

**WISDOM CIRCLES**  
**June 2014**  
**Rest, Renewal, and Sabbath**  
**Should I Be Taking a Sabbath?**

Every instant of our lives is precious and irretrievable because we don't know how many we have. But if you are following the script called the American Dream, working harder and harder, then you are letting other people decide what you are doing with the moments of your life. You may be giving up your time, your very life, so that the privileged few can make bigger and bigger profits. All to keep up in the status race and buy more and more goods and services, most of which we don't need. Some people being squeezed by low wages and need two or three jobs just to buy the necessities. But for most of us there is a measure of choice about whether we will be caught in the hamster wheel of working and spending.

Being busy is something we complain about, but we are really bragging. The average American doesn't take a fifth of their paid time off. That means that we are just giving it away to our employers. That time is gone. Our children don't get it. Our spouses and partners don't get it. Our friends don't get it. Even the activities that bring us joy and fulfillment don't get it. And our productivity goes more and more into the hands of the greedy few. If we're not intentional about what we're going to do with our lives, other people have ideas.

UU theologian Rebecca Parker offers advice for activists on how to make a lifestyle statement to resist a culture that commodifies everything. They are two ancient practices. One practice is tithing, giving away a tenth of one's income to good causes. The other is keeping a Sabbath. Keeping a Sabbath means that there is one day a week that is all yours, that doesn't go to "the man." Sabbath is a time not for producing, but only for being and for enjoying life. It is a time to rest.

The traditional Jewish Sabbath starts at sundown, whether that be 4:30 in the afternoon in winter or late in the evening in the summer. It begins not when everything is done but because it is time. Writer Wayne Muller says "If we refuse to rest until we are finished, we will never rest until we die. Sabbath says, 'stop now.'"

I know that some who have been brought up in an ultra-orthodox household have felt oppressed by the narrow way the Sabbath was practiced in their homes growing up. But most of those who have kept a Sabbath at some time in their lives have looked forward to it as a time for good food, rest, worship and lovemaking. Rabbi Zalman Schacter expresses this well when he wrote, "Today I'm going to pamper my soul."

Of course, as Unitarian Universalists, we are free to practice the Sabbath in the way that nurtures us. It could be Sunday or any day of the week. The main thing is to ask yourself, "What would pamper my soul? What would feed me?" One simple way to keep the Sabbath is don't do anything on your to do list.

According to writer Tim Kreider, “Idleness is not just a vacation, an indulgence or a vice; it is as indispensable to the brain as vitamin D is to the body, and deprived of it we suffer a mental affliction as disfiguring as rickets. The space and quiet that idleness provides is a necessary condition for standing back from life and seeing it whole, for making unexpected connections and waiting for the wild summer lightning strikes of inspiration — it is, paradoxically, necessary to getting any work done.”

Some people don't spend money or deal with electronic devices. It seems to me that checking your email or voice mail is the quickest way I can think of to get out of the Sabbath mood. Just thinking about it makes the anxiety go up.

Many in our society are literally addicted to busyness and the adrenalin that it creates. That's why it might feel bad for a little while when we stop. But we pay a huge price for our addiction to busyness. Europeans take 4 to 8 weeks of vacation and are typically more productive than we are. Overwork, lack of rest and hurry will lead to bad decisions that must later be corrected if that is even possible. And our addiction takes a physical toll as well. The Chinese pictograph for hurry is a combination of the characters for heart and for kill.

Sherry Turkle is a social scientist from MIT. She did a study on how new technology is affecting our lives and our relationships. Her conclusion is that technology should enhance our lives and that can only happen if we lead an examined life with technology. Before she began the study she thought children would be driving their parents crazy by constantly being engaged with their devices, but instead she found that the parent constant pre-occupation with their devices was leaving children feeling lonely and unimportant. Turkle reminds us that “Just because we grow up with the internet doesn't mean the internet is all grown up.”

One essential question for greater happiness is: “Are you taking the time to enjoy your life and the people in it? Are you doing what you love and what is meaningful to you? Who are you living for, yourself and those you love, or the 1% that is running the world for their benefit?”

Change your situation. Change your priorities. Have the courage to live and enjoy your life, because there is not loving and living in the grave where you are going. Truly every moment is precious.

## **Spiritual Exercise**

The spiritual exercise for this summer is to keep Sabbath for one day, one 24 hour period, starting either at sundown to sundown or when you awaken in the morning. We will keep the definition simple. Don't do anything on your to do list. No returning phone calls, our errands, or household chores, or checking e mail or voice mail or returning phone calls. Just things that you enjoy and that nourish you. Try to have a really good meal as part of the deal. Perhaps you would like to do this on a Sunday and have attending services be part of your Sabbath. Then be prepared to share the experience with the group.

If you resist doing this exercise, get in touch with where that resistance is coming from and share that with your group.

## **Questions for Reflection**

Do you think you could create a regular Sabbath in your life? Does the idea appeal to you?

What would you have to change in order for that to happen? If you can't take one whole day, is there a way that you could rest from work or obligation for 1/7 of your week?

## **Words of Wisdom**

"There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence to which the idealist ... most easily succumbs: activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence."

"To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence. The frenzy of our activism neutralizes our work for peace. It destroys our own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful."

~ Thomas Merton

Anybody can observe the Sabbath, but making it holy surely takes the rest of the week.

~ Alice Walker

Sabbath - a weekly festival having its origin in the fact that God made the world in six days and was arrested on the seventh.

~ Ambrose Bierce

“Sabbath, in the first instance, is not about worship. It is about work stoppage. It is about withdrawal from the anxiety system of Pharaoh, the refusal to let one’s life be defined by production and consumption and the endless pursuit of private well-being.”

~ Walter Brueggemann

“Some keep the Sabbath going to church, I keep it staying at home, with a bobolink for a chorister, and an orchard for a dome. ”

~ Emily Dickinson

“A world without a Sabbath would be like a man without a smile, like summer without flowers, and like a homestead without a garden. It is the most joyous day of the week.”

~ Henry Ward Beecher

The command is "Do no work." Just make space. Attend to what is around you. Learn that you don't have to DO to BE. accept the grace of doing nothing. Stay with it until you stop jerking and squirming.”

~ Dallas Willard,

When we live without listening to the timing of things, when we live and work in twenty-four-hour shifts without rest – we are on war time, mobilized for battle. Yes, we are strong and capable people, we can work without stopping, faster and faster, electric lights making artificial day so the whole machine can labor without ceasing. But remember: No living thing lives like this. There are greater rhythms, seasons and hormonal cycles and sunsets and moonrises and great movements of seas and stars. We are part of the creation story, subject to all its laws and rhythms.”

~ Wayne Muller

All life has emptiness at it's core it is the quiet hollow reed through which the wind of God blows and makes the music that is our life.”

~ Wayne Muller