



Spiritual Practice Packet

January 2023

Finding Our Center



Labyrinth by Andrea La Sonde Anastos

CONTENTS

Reflection

Spiritual Practices

Questions to Ponder

Inspiration

Unity Church-Unitarian, St. Paul, Minnesota

Unityunitarian.org

Finding Our Center

On the first Tuesday of every month, a group of us gather in the Center Room to discuss the following month's theme.

Although the writing of the article is not a group effort, the ideas reflected in this article are the result of our contemplation on an opening question: "Where do you find your center?"

"For me, I have to always practice finding my center," said one participant. "But finding it is outside my control! When it comes, it's a gift..." Another said, "My mother. She is my center. When I feel myself spinning away from my center, she pulls me back. And spiritually, I go to my 'mom' — that is, my connections that help me to ground myself in the center."

So, is finding your center a practice, a person or a place? One of our members spoke movingly about experiencing the solitude of her childhood in a particular place. It was in this place where she felt most safe, secure and grounded — a place of being well cared for; where her basic needs were met. She experienced that at "my center... is a sense of well-being that is not based upon the existence of others; and it helped to develop my sense of trust in the care of the world and the universe." Finding one's center, then, can be intimately connected to our experiences of place. As one participant said, "...it's knowing the land that formed my bones. This is what keeps me centered, even though I no longer live on that land."

In some ways, it felt as if the conversation were circling around the center, but never landing there, as each one of us tried to explore the feeling of being centered. That feeling was reflected in returning to one's center time and time again; to particular people, both past and present, and to ordinary or special places that help us to center down.

What's not to love about the idea of being centered? "Well," said a member, "I would prefer not to use the word 'center,' but instead 'grounded'... Because centering implies a certain duality, in that you are either centered or not-centered." When the Buddha, who was seeking enlightenment was being tormented by Mara and his minions, the Buddha touched the ground and the earth immediately responded, "I am your witness." That simple act of touching the earth was a grounding experience from which the whole of Buddhist tradition unfolds.

We also explored the dangers of "seeking our center" so much so that we neglect the ways in which we must also de-center ourselves. Our culture emphasizes individual achievement over collaboration. White people must continue to de-center the ways in which they have adopted and benefitted from white supremacy culture. Learning to de-center our own egos is a lifelong practice.

As we enter into this month's theme of "Finding Our Center" we encourage you to explore both the ways that you center yourself and the ways in which you de-center yourself.

We began and concluded our conversation by reading this poem by Ha Jin. We offer it to you now for your own reflection and contemplation:

A Center

by Ha Jin

You must hold your quiet center,
where you do what only you can do.
If others call you a maniac or a fool,
just let them wag their tongues.
If some praise your perseverance,
don't feel too happy about it—
only solitude is a lasting friend.
You must hold your distant center.

Don't move even if earth and heaven quake.
If others think you are insignificant,
that's because you haven't held on long enough.
As long as you stay put year after year,
eventually you will find a world
beginning to revolve around you.

By Kathleen Rolenz on behalf of this month's theme team: Andrea la Sonde Anastos, Drew Danielson, Ray Hommeyer, KP Hong, Karen Gustafson, and Laura Park.

Spiritual Practices

Option A:

Walking a labyrinth

The journey of walking a labyrinth is a journey toward center and away from center. Unlike a maze, a labyrinth has one path in and the same path brings you out from the central space. There is no way to get lost in a labyrinth.

It may be possible for you to find an indoor labyrinth or an outdoor one that is not covered in snow. If not, you may want to use a finger labyrinth. You can download several different labyrinths and print them on a sheet of paper. Then you 'walk' the labyrinth with your finger.

Walking the labyrinth is really a three-part journey. One way to experience that journey is to begin with relinquishing those burdens or concerns that are distracting you and bringing anxiety. [Note: If you are walking a full-sized labyrinth, you may wish to bring a small object to leave once you reach center.].

Take a moment to pause and breathe at the entrance. Feel your body, where it is flexible and relaxed, where it is knotted, or aching. Take a moment to thank your body for carrying you into the labyrinth. Breathe again as you cross the threshold (with body or finger) and move at a deliberate, steady pace toward the center.

As you journey inward, imagine the burdens, concerns, and fears slowly dropping away as you open yourself to rest and peace.

Allow the journey to take the time it takes. Breathe slowly and deeply as you travel, clearing space in your heart and mind by releasing what has been keeping you trapped or afraid or angry or distraught.

As you come to the central place, you may feel lighter and more open, or you may not. If you have brought one, leave your object here with a blessing of gratitude. Breathe quietly allowing the journey to settle. Allow this space outside of time to enfold you in peace. If a prayer rises, you may speak it aloud or welcome it in silence. When you are ready, you can begin the return journey.

On the outward journey, you may open yourself to the people and tasks to which you return. You may see them differently after your time in center. You may find that these tasks have reorganized and reprioritized.

At the entrance/exit, express gratitude for your walk. Breathe again until you are ready to enter the world.

Resources

- Download finger labyrinths: <https://harmonylabyrinths.com/finger-labyrinth-gallery/>
- About labyrinths: <https://brocku.ca/brock-news/2019/05/new-labyrinth-to-provide-space-for-reflection/>

Option B:
If you are overwhelmed with fear and terror

If you are overwhelmed with fear and terror, find a friend, sit face to face, and do this together:

- *First*, take turns naming your fears and/or griefs. let feeling come with them. With your hands show where the fears live in your body. Mirror each other, so you both get the experience of seeing your grief on another.
- *Second*, place your hands on your bellies and take turns naming things that make you feel resilient. Imagine those things filling you up. Rock and roll a bit, make more room for resilience inside yourselves.
- *Third*, offer gratitude to each other for both having the complexity to hold grief/fear and resilience in the same miraculous body.

One day at a time. one brave, loving, radical day at a time.

From adrienne maree brown: <https://bit.ly/3jlfu3R>

Option C: Centering Prayer: The Basics

Most faith traditions have some form of meditation or contemplation. Virtually all methods of meditation have a goal of expanding, or deepening, the consciousness of the practitioner. The details vary. The Contemplative Society focuses on Centering Prayer, a surrender method of meditation, or contemplative prayer, that reaches back to the early days of Christianity.

In her book *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*, Cynthia Bourgeault writes that even though we can perhaps find ways to stop “outer noise” it is much more difficult to still the “inner noise.” She says Centering Prayer “...is a very simple method for reconnecting us with that natural aptitude for the inner life...which, over time, of its own accord, leads to personal self-emptying and a more unitive outer life.

How to “Do” Centering Prayer:

- Find a quiet space where you are unlikely to be disturbed.
- Sit in a way that allows you to be relaxed in body and alert in mind. Use a chair, meditation cushion or prayer rug, according to your own physical needs and preferences.
- Gently close your eyes.
- “Allow your heart to open toward that invisible but always present Origin of all that exists ”
- Whenever you become aware of a thought, no matter what its nature, let it go.
- Use a “sacred word”.

This is a word or short phrase that helps you to let go of thoughts. It is a reminder of your intention to remain open to the silence. Generally sacred words fall into one of 2 categories: “God” words/phrases such as “Abba,” “Jesu,” “Mary,” “Reality,” “Come, Lord,” or “state” words/phrases such as “love,” “peace,” and “be still”. Sacred words are not used as mantras, as in constantly repeating them, but as a reminder of your intention to remain open.

- Continue this practice for 20 minutes. At the end of the time get up and go about your business, leaving the practice behind, in the same way you let go of your thoughts.
- People who are just beginning, and are particularly restless in mind and body, may find it easier to start off with shorter prayer periods, perhaps only 5 minutes per sit to start. Then after a few days extend the time to 10 minutes and so on until you are able to sit for 20 minutes. Give the practice at least 2 weeks before you decide if it is right for you.

Two 20-30 minute sits per day are considered ideal. It is strongly recommended that no one meditates for more the 60 minutes a day unless you are attending a structured retreat with experienced leaders.

Adapted from *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* by Cynthia Bourgeault.

Option D: Finding Our Center Over A Cup of Coffee**

One of the best ways to explore our monthly themes is to bring them into the conversations you have with those closest to you. It's also a powerful way to take our closest relationships to a deeper level and move our conversations with family and friends below surface level.

Below is a list of conversation starters about *Finding Our Center* to help guide and enrich your discussion. Select one or more of these starters to use the next time you meet with a close friend or family member.

Afterward, consider what surprised you about the conversation and what gift or insight it gave you.

Conversation Starters on Finding Our Centers:

- When was the last time someone asked you about something that lies at the deepest center of who you are?
- What three things most moved you toward your center this past year?
- It's said that we are every age that we have been. What younger self do you most want to tap into right now?
- Does the idea of "following your bliss" play a role in your life?
- It is said that one of the best ways to be in touch with your deepest self is to pay attention to the person who most annoys you. Has this ever been true for you? If not, is it possible that it might be true for you?
- Who were you before others told you "You're too much!" or "You're not good enough!"?

Questions to Ponder

Read through the questions below and notice which ones resonate with you. One or more of the questions might seem particularly compelling – or some might stir resistance in you. Either of these reactions might make the question fruitful to consider. Choose just one and take time to consider it, over several days if possible. Write it down on a piece of paper you carry in your pocket. Or take a picture of that paper with your phone. Or record it in your journal – and spend some time, each day if you can, reflecting on it in writing or otherwise, noticing where it leads you and what you learn from it, and your response to it.

1. Is finding your center a practice, a person, or a place? Or perhaps it depends on the moment. Can you provide an example?
2. When did you last take a nap? How did it recharge you?
3. “Finding our center” is a useful metaphor, similar to “finding and keeping our balance.” Can a person ultimately find a center, or is it an ongoing process, or something in between?
4. In what ways, big or small, do we re-center our spirits? Consider how we align or center ourselves throughout a typical day, using a variety of tools, and without thinking much about it: Using a cell phone GPS application to determine where we are and then to get directions; parking our car between the lines in a parking lot, looking in a mirror to adjust our clothes so that they don’t appear crooked; and so on.
5. How does your race affect your sense of self and well-being?
6. Can we help our country find its center by de-centering white people and centering people of color? If White supremacy needs anti-blackness to thrive, can centering blackness removes both the fuel and the constraints of white supremacy, allowing everyone to be free of its tyranny?
7. At this moment, does the energy you find in your core inspire you to deepen into quiet, or to launch into the world?
8. What is your purpose in seeking center? For instance, are you looking for self-knowledge, for peace, for authenticity?
9. Do you understand ‘finding our center’ as a search for an individual expression; or as a search for a shared, communal expression of who you/we are and how you/we want to be?
10. **What is your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don’t name what life is asking of you now, spend the month listening to your heart to hear what your question is.

Inspiration

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

These resources are not required reading. They may not be analyzed in our sermons, newsletter, Chalice Circles, Wellspring, or other programs. Instead, they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get your thinking started, and open you to new ways of thinking about finding your center. The hope is not that you will engage them all or even most of them; rather that the variety here will offer you at least several access points to the theme that invite you to consider it thoughtfully and perhaps with new insights or understanding.

Word Definition

center

noun

- the point around which a circle or sphere is described
- a point, area, person, or thing that is most important or pivotal in relation to an indicated activity, interest, or condition
- a place where the greater part of some function or activity occurs
- the choicest or most essential or most vital part of some idea or experience
- the object upon which interest and attention focuses

synonyms

- core
- base
- heart
- central
- focus, focal point

verb

- to place or fix at or around a center or central area
- to give a central focus or basis

synonyms

- consolidate
- concentrate
- unify

Merriam-Webster.com, Dictionary.com

Wise Words

If you follow your bliss, you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. Wherever you are — if you are following your bliss, you are enjoying that refreshment, that life within you, all the time.

~Joseph Campbell

Equanimity doesn't mean keeping things even; it is the capacity to return to balance in the midst of an alert, responsive life. I don't want to be constantly calm. The cultural context I grew up in and the relational life I live in both call for passionate, engaged response. I laugh and I cry and I'm glad that I do. What I value is the capacity to be balanced between times.*

~ Sylvia Boorstein, from *Don't Just Do Something, Sit There*

It takes courage to say yes to rest and play in a culture where exhaustion is seen as a status symbol.

~Brene Brown

I am still every age that I have been. Because I was once a child, I am always a child. Because I was once a searching adolescent, given to moods and ecstasies, these are still part of me, and always will be... This does not mean that I ought to be trapped or enclosed in any of these ages...the delayed adolescent, the childish adult, but that they are in me to be drawn on; to forget is a form of suicide... Far too many people misunderstand what “putting away childish things” means, and think that forgetting what it is like to think and feel and touch and smell and taste and see and hear like a three-year-old or a thirteen-year-old or a twenty-three-year-old means being grownup. When I’m with these people I, like the kids, feel that if this is what it means to be a grown-up, then I don’t ever want to be one. Instead of which, if I can retain a child’s awareness and joy, and “be” fifty-one, then I will really learn what it means to be grownup.

~Madeleine L’Engle

Each one of us—not only human beings, but every leaf, every weed, everything whatsoever—exists as it does only because everything around it exists as it does. Without the center, there is no circumference; without the circumference, there is no center. Each individual and its universe are inseparable.

Put differently, there is no center of the universe in general. There is only the particular universe of which you are the center, and the universe of which I am the center, and so on. There is no place where you can stand idly by while someone else stands at the center. You are the vortex where the entire energy of the universe comes alive. You are the focus of the universe that makes you possible.

~Galen Guengerich

The individual has always had to struggle to keep from being overwhelmed by the tribe. If you try it, you will be lonely often, and sometimes frightened. But no price is too high to pay for the privilege of owning yourself.*

~Friedrich Nietzsche

If your desires be endless, your cares and fears will be so too.*

~Thomas Fuller

The tug-of-war in our psyche between anti-narcissism and self-care is a difficult game, and often ends with a worn-out spirit peeking through in times of stress. Do we love ourselves? Sure, we may like ourselves, but do we care for our bodies and minds in a way we would want our loved ones to practice? Most likely, we don’t. This is our problem: a lack of self-love.

To be clear, I am not advocating for egotism or gluttony in the slightest sense; I am advocating for being responsible for our own mental health. We shouldn’t have to justify taking basic care of ourselves at the price of seeming self-indulgent.

~Kathy Fecteam

Each new day is a path of wonder, a different invitation. Days are where our lives gradually become visible. Often it seems that we have to undertake the longest journey to arrive at what has been nearest all along. Mornings rarely find us so astounded at the new day that we are unable to decide between adventures. We take on days with the same conditioned reflex with which we wash and put on our clothes each day. If we could be mindful of how short our time is, we might learn how precious each day is. There are people who will never forget today... The liturgy of dawn signals the wonder of the arriving day. Magic of darkness breaking through into color and light is such a promise of invitation and possibility. No wonder we always associate the hope and urgency of new beginning with the dawn. Each day is the field of brightness where the invitation of our life unfolds. A new day is an intricate and subtle matrix; written into its mystery are the happenings sent to awaken and challenge us.

~John O’Donohue

Keep fresh before me the moments of my high resolve. Despite the dullness and barrenness of the days that pass, if I search with due diligence, I can always find a deposit left by some former radiance.

... In the quietness of this place, surrounded by the all-pervading Presence of God, my heart whispers: Keep fresh before me the moments of my High Resolve, that in fair weather or in foul, in good times or in tempests, in the days when the darkness and the foe are nameless or familiar, I may not forget that to which my life is committed.*

~Howard Thurman, from *For The Inward Journey*

Had I gone looking for some particular place rather than any place, I'd have never found this spring under the sycamores. Since leaving home, I felt for the first time at rest. Sitting full in the moment, I practiced on the god-awful difficulty of just paying attention. It's a contention of my father's—believing as he does that anyone who misses the journey misses about all he's going to get—that people become what they pay attention to. Our observations and curiosity, they make and remake us.

~William Least Heat-Moon

There are three fundamental rules that all the wisdom traditions say will help us accomplish our task, if we follow them. The first is to be cautious about materialism. Don't want too much. Live modestly. The second is to dedicate yourself to something you believe in, something you think is beautiful and important. The third is to commit yourself to a personal spiritual practice that you can follow every day, even if just for a few minutes. Devote some part of your day to sitting in silence and saying, "Here I am. Guide me." The point is that if we search outside ourselves for the meaning of life, we'll probably never find it. But if we center ourselves and look for meaning in life, we'll find that it's waiting for us right here in the present moment.

~Bo Lozoff

Each person's life is like a mandala – a vast, limitless circle. We stand in the center of our own circle, and everything we see, hear and think forms the mandala of our life... everything that shows up in your mandala is a vehicle for your awakening.

~Pema Chodron

Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now.

~Rainer Maria Rilke

Prayer

Let the center hold*

by Rev. Joe Cherry

This is my prayer: please let the center hold.
The center is what holds our faith together.
The strength of the center is what allows us to stretch farther into the future,
To the unknown,
the untried
the uncertain
the unnerving
the places where growth happens.

Let the center be strong.
And let the center of this living tradition move with the times.
Let the center of our living tradition LEAD the times.
May the strength of the center strengthen us as we seek,
As we embody compassion
Work for equity
Demand justice for all.

Let OUR center hold
Strong as an old Oak Tree,
Flexible as the Willow Tree
Life giving as an Orange Tree,
Ever green as the Pine tree and
As beautiful as the Almond tree in blossom."

Poetry

I am in need of music

by Elizabeth Bishop

I am in need of music that would flow
Over my fretful, feeling fingertips,
Over my bitter-tainted, trembling lips,
With melody, deep, clear, and liquid-slow.
Oh, for the healing swaying, old and low,
Of some song sung to rest the tired dead,
A song to fall like water on my head,
And over quivering limbs, dream flushed to glow!

There is a magic made by melody:
A spell of rest, and quiet breath, and cool
Heart, that sinks through fading colors deep
To the subaqueous stillness of the sea,
And floats forever in a moon-green pool,
Held in the arms of rhythm and of sleep.

Remember

by Joy Harjo

Remember the sky that you were born under,
know each of the star's stories.
Remember the moon, know who she is.
Remember the sun's birth at dawn, that is the
strongest point of time. Remember sundown
and the giving away to night.
Remember your birth, how your mother struggled
to give you form and breath. You are evidence of
her life, and her mother's, and hers.
Remember your father. He is your life, also.
Remember the earth whose skin you are:
red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth
brown earth, we are earth.
Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all
have their
tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to
them,
listen to them. They are alive poems.
Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She
knows the
origin of this universe.

Remember you are all people and all people
are you.

Remember you are this universe and this
universe is you.

Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you.

Remember language comes from this.

Remember the dance language is, that life is.

Remember.

Video

In praise of slowness TED Talk*

by Carl Honoré

Journalist Carl Honoré believes the Western
world's emphasis on speed erodes health,
productivity and quality of life. But there's a
backlash brewing, as everyday people start putting
the brakes on their all-too-modern lives.

TED Talk: <https://bit.ly/3hGpCnD>

Have the Courage to Stand Alone (Find True Belonging)*

by Brené Brown

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_sYCThUQc8

and

Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*

by Brené Brown

In *Braving the Wilderness*, Brown redefines what it
means to truly belong in an age of increased
polarization... Brown argues that we're
experiencing a spiritual crisis of disconnection, and
introduces four practices of true belonging that
challenge everything we believe about ourselves
and each other.

Bookshop.org: <https://bit.ly/3FQgi8u>

Articles/Online Resources

What Does It Mean To ‘Center Black People’?

by Siraad Dirshe

Excerpt:

White supremacy — which has harmed everyone, including robbing white people of their own humanity — needs anti-blackness to thrive. Centering blackness removes both the fuel and the constraints of white supremacy, allowing everyone to be free of its tyranny.

Doing so acknowledges the historical root of this racial hierarchy that has intentionally placed black people at the bottom of society and gives us the opportunity to see the world through the lens of the black experience. It requires us to imagine how our rules and structures would be reorganized and envision a world where we all thrive because the bottom is removed. When we remove blackness from the bottom, everybody gets to be seen.

Most black adults say race is central to their identity and feel connected to a broader black community

by Amanda Barroso

Excerpt:

Findings from Pew Research Center surveys conducted in recent years show that most black adults feel that they are part of a broader black community in the United States and see their race as important to how they think of themselves.

About three-quarters of black adults say that being black is extremely (52%) or very (22%) important to how they think about themselves, according to a 2019 Pew Research Center survey. By comparison, about six-in-ten Hispanic (59%) and 56% of Asian adults say being Hispanic or Asian, respectively, is extremely or very important to their identity. Only 15% of white adults see race as a central piece of their identity.

From Pew Research Center <https://pewrsr.ch/3FK2RH9>

Centering Yourself in 3 Easy Steps

by Tris Thorp

Excerpt:

The three pillars for centering are *awareness*, *attention*, and *intention*. When you notice that your life is becoming chaotic and you feel as if you’re losing ground, you can quickly and easily find your center again with just a few simple steps.

Awareness

The first step is to become aware that you’re off balance. Awareness is one of the greatest tools for creating change. Once you become aware that you’ve lost your center, you have the opportunity to make a conscious choice to shift your internal state.

Article: <https://bit.ly/3HUBkps>

Follow Your Bliss

by Rev. Sarah York

Excerpt:

In a little book called *Let Your Life Speak*, Parker Palmer writes, “[There are] moments when it is clear—if I have eyes to see—that the life I am living is not the same as the life that wants to live in me.” Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, Parker writes, “listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent.” Parker speaks of a voice inside that calls you to be the person you were born to be. From a sermon delivered by Rev. York at UU Fellowship of Vero Beach, in 2018.

[Follow Your Bliss Sarah York.doc - Google Docs](#)

Centering, Un-Centering

by Rev. Victoria Safford

Excerpt:

Prayer is no escape. It calls you back, centering, un-centering.

What sacred place – what place outside your door, or one you visit in your mind –and what practice, what silent prayer or spoken prayer restores your soul, revives and reassures you on those days when it seems like everything you touch is ruined by your

hand and every word you speak is foolish? I'm interested in the kind of prayer, the kind of practice, that brings us safely home to the center of our being no matter where the day has carried us, no matter how distracted we've become from our own truth, no matter how discouraged or weary or worn. I'm interested in the kind of prayer, spoken or unspoken, that reminds us we belong in this world, and that the world itself is beautiful and strong, worthy of our gratitude and awe. Some find it easily in nature; some in making art, in music, movement or in meditation; some use old words learned by rote in childhood, old religious prayers frayed a little at the edges, familiar as breath, whose power is still real though longer literal at all; prayers offered to saints no longer believed in, but still beloved and reliable. I know someone who prays the rosary still: old beads, new meaning – the same practice endures. Literal doesn't matter. I'm interested in any prayer that reassures you and restores you, that grounds you in just enough hope to go forward; any prayer from which you rise and say at last, 'Now I am called back to my life and the work of this day.'

<https://bit.ly/3BIZ6Gy>

The Art of Centering: Potter and Poet M.C. Richards on What She Learned at the Wheel About Non-Dualism, Creative Wholeness, and the Poetry of Personhood

by Maria Popova, from *The Marginalian* blog

Excerpt:

Centering is a verb... an ongoing process... a way of balancing, a spiritual resource in times of conflict, an imagination... an alchemical vessel, a retort, which bears an integration of purposes, an integration of levels of consciousness.

<https://bit.ly/3uFwTa5>

The Philosophy of Slowmaxxing*

by Amanda Wilson

Excerpt:

In today's fast paced world the cogs of capitalism keep the wheels of society constantly rotating — and at a speed never seen before. It seems like

there is never time to slow down, in fact it can be even frowned upon as every single moment must be productive. It is as if to use your time idly is a form of anarchism — I am all here for the laze revolution.

There is a new philosophy on the rise called “slowmaxxing.” I would describe the movement to be the antithesis of hustle culture. It values finding the utmost satisfaction in indulging in mundane tasks to relax, as opposed to finding pride in cramming as much productivity as you can into your day. Now that we have defined slowmaxxing, what are the origins and causes for this philosophy?

Slowmaxxing: <https://bit.ly/3I5Fevo>

Slowing Down: 14 Science-Based Ways to Enjoy Life*

by Tchiki Davis, MA, PhD. Berkeley Well-Being Institute.

Excerpt:

Feeling frazzled? Overwhelmed? Or anxious? Discover these science-based tips and strategies to slow down, savor the moment, and enjoy life a bit more.

In the modern world, we are encouraged to be busy, to multitask, and to be as productive as humanly possible. Most of us probably feel the pressure to perform—or at least look like we're performing in front of our boss—even if that means masking exhaustion with caffeine and sugar. But this feeling of 'time urgency'—or the sense that we don't have enough time—actually leads us to perform worse (Friend, 1982). Faster does not equal better. And busier does not equal more productive.

Slow down! <https://bit.ly/3PKJWAJ>

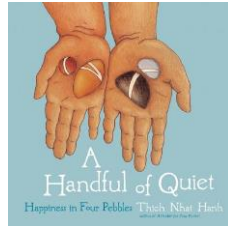
Books

A Handful of Quiet: Happiness in Four Pebbles

by Thich Nhat Hanh

Developed by Thich Nhat Hanh as part of the Plum Village community's practice with children, pebble meditation is a playful and fun activity that parents and educators can do with their children to introduce them to meditation. It is designed to involve children in a hands-on and creative way that touches on their interconnection with nature.

From Bookshop.org: <https://bit.ly/3HUdtpF>



Rest Is Resistance: A Manifesto*

By Tricia Hersey

Rest Is Resistance is rooted in spiritual energy and centered in Black liberation, womanism, somatics, and Afrofuturism. With captivating storytelling and practical advice, all delivered in Hersey's lyrical voice and informed by her deep experience in theology, activism, and performance art, *Rest Is Resistance* is a call to action, a battle cry, a field guide, and a manifesto for all of us who are sleep deprived, searching for justice, and longing to be liberated from the oppressive grip of Grind Culture.

Hachette: <https://bit.ly/3VrKTPO>

Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice

by Lauren Artress

and

The Sacred Path Companion: A Guide to Walking the Labyrinth to Heal and Transform

by Lauren Artress

Walking the Labyrinth has reemerged today as a metaphor for the spiritual journey and a powerful tool for transformation. This walking meditation is an archetype, a mystical ritual found in all religious

traditions. It quiets the mind and opens the soul. *Walking a Sacred Path* explores the historical origins of this divine imprint and shares the discoveries of modern day seekers. It shows us the potential of the Labyrinth to inspire change and renewal, and serves as a guide to help us develop the higher level of human awareness we need to survive in the twenty-first century.

Walking a Sacred Path: <https://bit.ly/3PI6Kks>

The Sacred Path Companion: <https://bit.ly/3WCLgbg>

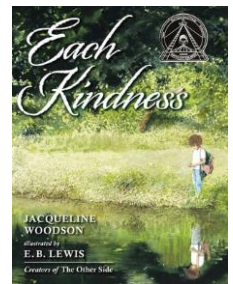
Each Kindness

by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrations by E.B. Lewis

Chloe and her friends won't play with the new girl, Maya. Every time Maya tries to join Chloe and her friends, they reject her. Eventually Maya stops coming to school. When Chloe's teacher gives a lesson about how even small acts of kindness can change the world, Chloe is stung by the lost opportunity for friendship, and thinks about how much better it could have been if she'd shown a little kindness toward Maya.

Children's book

Bookshop.org: <https://bit.ly/3YJcsqv>



Centering: Navigating Race, Authenticity, and Power in Ministry

edited by Mitra Rahnama

From the UUA book store, inSpirit: In October 2015, a group of distinguished UU religious professionals of color gathered together in Chicago to embark on a radical project. The conference was sponsored by the UUMA's Committee on Antiracism, Anti-oppression, and Multiculturalism. It started with the premise that discussions of race in Unitarian Universalism have too often presupposed a White audience and prioritized the needs, education, and emotions of the White majority. The goal was to reframe Unitarian Universalist anti-oppression work by putting the voices, experiences and learnings of people of color at the center of the conversation. The resulting

book, *Centering*, captures the papers that were presented and the rich dialogue from the conference to share personal stories and address the challenges that religious leaders of color face in exercising power, agency, and authority in a culturally White denomination. *Centering* explores how racial identity is made both visible and invisible in Unitarian Universalist ministries. UUA Bookstore: <https://bit.ly/3hMYQde>

Movies

The Worst Person in the World

directed by Joachim Trier, 2021

The chronicles of four years in the life of Julie, a young woman who navigates the troubled waters of her love life and struggles to find her career path, leading her to take a realistic look at who she really is.

IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10370710/>

Gravity

directed by Alfonso Cuarón, 2013

Despite being set in space, the film uses motifs from shipwreck and wilderness survival stories about psychological change and resilience in the aftermath of a catastrophe. Cuarón uses the Stone character to illustrate clarity of mind, persistence, training, and improvisation in the face of isolation and the consequences of a relentless Murphy's law. The film incorporates spiritual or existential themes, in the facts of Stone's daughter's accidental and meaningless death, and in the necessity of summoning the will to survive in the face of overwhelming odds, without future certainties, and with the impossibility of rescue from personal dissolution without finding this willpower. Calamities occur but only the surviving astronauts see them.

From Wikipedia: <https://bit.ly/3jhgaka>

Music

Finding Our Center

Soul Matters Spotify playlist**

<https://spoti.fi/3Y9bd3s>

- *Woke Up This Morning With My Mind Stayed On Freedom* – Traditional, Sweet Honey In The Rock, James Horner
- *Road to Self* – Aisha Badru Centre (feat. Sridaya Srivatsan) – Alysha Bri Ila, Sridaya Srivatsan
- *Take It Slow* – Ayla Nereo
- *The Mountain* – Dave Carter, Tracy Grammer
- *Earth My Body* – Maggie Clifford
- *What I Am* – Iron & Wine
- *This Must Be the Place* (Naive Melody) [by Talking Heads] – Kishi Bashi
- *Just Fine - Alternate Version* – Desiree Dawson
- *Happy Song* – Amy May Ellis
- *The Moon's Song* – Olivia Fern
- *Closer* – Samuel J, Sunny Ray
- *Be Yourself* – Harrison Storm
- *Hearts Remain* – Evergreen
- *A Reminder* – Trevor Hall
- *Hello My Old Heart* – The Oh Hellos
- *This Little Light of Mine* – Traditional, Sweet Honey In The Rock, James Horner

Finding Our Center

Soul Matters YouTube playlist**

<https://bit.ly/3jfmWc4>

Art

Why should not we?

Calligraphy by David Baldwin, text by Ralph Waldo Emerson



Why should not we enjoy
an original relation to the universe?
Why should not we
have a poetry and philosophy of
insight and not merely of tradition,
and a religion
by revelation to us,
and not simply the history of theirs?
The sun shines also today.
There are new lands,
new men and women,
new thoughts.
Let us demand our own works
and law and
worship

Adapted from the Introduction to *Nature* by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

This piece is part of the Unity Church permanent art collection. It is displayed in Unity's Anderson Library.

Photos

Labyrinth

by Andrea La Sonde Anastos



The original labyrinth is displayed in the Unity Church Ames Chapel.

Contributors: the Spiritual Practice packet team – Merrill Aldrich, Andrea La Sonde Anastos, Shelley Butler, Mike Funck, Lia Rivamonte, and Erika Sanders; with ministerial support from Rev. Karen Gustafson. Additional support was provided by Susan MacPherson of the Unity Art Team.

* Material adapted from Soul Matters *The Path of Finding Our Center* Worship Research Packet

** Material adapted from Soul Matters *The Path of Finding Our Center* Small Group Packet

