

“Sabbath Wisdom”

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A few days ago, I was sitting at my desk at home, looking out the window toward the street when I saw two men approach each other, each walking their dog. They waved as they neared each other, then stepped together and shook hands. A few months ago, I would have smiled at this sweet connection between friends. On that day, I found myself wondering what they were thinking and if they had hand sanitizer with them.

The world has been turned upside down.

I know you don't need me to tell you that. Your own life experience tells you that every day. I say those words out loud as a way to tell myself to stop wishing that the world was different than it is. I say those words out loud to acknowledge our collective experience of challenge and upheaval. I say those words out loud to affirm that nothing is the same as it was and likely never will be.

These past few weeks, I have been so grateful for all the ways so many people have come forward with energy and compassion. I am indebted to Troy and Sara and Darlene and Kari, who have worked hard to move all that we do online. I am grateful to Marie, our caretaker, for her deep cleaning of our building. I am grateful to Rev. Carol for her deep connections to our community and unwavering justice work. I am grateful to so many of you for the care you have shown to each other, some I know about and much that I don't. It has been beautiful, and it gives me hope.

At the same time, I have been aware of my own grief process as I am taking in the immediate implications of this virus and imaging the long-term consequences. Along with many of you, I have felt denial, anger, bargaining, and depression, sometimes moving from one to the other and back again. I am not at acceptance yet—it is too soon. And, we really don't know yet what we will need to accept. We are still in the transition; the new normal has not yet emerged.

Just a few weeks ago, and an eternity ago, I spoke about this season of Lent as a time of emptying to make space for what is waiting to emerge. I spoke of simplifying, paring down, prioritizing our core values. I do not have

a crystal ball (much as I might like one) and could not have imagined then that we would be here now. And, here we are—simplifying our lives, paring down our calendars, and prioritizing what is most important: our health, our families, our communities.

In this time, we are reminded that there is much that we do not control. A microscopic virus has the ability to upend the world. What we can control is how we respond. In this time when we cannot deny that we are connected in ways that are both terrifying and beautiful, we have needed to decide about being around others, touching others, sharing food—basic things that we take for granted. Surely it has become clear that we hold each other's lives in our hands. Sometimes quite literally. This time is an invitation to discern what we can control and how we can do so with integrity.

So, what if we were to experience this as a time of sabbath, the most sacred of times? The roots of the word “sabbath” come from Middle English *sabat*, Latin *sabbatum*, Greek *sabbaton*, and Hebrew *shabbāth*, all of which mean, literally, rest. These are the same roots for the word “sabbatical,” the practice of taking a break from usual activities for new experiences and creativity.

Some of us have taken a sabbath, clearing our calendars of commitments, opening up to a time of rest. Some of us have stepped outside of our usual activities, taking on new and different activities, or doing them in a different way. Some of us are continuing to work, some from home, and I am hard pressed to imagine any work that has not been affected in some way. Some of us are looking at days and weeks of rest, perhaps welcome and perhaps not. Some of us are struggling to rest at all, perhaps wrestling with worry or the demands of a position that impacts people's lives.

Regardless of what we are doing in this time, I wonder what would happen if we tended to our being. If we were to remain open to this time as sacred and holy, even if it was just for a moment, maybe just for this moment.

For this is the core of most religious traditions—be in this moment. That is the Jewish practice of sabbath: set aside time each week to worship and share food. Those who practice Shabbat step outside of their usual

schedule to create sacred space and celebrate connection—to themselves, to each other, to God.

The mindfulness practice of Buddhism teaches us to relax our bodies and focus our minds on what is now; to be present to what is right in front of us; to notice and experience what is real.

One of the five pillars of Islam is *salat*, the duty to pray. Those of us who practice in this way will stop what we are doing to pray five times each day; facing the Holy Mosque in Mecca, praying in Arabic, and moving in a ritual way. In those moments, Muslims are present to that moment, connected to Allah, seeking guidance, courage and strength.

Those of us who practice Earth-centered traditions stop to notice the turning of the wheel by marking holidays like the Spring Equinox, which we just celebrated a few days ago. These are moments throughout the year to notice the passing of time and experience gratitude for the beauty of our world.

With each practice, we are invited to stop and notice, to take a moment of sabbath, to see the magic and wonder all around us, to appreciate and give thanks for all life, and to connect to the Divine, however we experience it.

Author and spiritual psychologist Jacquelyn Small said, “We are not human beings trying to be spiritual. We are spiritual beings trying to be human.”

Especially now, in this time when the world is turned upside down, we are still spiritual beings trying to be human. This is a crisis like most of us have never experienced and may never again. There is uncertainty and worry, misinformation and fear. There is also incredible kindness and generosity and compassion. I have experienced so many of you reach out with your hearts and words and tendrils of compassion. These are the things that will help us weather this for the duration.

I wonder if treating this as a time of sabbath would help us notice that Spring is here—trees are budding, flowers are blooming, there are longer days of sunshine. We might notice our connection to each other, and how we can bolster our interdependent web using the world wide web. We might notice all the ways, big and small, that people are kind and generous and compassionate. We are making changes as individuals, as a society,

and as a world, that acknowledge and support our interdependence and connection. Perhaps making this a time of sabbath could help cement those positive changes permanently.

I am by myself in the sanctuary this morning, but I am not alone. The spirit of this congregation is in this space. This spiritual community is not the building. It is the people. You. Us. And, we have been invited in this time to extend our community well beyond our walls.

Our Unitarian Universalist faith tradition has a loving and life-giving message to offer, a message so important now and always. We say that there is a piece of divinity in each of us and that everyone is worthy of dignity and respect. We come together in covenant, the mutual promises that we make to each other and that we repair when we break. We affirm that we are always connected. We are never alone, even when we forget; especially when we forget! Ours is a message grounded in love.

As we move through this time and into the future, I know that we will continue to reach out our hearts and words and tendrils of compassion virtually to all who wish to join us on this journey.

For now, I invite you to consider what would make these days sacred and holy for you? How will you find moments of sabbath? What will help you stay right side up when the world is upside down?

In the days ahead, may we experience moments of rest. May we experience moments of connection. May we experience moments filled with spirit and peace. Amen and Blessed Be.

Time of Silence and Reflection

I invite you now into a moment of sabbath. I will offer a spoken meditation, then we'll hold silence together.

Settle in, wherever you are. Rest.

Relax your body; your neck and shoulders; your arms and hands; your legs and feet.

Feel the grounding of Mother Earth beneath you.

Notice your breath.

Feel your heartbeat.

Notice the thoughts that cross your mind and let them go.

Soften your focus or close your eyes if you are comfortable.

These words are adapted from “The Pulse of Life” by Jennifer Johnson:

These are anxious days. Hair-pulling, hand-wringing days. We are bombarded from all sides with new and unprecedented developments. Grave threats to our national values and institutions on one hand, and countless calls to action on the other... and then the flood of critique and analysis. These are indeed uncertain times.

And yet, there are some things we do know for certain. We know that our blue boat home continues to rotate on its axis, continues its familiar sojourn around the sun. The sun sets and rises, and if we remember to pause, we may lose ourselves, but for a moment, in the glorious play of light and color on the horizon.

Beneath the crust of warming earth, the crocuses and the daffodils are stirring and bursting forth. The energy of life and living is pulsing in them and in the blades of grass and the maple buds. And it's pulsing in us, too.

The pulse of life calls us to nourish our bodies with good food and movement, to nourish our spirits with art and song, friendship and tenderness, and quiet.

When we heed the pulse of life, we know what we need to do:

To rise in the morning and rest into darkness.

To put our hands, hearts, and minds to work.

To meet those in our midst with compassion.

To join with the vulnerable and speak truth to power.

To play with our youngest and hear the wisdom of our elders.

To heal the sick and wounded.

To grieve the dying and remember the dead.

To be of use, and sometimes, to be still.

The pulse of life is beating in each and every one of us. Amidst the clamor of these times, let us heed its sure and steady rhythm.

Let us hold a moment of silence together.