Oct. 10 - Nov. 27, 2021

Savoring the Harvest

Credit: Ira Srole (at the Rochester Public Market)

What does it mean to be called together spiritually to Savor the Harvest?

Definitions (from Oxford dictionary)

Savor (verb)
1. To enjoy or appreciate completely, especially by dwelling on it.

Harvest (noun)
1. The process or period of gathering
2. The product or result of an action

Harvest (verb)
1. To gather
2. To collect or obtain for future use

This Soul Matters Packet was shepherded into being by Suzy Farrell, Tom Perry, Ira Srole, and the Packet Writing Team with special thanks to Petra Mann-Page of Fruition Seeds.
Savoring the Harvest

Having returned to the east, my wife and I are very excited about the return to seasonal cycles. The onset of fall is a particularly delightful time for us. When we lived in Boston, we would often savor the season by going to a farm for apple picking, fresh cider, corn mazes, and other autumnal activities. Now that we’re back in an area with such traditions and opportunities, we’ve already made time to resume this tradition. It’s a fun way to savor and enjoy the harvest!

While fun, I also am aware that my enjoyment of it is an expression of my own economic privilege. Not everyone is able to spend the time and money to attend such fall festivities. This savoring is also made possible for me in large part by centuries of settler colonialism, the genocide of Native Americans, and the forced possession of their land. With this awareness accompanying our October outings, is my savoring lessened?

I don’t think it necessarily is. In fact, rather than stopping my ears to the truth and living in blissful ignorance, I think I can find a deeper savoring. By fully acknowledging the reality of our nation’s history, and the landscapes of power I am born into and inherit, I can engage more authentically and holistically, with all the burdens and joys that my awareness brings.

For example, acknowledging the whitewashed legend and problematic history of Thanksgiving doesn’t mean we can’t still gather with family and friends and enjoy a bountiful feast. Rather, when we acknowledge the real history, we might find deeper appreciation for what we are able to enjoy, and feel compelled to work for justice to ensure all have access to such opportunities.

We all reap from what others have sown. In some cases, we do so because of the exploitative systems of food and agriculture that pervade society and are difficult to avoid entirely. In other cases, it’s the simple perennial truth that we benefit from the sweat and sacrifice of the generations that came before us. What are you reaping and savoring this harvest season that you did not yourself sow? The seventh principle of Unitarian Universalism reminds us that we are all inescapably linked to one another in a vast interdependent web of existence. As you dive deeply into this packet, I encourage you to keep your attention on the question of where mutuality and reciprocity are in your savorings. This mutuality might be across vast expanses of time and space, or present in your more local relationships. Let us savor the harvest, and savor the connections we find with one another.

In faith,
Rev. AJ
LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As we ground ourselves in this time and place, let us be present in our minds, hearts, and bodies with reverence for the soul work we are undertaking. We acknowledge that the land where we are situated is the seized territory of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, including the Onödowa'ga:' (Seneca), Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, and Tuscarora Nations.

We pay respect to their elders, past and present, and express gratitude for the gifts they have bestowed upon us and what we have learned from them about democracy, care of the Earth, the transformative power of the human and natural spirits, and respect for the interconnected web of life. We also pause to consider the many legacies of violence, displacement, migration, and resettlement that enable us to be here together today.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Select one of the exercises below to practice and come prepared to discuss the experience and your thoughts and feelings about it with your group.

**Exercise A. What does the Earth Teach You?**

Rowen White and Leah Penniman, young BIPOC farmers, both discovered the transformative power and healing that the earth can offer. Through farming, each has connected with their individual ancestral roots and grown to share what they have learned with others. Read and listen about their plant journeys (links are in the Resources). The article from *Grist* speaks to White’s belief in the power of saving seeds. The audio excerpt from Penniman’s book, *Farming While Black*, begins at 9:17.

**Activity:** Do you have a plant journey to share? Are you drawn to the art of gardening? If so, you know there are many points during the gardening cycle. Planting, nurturing, cultivating as well as harvesting. Focus on the harvest and make it your daily spiritual task to savor the time you spend in your garden. Over time, see what changes you witness. What part of this practice did you especially like? Share your own plant journey with your soul matters group.

**Exercise B. Honorable Harvest**

In Robin Wall Kimmerer’s popular book, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indegenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teaching of Plants*, the reader is taught that plants and animals are our oldest teachers, if we only listen. Kimmerer offers this insight as a scientist as well as a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. Her chapter entitled *Honorable Harvest* (pages 175-201) outlines a set of ten guidelines based on the ways of her indegenous people. Kimmerer also describes the ten principles in the video found here: [https://youtu.be/ZDAPis_GA_s](https://youtu.be/ZDAPis_GA_s)
**Activity:** Read the *Honorable Harvest* chapter of the book if available or watch the video linked above. Then choose at least one of the principles of the honorable harvest (pg. 183) as you harvest your garden and/or prepare for winter and/or prepare for the holidays. Tell your soul matters group which principle(s) you choose, and how that changed your relationship to the natural world.

**Exercise C:** What are you grateful for at this Harvest Season?

It seems that ever since our ancient ancestors started intentionally planting crops, there have been celebrations and expressions of gratitude for the harvest. While our own Thanksgiving holiday is a recent invention of somewhat dubious origin (see *The Invention of Thanksgiving* in the Resources), nonetheless it is in the tradition of Harvest Feasts throughout history. Besides shopping, it is a time for reflection and, shall we say, giving thanks.

**Activity:** Take the next few days or weeks until you meet with your soul matters group to create a list of things for which you have been grateful. Note each event or thought which has evoked in you a feeling of thanks or gratitude. Big or small, mundane or exotic... add them all to your list. Come prepared to share with your group what you have learned from this exercise.

**Exercise D.** Day of the Dead – Honoring your Ancestors

Watch and discuss the movie, *Coco*. (It could be borrowed from the library, rented online or bought). This family-friendly animated film follows a 12 year-old boy as he is transported to The Land of the Dead. He explores and learns the familial connections to his present life. If you could “visit” ancestors, who would they be and what questions would you have for them?

How does it change things if you were to visit one of your ancestors whose legacy you are critical of? If you’re white, this might be an ancestor who was complicit in the genocide of Native Americans or benefited from slavery. Listen to “And When Ancestors are Dishonorable” in the Resources. Can you find a way to honor the dishonorable among your ancestors?

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

*These questions aren’t “homework” that need to be covered entirely. Instead, simply pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The questions often lead not to answers, but more questions.*

1. In what ways do you “reap what others have sown”? Does this feel fair? Why or why not?
2. How do you savor what is precious to you? Explain using all your senses.
3. Our church services during this theme touch on many holidays and remembrances. There is Indigenous People’s Day, Memory Tree, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving and more. Does one resonate with you more than any others? And why?

4. The quote (The trees are about to show us how lovely it is to let things go) by “unknown” suggests that nature shows us how to live. Have you ever had that experience? If so, speak about it.

5. In Resources, listen to the NPR story on Biden’s plan to slow the collapse of nature by protecting nearly a third of the country’s land and water by 2030. The plan is expected to rely heavily on private land owners. How do your UU core values apply when individual rights conflict with the common good of preserving the Earth for future generations?

6. The Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address (link in Sacred Texts) gives thanks to all of creation. What is your relationship to the plants, animals, water, and air that surround you?

7. Watch the video Three Seconds (https://vimeo.com/208145716). What can we do this year as a spiritual community to help humanity to get to 4 seconds?

GROWING OUR SOULS

These questions are the same each month and invite us to connect this work of spiritual deepening ...

1. How will our discussion today cause you to be different in the world?

2. Within our church community, where can you help to make changes related to this topic?

3. How does this discussion relate to other activities in which you are engaged at church (e.g., parenting, religious education, social justice, worship, music)?

READINGS FOR CHALICE LIGHTING

Chalice Lighting

The Abundance of Our Lives Together by Katie Gelfand, DRE

We light our chalice as a symbol of gratitude as we celebrate the abundance of our lives together. In this sanctuary we harvest bushels of strength for one another, and offer our crop with the hands of compassion and generosity. In the authentic and gentle manner of our connections, we cultivate a simple sweetness to brighten our spirits. May we be grateful for the ways we nourish and uplift each other, For it is the sharing of this hallowed time together that sustains us.
Closing Words

Teach Us to Remember our History by Rev. Jude Geiger (excerpt)

Teach us to remember our history.
Though we can not make amends for what has come before,
may we learn from those ways, never to repeat them in our lives today.
May we develop new ways of relating to neighbor and stranger,
without violence or coercion, deceit or greed.
Mother of Grace, help us to find a sense of humility where we have privilege,
and strength where we face oppression.
In our struggles we may learn compassion;
and in our power, may we learn temperance.
As a community of faith, may we be a safe harbor
in a world that is often harsh toward difference.
Challenge us to use our presence as a healing force for justice and equity.
Knowing that although we have come far in the civil rights struggles of our times,
there are many people who are still left behind,
and the work of building the beloved community,
is just as pressing as ever before.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

QUOTATIONS

Autumn leaves don't fall, they fly. They take their time and wander on this their only chance to soar.
   ~ Delia Owens, from "Where the Crawdads Sing"

We have lived our lives by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. We have been wrong. We must change our lives so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption, that what is good for the world will be good for us. And that requires that we make the effort to know the world and learn what is good for it.
   ~ Wendell Berry, The Long-Legged House

The trees are about to show us how lovely it is to let things go.
   ~ Unknown

I've always believed in savoring the moments. In the end, they are the only things we'll have.
   ~ Anna Godberson

I was taken by the power that savoring a simple cup of coffee can have to connect people and create community.
   ~ Howard Schultz
Now is the accepted time, not tomorrow, not some more convenient season. It is today that our best work can be done and not some future or future year. It is today that we fit ourselves for the greater usefulness of tomorrow. Today is the seed time, now are the hours of work, and tomorrow comes the harvest."

~ W.E.B Du Bois

FROM UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

Reflection on the Seventh Principle
Our seventh Principle, respect for the interdependent web of all existence, is a glorious statement. Yet we make a profound mistake when we limit it to merely an environmental idea. It is so much more. It is our response to the great dangers of both individualism and oppression. It is our solution to the seeming conflict between the individual and the group.

Our seventh Principle may be our Unitarian Universalist way of coming to fully embrace something greater than ourselves. The interdependent web—expressed as the spirit of life, the ground of all being, the oneness of all existence, the community-forming power, the process of life, the creative force, even God—can help us develop that social understanding of ourselves that we and our culture so desperately need. It is a source of meaning to which we can dedicate our lives.

~ Rev. Forrest Gilmore  https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles/7th

Sources of our Living Tradition (sixth source was added in 1995)
Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.
https://www.uuworld.org/articles/the-sources-unitarian-universalism

FROM SACRED TEXTS

Hebrews 12:11 – New Living Translation (NLT)
11 No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening – it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.

James 3:18 – NLT
18 And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 – NLT
6 Remember this – a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. 7 You must each decide in your heart how much to
give. And don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. “For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.”

**Galatians 6:7-9 – NLT**

7 Don’t be misled – you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant.
8 Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit.
9 So let’s not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up.

**Buddhist Four Laws of Harvest:**
We reap what we sow.
We reap far more than we sow.
We won’t reap if we don’t sow.
We reap even though there may be a delay from when we sow.

**Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address**
The Thanksgiving Address acknowledges the people, earth, waters, plants, animals, birds, bushes, trees, winds, sun, moon, stars, as well as the unseen spiritual forces. The Haudenosaunee are thankful for all the gifts that we receive.

https://americanindian.si.edu/environment/pdf/01_02_Thanksgiving_Address.pdf

**POETRY EXCERPTS**

**The Wild Geese** by Wendell Berry, from *Collected Poems 1957-1982*

Horseback on Sunday morning, harvest over, we taste persimmon and wild grape, sharp sweet of summer’s end. In time’s maze over fall fields, we name names that went west from here, names that rest on graves. We open a persimmon seed to find the tree that stands in promise, pale, in the seed’s marrow.

Geese appear high over us, pass, and the sky closes. Abandon, as in love or sleep, holds them to their way, clear, in the ancient faith: what we need is here. And we pray, not for new earth or heaven, but to be quiet in heart, and in eye clear. What we need is here.

**The Freshness of a Fall Day** by Richard Gilbert, from *Thanks Be for These, Meditations on Life and Death*

In the whirling dance of the seasons We savor the freshness of a fall day. Unbidden it comes with blinding sunshine Against a true blue sky that is infinite so far as we know.
Through no merit of our own we breathe in deep gulps of air so crisp
Our tired bodies find new energy
Quite beyond our power even to comprehend.
The beginning dabs of color on green hillsides
Move us to marvel that we live in such a world.

It is as if all the powers of truth, goodness and beauty
Have conspired to grant us this one perfect day.
There will be other days-
Days drab with fog;
Days wet with rain and heavy with snow;
Days that chill our spirits to the bone;
Nondescript days that test our mettle to endure.

But we who have experienced this singular day,
We who have been embraced by such loveliness,
We who have been privileged to be alive in such splendor,
We who have known the incomparable autumnal miracle,
Will savor forever the freshness of a fall day.
And it will be enough.

PODCASTS, SONGS, ARTICLES, FILMS, & BOOKS

Books & Articles

Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer. As an indigenous scientist, Kimmerer urges the reader to awaken and develop a relationship to the rest of the living world.

Wisdom of the Last Farmer: Harvesting Legacies from the Land by David Mas Masumoto. A son tenderly explores the lifetime of hard work he and his father have experienced on their farm.

The Great Wound: Confessions of a Slaveholding Family by Kenneth Collier. The author examines his own family’s relationship with slavery and realizes that acknowledging it is the first step to healing.


Audios

Audio excerpt from Farming While Black by Leah Penniman. The author co-founded Soul Fire Farm (Grafton, NY) in 2010 with the mission to reclaim the inherent right of Black and Brown people to belong to the earth and have agency in the food system. (Excerpt begins at 9:17.) https://readtomepod.libsyn.com/read-to-me-from-farming-while-black-0 (37:30)
**And When Ancestors are Dishonorable** by Rev. Kenneth Collier, Quest, November 2018. It’s easy to honor ancestors when those ancestors are honorable, but what if they weren’t? [https://www.questformeaning.org/quest-article/and-when-ancestors-are-dishonorable](https://www.questformeaning.org/quest-article/and-when-ancestors-are-dishonorable) (4:00, transcript included)

**To Conserve Vast Areas Of Land, Biden Needs Help From Private Landowners** reported by Nathan Rott on NPR Morning Edition, September 21, 2021. To slow the collapse of nature, the Biden administration is promising to protect nearly a third of the country’s land and water by 2030. The plan is expected to rely heavily on private landowners. [https://www.npr.org/2021/09/21/1039191120/to-conserve-vast-areas-of-land-biden-needs-help-from-private-landowners?ft=nprml&f=](https://www.npr.org/2021/09/21/1039191120/to-conserve-vast-areas-of-land-biden-needs-help-from-private-landowners?ft=nprml&f=) (6:00, transcript included)

**Videos**

**Coco** by Disney Pixar, 2017. This animated film is inspired by the Mexican holiday Day of the Dead. Twelve-year-old Miguel finds himself in the Land of the Dead where he meets his deceased musician great-great-grandfather who aids Miguel in his return to the land of the living and reverses the family’s ban on music. Borrow from the library, free on Disney+, rent or buy on most streaming platforms (105 min)

**Three Seconds** - The 2016 Film4Climate 1st Prize Short Film Winner. The Earth is 4.5 billion years old; mankind has been around only 140,000 years. Scale all of Earth’s existence to 24 hours; we humans only show up for the last 3 seconds. Will we get to 4 seconds? [https://vimeo.com/208145716](https://vimeo.com/208145716) (4:17)

**Honorable Harvest** by Robin Wall Kimmerer, excerpt from her speech at The Center for Humans & Nature’s 2014 Forum on Ethics and Nature. Screen snap lists the ten principles of the Honest Harvest. [https://youtu.be/ZDAPis_GA_s](https://youtu.be/ZDAPis_GA_s) (15:10)
Music/Hymns

Mother Earth, Beloved Garden, #1067, Singing the Journey
https://youtu.be/snbA8EdIEqM

Turn! Turn! Turn! (To Everything There Is A Season)
The Byrds Greatest Hits © Originally Released 1965
Composer: Peter Seeger; Lyricist: Words from the Book of Ecclesiastes
https://youtu.be/5_YsQu5tKEE

HUMOR

The Invention of Thanksgiving, a video by Paul Chaat (Comanche)
A factual and witty account of how “a brunch in the forest” became a national holiday, and why it is so important to our image of ourselves as a nation.
https://americanindian.si.edu/americans/#stories/the-invention-of-thanksgiving (4:38)

BBC: Spaghetti Harvest in Ticino
news story first broadcast on April 1, 1957.
https://youtu.be/tVo_wkxH9dU
(2:29 min)

The Famous Iceland Marshmallow Harvest, courtesy of Facebook group: High Church Coyote (Episcopal humor)
photo from Carol Hedges