

November/December 2023

Darkness Season - Rest



Woman Resting, by Lilian Wescott Hale c 1920s

How are we called to rest as the days shorten and we enter the dark time of the year?

“Late lies the wintry sun a-bed,
A frosty, fiery sleepy-head;
Blinks but an hour or two; and then,
A blood-red orange, sets again...”

[Winter-Time](#), by Robert Louis Stevenson

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge with respect the Seneca (Onöndowa'ga:') Nation, Keepers of the Western Door and part of the Haudenosaunee People, on whose ancestral land First Unitarian Church of Rochester, First Universalist Church of Rochester, and the Unitarian Universalist Church of Canandaigua now stand.

Dear Ones,

As the year winds down, we are faced with a dilemma. We are drawn into a very busy time with family and friends, as well as religious celebrations. Simultaneously, as the days shorten, we gravitate toward rest.

This time is bracketed by Halloween on October 31st and New Year's Day on January 1st. During November, there is our national Thanksgiving holiday with record numbers of people traveling. The conditions often become so chaotic that some of us question why we bothered. We may be called to create the 'perfect' versions of all the traditional foods. As a 17-year-old college student, I took on making a complete feast for a houseful of students. I made everything from scratch, including the bread for the stuffing. By the time dinner was ready, I was ready to lie down and rest.



If we haven't already done some preparations for the holiday season, Thanksgiving reminds us to string lights, decorate trees, find the menorah or Kwanzaa candles that we put away 'somewhere' last December, and start accumulating gifts. All of this may also put us into debt. So much pressure! How do we give ourselves permission to simplify so that we can respond to the universe's call to restorative, replenishing rest.

We also expect our UU churches to do extra services. Solstice, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Christmas. Sometimes these involve extraordinary planning. At the very least, they involve huge time commitments on the part of our clergy and lay leaders. Just when they are also feeling called to rest.

And if all of that wasn't enough, along comes December 31st – New Year's Eve. For many, there is added pressure to find a date for that elusive New Year's Eve party. One year when we were living in Culver City, I volunteered to help decorate a Rose Parade float. It was a great learning experience, but also added 'one more thing' and of course we had to get up early on New Year's Day to meet a friend who lived near the parade route. Pretty much ever since, January 1st has been a day of rest, enjoying the Rose Parade on TV and perhaps the Rose Bowl Game.

This season, we are called to review our plans as we approach the end of the year. Give ourselves permission to use the "holy no", to simplify, to donate instead of buying gifts, to enjoy time with family and friends without the 'friend-zy'. And, especially on those days when we are not working, plan a long winter's nap. We'll feel better for it.

– Anne J. Perry – if not cooking or baking, stretched out on the recliner
Member, First Unitarian Church of Rochester

Gratitude to this season's packet team leads, Mary Hammele and Anne Perry, the inspiring 3-church worship team, and the supportive contributions of the entire packet team. We hope you find inspiration to resist the urge to be too busy in this season and, instead, relax into rest.

READINGS FOR CHALICE LIGHTING

Chalice Lighting

We light this chalice to find inner peace,
love for each other, and faith in ourselves.
Also, to be welcoming to whomever we meet
and kind to all living creatures. So gather around
this light of hope as we share this time together.

By Oberlin UU Fellowship, Oberlin, OH

A Spark of Hope

If ever there were a time for a candle in the
darkness,
this would be it.
Using a spark of hope,
kindle the flame of love,
ignite the light of peace,
and feed the flame of justice.

By Melanie Davis



Chalice Extinguishing

Carry the Flame

The Chalice is now extinguished,
but its light lives on in the minds and hearts and souls of each one of you.
Carry that flame with you as you leave this place and share it
With those you know
With those you love
and most especially, with those you have yet to meet.

By Brian Kiely

It Becomes More

When we take fire from our chalice, it does not
become less.
It becomes more.
And so we extinguish our chalice, but we take its light
and warmth with us,
multiplying their power by all of our lives, and sharing it with the world.

By Rev. Amy Zucker Morgenstern



SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

It's the most Wonderful Time of the Year ... Late Fall & early Winter is the perfect time to slow down & smell the pumpkin spice – the sun is setting lower, diffused through the trees, the fireplace kicks on, and cooler temperatures suggest cozy indoor activities & an early bedtime. Rather than kick into high holiday gear, why not give in to your biorhythms & slow down a notch? Here are a few exercises to soothe your body & spirit during the Season of Darkness.

1. **Nap Ministry - Rest is Resistance**

Many of us have (or had) jobs where seat time was valued over quality and napping was grounds for termination. We may know people who take work phone calls and do email at all hours and then, when they do take vacation time, they stick to long weekends, never taking a full 2- or 3-week break. These people are valued in our capitalist culture for being dedicated to the institution. Finding time to sleep, let alone rest, can be challenging for those working multiple jobs and caring for children and/or elders. During slavery, enslaved people were worked 12-18 hours a day doing back-breaking labor with insufficient food and rest to build the America we know today. Work without rest is soul numbing and body breaking.

Tricia Hersey discovered the value of napping while in the Emory University School of Theology and wrote the 2022 NY Times best seller, "Rest Is Resistance: A Manifesto". After reading about her experience at <https://news.emory.edu/features/2023/07/emag-power-of-naps-13-07-23/index.html>, take some time to consider when and where in your life you could insert a nap. Perhaps it's a 20-minute nap during your lunch break. Maybe it's a weekly nap on your day off. Some can nap anywhere, and others can't nap without changing into their night clothes and getting into bed. Try taking naps at least 3 or 4 times. How did you feel about this? What challenged you to find the time? Were you able to go to sleep? If not, what got in the way? How long did you sleep? Did you wake up rested or not? Did you feel more energized after the nap? This might be a good exercise to work on during November and talk about in December.

2. **Sabbath – Sacred or Secular**

Workers have struggled for centuries to procure the right for manageable work weeks and days off for rest & recreation. The UAW is currently asking for a four-day work week. So why are so many of us determined to fill *all* our waking hours with productivity!?! Can we let go of the idea that "we are what we do" and take a day of rest?

JUST. ONE. DAY. OFF.

This pressure to produce is embedded in the Protestant Work Ethic. In Orthodox Jewish communities, the Saturday sabbath is sacred. People are called into connection with one another and into study and prayer. The expectation is to do absolutely no work, not even turning on a light or cooking a meal.

You can try this too. Take a day to stay in your pjs and watch cartoons, alone or with your kids. Even kids need a mental-health day off sometimes. Make a huge pot of flavored coffee or chai and read magazines. Take a stroll down a path where you haven't been in a while – a stroll – not a brisk, step-counting walk. Go window shopping and don't buy a single item. Take the opportunity to engage in yoga or meditation or other soul-nourishing activities.

Come to your spiritual deepening group meeting and report what that was like. Did you take the whole day? What temptations popped up to try to lead you away from rest & relaxation? Could you do this again? Could you make it a new habit?

3. **Permission to Simplify - Involve your Household**

Begin by making an inventory of events you participate in that occur in November and December. These can be 'national' events or family/friend/church seasonal events. Next to each event, list all the activities associated with that event that you expect of yourself. This can be done with all those living together in one location to give everyone an opportunity for input. Try to capture everything possible. For example, if you host guests in your home, will there be extra cleaning, laundry, special meals, etc.? Now go through the inventory again and note which activities you really like to do or that are most important to you. If you really like to bake that special holiday tart, then keep that on the list. If you really hate to clean,

take a look at the resources for cleaning hacks. If others in the household adore the gingerbread house making activity, discuss how the work can be shared or how the activity could be less complicated. You should now have a list of activities and events that are less important to the household.

Wait a few days or a week and review these less-important activities again. Does anything change? Give yourselves permission to let go of those less-important activities. Take a rest (see Exercise 1 above). Or maybe the household group can do something together that is fun and relaxing and doesn't require a lot of work, such as watching a movie together or getting out that old Scrabble game. Come to your spiritual deepening group and talk about how this worked for you and whether you felt like you were able to reduce the pressure of the season.

4. **Multigenerational** - Read a story about ***The Dark***

Fear of the dark (called nyctophobia) is not unique for children – sometimes we carry some of that fear into adulthood, when we circumnavigate the house at dusk, testing all the doors to be sure they are locked. Children and adults with nyctophobia may fear being *alone* in the dark but draw comfort from having others around. Have a listen to this story by Lemony Snicket with a youngster (or any friend, really). The book is available from the Monroe County Library [here](#).

For a suspenseful read-aloud, here's a YouTube link: [The Dark](#)

Description: The dark lives in the same house as Laszlo. Mostly, though, the dark stays in the basement and doesn't come into Laszlo's room. But one night, it does...

After listening to or reading the book, have a chat with your friend & answer these questions: How did you feel as Laszlo's story progressed? Did you relate to his uneasiness at the beginning of the story and as he traveled around his creaking house with his flashlight? What memories do you have of dark places when you were younger? Are there dark places that make you nervous today? What were you feeling when The Dark proposed a solution? Do you have any tricks that help you deal with the dark? Are there other times when you feel sadness or fear? What are some ways to bring light to those situations?

REFLECTION 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 to more questions

1. What is your definition of "sabbath," and how do you "observe" it in your life?
2. What are your thoughts about "blue laws" and other legislated restrictions for Sundays or enforced days of rest? Does this blur the line between church & state? Is it beneficial to have days when stores are closed?
3. What are some of the holiday stressors you could quietly trim from your life without much fanfare or other family members noticing? How have some traditions been carried on – do they bring joy or additional pressure?

4. What are some of the simple (holiday) joys you remember from childhood that could be revived for yourself or your family?
5. What does naptime look like for you? What interferes with your ability to rest/nap? What kind of preparation do you/would you need to incorporate a nap into your routine for a day or as a habitual practice?
6. How do you capture dreams, daydreams, and thoughts that arise from naps, resting, or a night's sleep? How does a rest period jump start creativity?
7. What are some ways you can shine a light in the darkness of the troubled world – locally or globally?
8. What do you think of when you hear the epitaph, “Rest in Power” and “Rest in Peace?” How are they different?

FROM UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM



Watercolor by Charles R. Murphy, *Alone*

[Meditation on Breathing](#)

by Sarah Dan Jones

Performed by First Unitarian Society of Denver

“When I breathe in, I breathe in peace.
When I breathe out, I breathe out love.”

Hymns

[1055 How Sweet the Darkness](#)

Sung by Amy O’Connell, UU Congregation of Northern Chautauqua

[55 Dark of Winter](#)

Sung by Lea Morris

Also see [UU World, Fall/Winter 2023](#)

[Rest in the Peace of This Moment](#)

By Kris Cervantes

“Rest now,
Rest in the peace of this moment.
Be at ease.
Look up at the stars, and down at the grass:
Imagine the stars looking back at you over
years and centuries, across oceans of
empty space.
Imagine the feel of the grass on your bare
feet and feel it—dry and crunchy, soft and
supple.

Rest now,
Rest in the peace of this moment....”

[Sabbath Practices for Wintertime](#)

By Rev Joanna Lubkin, UUWorld

“What would it look like to not just accept
and survive our times of rest, but to delight
in them? You could have Sabbath any time
you intentionally set apart ...” Here are
some ideas on how to renew & reconnect
with what’s important.

FROM SACRED TEXTS

Old Testament

"And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it, God rested from all his work that he had done in creation." - Genesis 2:2-3

Quran

"When the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday ([jumu'ah](#)), hasten earnestly to the Remembrance of Allah, and leave off business: That is best for you if ye but knew." (62:9)

Buddhist observance of [Uposatha](#)

"As a sabbath, it's ... a beautiful discipline in doing with less, having a bit more time to practice, and remembering that there are deeper currents in your life than the endless circle of working, feeding, and cleaning up." (Sein Feit Oakes, 2020)

Verse 15, Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu

"Do you have the patience to wait till your mud settles and the water is clear? Can you remain unmoving till the right action arises by itself?"

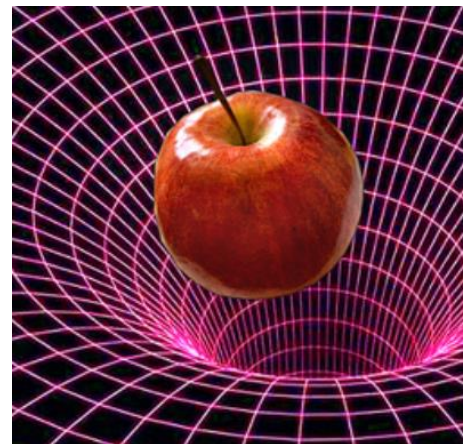


POETRY EXCERPTS

[Breathe](#): A poem about getting back to your true self
by *Becky Hemsley*
"...sometimes we have to get lost to find ourselves again ..."

[Gravity](#) (2019)
by *Benjamin Gorman*

"Gravity
Is not constant
Some days
Certain facts
Weigh more than they should ..."



When I am Among the Trees

By Mary Oliver

“Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, ‘Stay awhile.’
The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, ‘It’s simple,’ they say,
‘and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine.’ ”

Photo by Mary Lyubomirsky
Olympic National Park
Ancient Groves Trail
Hoh Ancestral Land



“Out beyond ideas of
wrongdoing and rightdoing
there is a field.

I’ll meet you there.
When the soul lies down
In that grass,
The world is too full
To talk about.”

By Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks

QUOTATIONS

“We humans have lost the wisdom of genuinely resting and relaxing. We worry too much. We don’t allow our bodies to heal, and we don’t allow our minds and hearts to heal.”

By Thich Nhat Hanh

“The madness of spring is so enticing. I love it when things are opening up and emerging from the ground. I also love the middle of summer when fruit is bursting forth, but I even love the garden in the winter when everything is resting.”

By Ross Gay, American Poet

“After all, the best part of a holiday is perhaps not so much to be resting yourself, as to see all the other fellows busy working.”

By Kenneth Grahame, British Author



“I've always found a cure for the blues is wandering into something unknown, and resting there, before coming back to whatever weight you were carrying.”

By Diane Sawyer, American TV Journalist

“Think what a better world it would be if we all, the whole world, had cookies and milk about three o'clock every afternoon and then lay down on our blankets for a nap.”

By Barbara Jordan, American lawyer, educator, & politician

“The replenishing thing that comes with a nap – you end up with two mornings in a day.”

By Pete Hamill, American journalist, novelist, essayist and editor

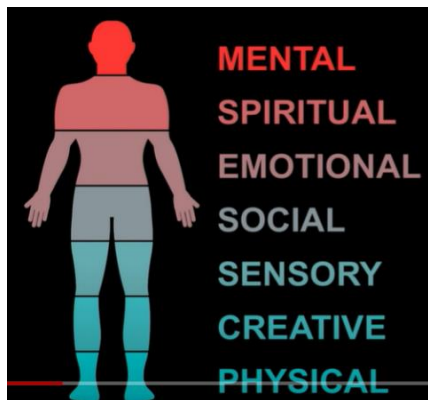
RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Articles, TED talks, videos, blogs, podcasts, books ...

[How to rest well](#)

by Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, PhD, Pysche

“Taking a break isn't lazy – learning to recharge is a skill that will allow you to enjoy a more creative, sustainable life... Downtime is undervalued in today's busy, always-on world. But for most of human history, rest – time in which we can recharge the mental and physical batteries we use while labouring – was prized as a gift.”



[TEDxAtlanta](#)

The real reason we're tired and what to do about it

By [Dr. Saundra Dalton-Smith](#)

Dr Dalton-Smith identifies why sleep & rest are both necessary and identifies seven types of rest our bodies need. She calls rest “the most safe & effective alternative therapy available to us.”

[Sabbath](#)

A Film by Martin Doblmeier (May, 2023), [Full film](#) at Journey Films (1 hour)

This documentary shows various religions' emphasis on rest in a burnout culture. Told as a collection of short stories, *Sabbath* explores the history of one of the world's most important spiritual practices and its timeless relevance for a stressed-out, modern world. From the Biblical accounts of creation & the 10 Commandments, to the Puritans landing in the New World, to the contemporary practice of a "tech-sabbath," *Sabbath* ties together our collective history, our health practices, our response to God's invitation, and search for a more sustainable way of life.

[Sabbath: Good for Non-Believers Too,](#)

*By [Andrei Codrescu](#) on NPR, *All Things Considered**

“For one day a week forget pedagogy, self-incrimination, disapproval, political rage. Let it be a cliché if it has to, or just let it. It's the Sabbath...”

How to Cancel Plans Without Losing Friends and Feeling Like a Jerk

by Rachel Wilkerson Miller, *Self*, Sep 20, 2019.

If you have a packed calendar and a pressing need to practice self-care, this one's for you. It's an example of "The Holy No," when we allow ourselves to bow out and preserve our own sense of peace and well-being.

Sleeping on the job: how a quick nap makes us more efficient

by Jamie Waters, *The Guardian*, Dec 6, 2020.

"While working from home have you had a cheeky nap? Don't feel guilty. Research shows a brief kip boosts productivity. But will it catch on in the office?"

The Case for Rest: A Lesson from the Tao Te Ching

by Dave Ursillo

"... the end of the traditional calendar year also calls forth a season of inward focus, introspection, and reflection: we take stock in what our year has held, what we have done, and question how we would like to live in the New Year... this is not a time to try to 'do' more to 'get ahead.' In a society that tells us to "keep going at all costs," we are likely to find ourselves confused, overwhelmed, or disconnected as a result of the constant action, movement, and distraction. The Tao Te Ching, V15, asks whether we have the patience to remain still & quiet and wait for the 'right action' to reveal itself. Stillness brings clarity. This season is ripe for it."



The case for unproductivity: Why you aren't meant to be 'on' all the time

by L'Oreal Thompson Payton

What is "Toxic Productivity" and what can we do about it?

Don't have the energy to clean today? Just tidy up these 5 things

By Marielle Segarra, Mia Venkat, April 26, 2023

NPR – a 16-minute recording or a quick read

1. Trash
2. Dishes
3. Laundry
4. Things that have a place
5. Things that don't have a place

SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

Where are some places or opportunities you can join with like-minded people to shine a light into dark spaces?

Postcard Fridays – a local group who works to get out the vote in areas where voter suppression & disenfranchisement is on the rise. Email Trish Harren at trish.harren@gmail.com.

Attend your local Board of Education meetings – support teachers & administrators
Shining Light into Darkness. Rev Joanna Fontaine Crawford, UU Minister in Austin, TX, speaks out against censorship in libraries. Requests to ban books at US public schools & libraries surged to a 21-year record in 2022, according to data from the American Library Association. Last year, the ALA recorded 1,050 requests to censor

library books, a 70% increase over the 619 requests in 2021 (Leipzig, P. [CNN](#), 2023, 8/27). Rev Joanna demonstrates how we can help support teachers & administrators fight constitutional infringement.

MUSIC

[John Cage 4'33"](#) Petrenko Berlin Philhamoniker

[Find a Stillness](#) (SLT #352)

[For All That is Our Life](#) (SLT #128)

[Loosen Loosen](#) by Aly Halpert

[Sleep My Child](#), Jewish Folk Song

[Gathered Here](#) (#389)

[Lone Wild Bird](#) (SLT #15)

[1001 Breaths](#), by Birango Diop

[Faure Requiem](#), Op 48, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

[Lay Your Burden Down](#), Chuck Girard

[Enya Relaxing Music](#) (2 hours)

[Vienna Teng Green Island Serenade](#)

HUMOR



Garfield by Jim Davis



"I can get by on just 2 hours of sleep every day, as long as I nap for 14 hours."



[Pocoyo in Nap Time](#)

A cute Claymation video to share with nappers and nap guards.