Living Religions of the World

Experiential Journal Prompt: Renunciation

Along the Buddha’s path to *nirvana* (or *nibbana),* he renounced a life of extreme pleasure to engage in a life of extreme asceticism. While in the end he chose the “Middle Path,” this really meant that he no longer starved himself or practiced extreme austerities. He still refrained from many actions (such as eating meat) and even from many thoughts. This type of renunciation is practiced by many different cultures in many different forms, and there are countless testimonies to its leading to insight, wisdom, and self-knowledge. In the spirit of this…

1. Choose something to give up for five days. Make sure it is something challenging—caffeine, sugar, gossip, etc.\*
2. At the end of each day, write a short entry about how it went.

\*Often our *dukkha*, or recurring suffering or unsatisfactoriness about our existence, is brought to the surface when we give up one of our addictions. This is because our addictions are typically things that distract us or numb us or generally keep us from facing the things that are bothering us (e.g. instead of stressing about an upcoming test, I will eat a brownie, which contains sugar and which makes my brain release a small amount of an endorphin). The 8-fold path is supposed to offer a way out of that cycle of suffering.

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