial, sitting mindlessly in front of the television, bingeing on junk food. It’s not an excuse for feeding an addiction or shirking responsibility. Instead, it’s choosing to pursue a healthy delight. Finishing up, you feel better, more equipped to manage what’s ahead.

While you’re starting over, choose what replenishes your soul. This activity doesn’t need to cost money; it just requires your time. Begin by choosing one activity you love, and go play!

This list offers some soul-plumping options that might suit you.

1. What did you love doing as a child?
2. What hobby can you take up?
3. What musical instrument could you play?
4. What craft can you begin or renew?
5. Do you like to paint, draw, or sculpt?
6. Do you like to dance?
7. What lessons could you take?
8. What places could you visit?
9. What books might inspire you?
10. Which people energize you?
11. Do you enjoy sports or exercise?
12. Where would you like to walk?
13. Could you get a massage?
14. What do you dream about writing?
15. Do you enjoy movies or stage plays?
16. Do you relish musical concerts?
17. Do you like to cook or bake?
18. What games do you like to play?
19. What is your favorite coffee shop?
20. How about some good sex?
21. What could you do with family?
22. Does solitude revive you?
23. Why not play with your cat or dog?
24. What do you like to collect?
25. What could you add to this list?

Whatever you do, don’t make plumping up the soul another “should” in your life. Keep it fun, away from your work and worries. Get lost in it. When you return to your daily life, it won’t feel like such a grind.

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