

## September Theme

### *Sabbath: The Practice of Honoring Boundaries*

#### **Introduction**

The word ‘Sabbath’ comes from Old English *šābaſ* meaning “Saturday as a day of rest”, Latin *sabbatum*, Greek *sabbaton* from Hebrew *šabbāṯ* which means simply, ‘to rest’. Sabbath signifies a time-out, a time for rest and reflection, a time to be deeply mindful, and a time to restore our souls. The concept of taking a Sabbath is considered an aspect of self-care. Sabbath provides a boundary that allows us to care for both our body and our soul.

In our culture that places value on busy-ness, our faith tradition encourages us to develop boundaries that support the actualization of our higher and best self, and provides us, through worship services, with an opportunity to rest and restore ourselves and to celebrate life. This month’s theme emphasizes the need to honor our boundaries, to see the sacredness in separating from the hectic world and becoming more in touch with our authentic selves.

Many religious traditions have formal versions of Sabbath – time set aside for sacred rest, perhaps a special holy day, or a specified day of the week. We as Unitarian Universalists don’t have a formal Sabbath, but our September theme encourages us to think about things that provide us with a visceral experience of life-giving nourishment and rest; this may be a Sabbath hour, a Sabbath afternoon, a Sabbath walk in the woods, or even a Sabbath moment in the midst of a busy day.

In the book “Sabbath,” by Wayne Muller, the author explains the wisdom of taking time for rest and nourishment, and how important this is to our own health and to the world’s well-being as well. During this month and in the coming year, consider ways in which we might honor the concept of Sabbath, both as individuals and as a congregation, and think of ways in which we might go deeper within ourselves to find nourishment and inspiration.

#### **Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, or with each other:**

1. Do you observe a Sabbath? If so, how do you? What is it?
2. What are some ways that you go deeper within yourself to find nourishment and inspiration?
3. Does observing and honoring Sabbath require work?
4. Do you have a place of Sabbath, a place of rest, a sanctuary? If so, what is it?
5. How do you create ways to celebrate the Sabbath in your life? (e.g. Gathering with friends and family; shopping for, preparing, and eating good, healthy food; painting; sculpting; singing; dancing; playing music, etc.)

This month’s theme was composed by Alex Businger and the Worship Associates.

6. To what in your life have you bound yourself, from which you seek Sabbath?
7. How do you honor the boundaries in your life?
8. Do boundaries sometimes seem arbitrary?
9. Are there areas of your life where your boundaries need to be more defined?
10. What happens when your boundaries get crossed? And what happens when you cross someone else's boundaries?
11. What are the differences between rigid and fluid boundaries? Do you have some of both in your life?
12. Is UUAC Sabbath for you?

### **Quotes and Short Readings**

Be content with what you have; rejoice in the way things are.  
When you realize there is nothing lacking,  
The whole world belongs to you.

~ *Lao-Tzu*

Just to be is a blessing.  
Just to live is holy.

~ *Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel*

Sabbath honors the necessary wisdom of dormancy. If certain plant species, for example, do not lie dormant for winter, they will not bear fruit in the spring...

We, too, must have a period in which we lie fallow, and restore our souls. In Sabbath time we remember to celebrate what is beautiful and sacred; we light candles, sing songs, tell stories, eat, nap, and make love. It is time to let our work, our animals, our lands lie fallow, to be nourished and refreshed. Within this sanctuary, we become available to the insights and blessings of deep mindfulness that arise only in stillness and time. When we act from a place of deep rest, we are more capable of cultivating what the Buddhists would call right understanding, right action, and right effort ...

Sabbath is more than the absence of work; it is not just a day off, when we catch up on television or errands. It is the presence of something that arises when we consecrate a period of time to listen to what is most deeply beautiful, nourishing, or true. It is time consecrated with our attention, our mindfulness, honoring those quiet forces of grace or spirit that sustain and heal us.

~ *Author Wayne Muller, from book "Sabbath"*

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There were times when I could not afford to sacrifice the bloom of the present moment to any work, whether of head or hands. Sometimes, in a summer morning, having taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a reverie, amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sang around. I grew in those seasons like corn in the night, and they were far better than any work of the hands would have been. They were not time subtracted from my life, but so much over and above my usual allowance.

~ *Henry David Thoreau*

Now weak, short of breath, my once-firm muscles melted away by cancer, I find my thoughts increasingly, not on the supernatural or spiritual, but on what is meant by living a good and worthwhile life – achieving a sense of peace within oneself. I find my thoughts drifting to the Sabbath, the day of rest, the seventh day of the week, and perhaps the seventh day of one's life as well, when one can feel that one's work is done, and one may, in good conscience, rest.

~*Oliver Sacks in an opinion piece published in August in the New York Times. Sacks died this August. For more, see link:*

<http://wbur.fm/1Um9Mpx>

Observing the Sabbath, observing a day of mindfulness, taking a real day off, does not require anything extra of us. It does call for the intentional creation of sacred space and time. It takes a little discipline. It also calls us to overcome our fear of what we will find in the silence and the emptiness, our fear of what disaster will strike if the cat remains un-vacuumed.

The most challenging thing about Sabbath is that it is useless. Nothing will get done, not a single item will get checked off any list. Our work is necessary. But Sabbath time offers the priceless gift of balance. We are valued not for what we have done, but simply because we are. During Sabbath time, we reconnect with what is truly valuable: the beauty of the world, the love of God, and the miracle of being itself. Sabbath is waiting quietly for us, a haven of calm, a nest of gentleness, a sweet apple on the tree of peace. Let us reach up toward it, and taste it for ourselves.

~*Rev. Amanda Aikman of the Olympic Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Port Angeles, Washington. From sermon, "Welcoming the Wild Wood-Dove," one of [three winners](#) of the first annual Richard C. Borden Sermon Award competition. Link below:*

<http://archive.uuworld.org/2003/05/sermon.html>

So Sabbath is something more than just time off, more than just not working, although taking time off is important. It is a time in which we listen to our deeper voices. It's a time in which we appreciate what is beautiful, and nourishing, and true. It's a time when we are mindful of those things that sustain us and heal us. And Sabbath is not a time of austerity and a list of "don'ts." It should be a time to celebrate. As Rabbi Lerner reminds us, Sabbath should be a time of pleasure, a time to dance and sing, a time of joy, wonder, and amazement.

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~Rev. Craig Scott from sermon:

<http://www.uufc.org/minister/sermons/2010-sermons/practicing-Sabbath-caring-for-body-and-soul/>

Sabbath will help us remember who we are - that we are precious individuals with the capacity for love. And Sabbath will help us remember what a gift this Life is. With all its grief and struggle, there is beauty and the possibility of love.

Practicing Sabbath is not something we do only for ourselves. It is not only about finding inner peace. Ultimately it is all about how we live in the world, what we offer of ourselves to this weary world. If we cannot be still and see the world in all its vast possibilities and beauty, we will come to believe it is a world without possibilities, devoid of beauty. We will forget the beauty and worth in each other, and in ourselves. We will move through the world (as we sometimes do) thoughtlessly, carelessly, using up what is here for the sake of keeping moving.

If, on the other hand, we can stop, practice the Sabbath, listen to the still small voice within, experience the life-giving force all around us—then we are much more likely to move with care through the world. Kindness and compassion are possible then. And suddenly the possibilities and the beauty of the world are ours. The peace that we find within will bring peace to the world.

~ Rev. Mary Katherine Morn from sermon:

<https://firstuunashville.org/sermons/older/2002sabbath.php>

Sabbath can be something different for each one of us, and it can also be something that we do together. We need to take the time – from our busy lives – to be still, or to play, or to be with friends. We need to find the time to appreciate the silence, to be nourished, to be refreshed. We need to take the time to look into our deepest being, to experience the insights and the blessings that come to us from periods of deep mindfulness. We need to take the time to be grateful for this amazing, wondrous, miraculous gift of life that we have been given.

At Plum Village, the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh's retreat center in France, monks ring a gong at random times during the day. This is a signal for all the residents to pause in whatever they are doing for the space of three breaths — And to use this pause to get back to their center, to focus, to experience their connection to all other living things. Muslims are called to worship five times every day – a practice known as *salat*. When the *muezzin*'s call is heard, Muslims stop whatever they are doing in order to worship. And then there is the example of Jesus. When he was worn down from healing people, or preaching, or whatever, Jesus would leave and go off to the mountains to restore himself in body and soul. There was always more work to do, but Jesus seemed to know that he needed times of rest and reflection, so that he could return restored and be more effective at his work.

~Rev. Craig Scott from sermon (link below)

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It's really about intimacy. The Sabbath calls us to intimacy of all types, with ourselves, with those closest to us, with those we should be closest to – family, friends, community; it's about stopping time long enough for deep sharing. We're teaching [OWL](#), human sexuality education here this year, so I will even tell you that it's a mitzvah to make love to your spouse on the Sabbath. In their book [Living A Jewish Life](#), Anita Diamant and Howard Cooper give a translation of a traditional song, [Y'did Nefesh](#), that makes the connection between the spiritual and the physical:

*Draw me to you with the breath of love  
Swiftly shall I come to stand within your radiance  
That I may attain that sweetest of all intimacies  
My Soul aches to receive your love  
Only by the tenderness of your light can she be healed  
Engage my soul that she may taste your ecstasy*

It is unclear whether the speaker is talking about a divine or human lover, but does it matter? The simple fact that a Sabbath manifesto calls us to make time to be with both, is a call we'd all do well to hear.

<http://sunflowerchalice.com/2011/08/14/a-unitarian-universalist-Sabbath-manifesto/>

Link to poem by Robert Frost, "Mending":

<http://writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88/frost-mending.html>

### **Worship Associate testimonials**

The best way I have found for myself to observe Sabbath is to bring together activity, nature and prayer/meditation on a daily basis. Every day I try to run or hike for an hour, and include a loop to Lake Winthrop, which is within walking distance of my house. There I can experience the beauty of trees, lake, wildlife, fresh air and sunlight. It is here that I feel the presence of the spirit, feel grounded, and also feel connected to the universe.

~Alex Businger

Sabbath, for me, can come in many forms. It can be a walk around the block with the dog; frequently a bike ride alone on the backroads of the beautiful area in which I live. There are even moments of Sabbath when I take a deep, conscious breath while sitting at a red light. One of my favorite spots for this is on Speen St. by Fiske Pond - still water, still trees, floating birds - a brief refuge in the craziness of life.

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Then there is church where each Sunday there is an hour, and within that hour a moment of reflection, that may be the only break for the busyness of life in the entire week. I cherish this moment of Sabbath, amidst the loving community and am grateful for it

~Alan Cantor

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