

Coziness as a Spiritual Practice

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Unitarian Universalist Area Church at First Parish in Sherborn

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I live in an 11 bedroom cooperative household,
And when we advertise an open room, it's not uncommon that the open room is the
middle room on the third floor.

We call it "cozy".

Because, as my housemate who wrote the description of the room said,
"everyone knows cozy means it's the smallest room in the house".

But this winter I've been mildly obsessed with feeling cozy.

Well, maybe not quite obsessed, but highly focused, let's say.

Soft leggings, slippers, warm lighting, an oversized fleece, woolly socks, hot tea,
Netflix,

All of these have been staples in my winter wardrobe and accessories.

And a quick internet search tells me

That I am not the only one, especially this year.

When I polled my housemates about what coziness means to them

One of them smartly pointed out that feeling cozy is essentially in contrast to
something not-cozy.

It's cold outside, but warm and snug inside. Cozy.

It's dark outside early, but there is a warm, soft glow inside. Cozy.

The news is exhausting, but I've been turning off my phone and coloring. Cozy.

Our days are so busy, but we find a moment of stillness over a cup of tea. Cozy.

My housemate was right:

My recent increased desire for coziness and comfort is indeed in contrast to

A feeling of increased division, worry about the future, and the most vulnerable
among us,

And for me it's more than just these winter months.

Though winter, and for me February in particular, with its common snow days
and 6 more weeks of winter,

Lends itself to hunkering down,

Hibernating just a little bit

Trying to stay warm and riding it out till spring.

This week—

And I know that we missed you all last week because of the snow last week,

I hope you had a chance to be cozy wherever you were in the snow,

But this week we asked you via the weekly email to bring or wear an item that
makes you feel cozy.

So whether or not you saw that invitation,

and whether or not you took us up on it,

I invite you to turn to a neighbor—

And please remember that we are a multigenerational community, and I especially invite you to talk to someone you might not regularly have a conversation with— and take just a few moments share a few thoughts about what makes you feels cozy, or comfortable

Whether it is the item that you brought, or a feeling,
or the picture that you are working on
or whether it is a place that you are thinking about and want to describe.

Ring Bell

Let us sing together the first verse of Comfort me, which is hymn #1002, though you will be able to follow along easily. The choir will lead us, and we will sing it through twice.

Sing Comfort Me

For me, bodily comfort and mentally slowing down are such important reminders that body and mind and soul are connected, and that time for renewal and Sabbath is so important to our spiritual lives.

There is a Scandanavian concept, that some of you may have heard of, called Hoog-ah (it's spelled h-y-g-g-e).

Hygge is roughly translated to “coziness”

Interestingly enough, hygge has etymology connected to the word “hug”, in English. I see a lot of ads in the winter, telling me that feelings of comfort and coziness can be bought.

And hygge is currently being well-marketed to Americans as a class status
With quirky objects to be purchased, that will make us feel cozy
Images of fires and warm socks and hands wrapped around a warm mug,
Selling us coziness.

But Louisa Thomsen Brits, a British-Danish writer, instead characterizes Hygge as a state of mindfulness, of doing mundane tasks with a dignified and joyful and beautiful manner, a manner defined by connection with loved ones and spaciousness in time.

There is a spiritual underpinning to this concept of hygge

One that values relationships over productivity.

That allows us to put down the “doing”, and focus more on the “being”,

That says that we don't need a particularly picturesque cabin in the woods
(though I sure do love a warm fire and a cabin in the woods, don't get me wrong)

But we don't need any special things in order to carve out a few moments of spaciousness, of warmth, and of intentional relaxation for ourselves.

I'd like to invite us now into a space of intentional relaxation and spaciousness in time.

Because we know that's its not enough to talk about spiritual practices, right?

We have to actually practice them

So today I'd like to invite us into a few moments of practice together
A chance to practice what it might mean to create coziness in our own lives and in
our souls

Wherever we find ourselves.

So I'd like to invite you to find a comfortable position

And kids, I'm inviting you to do this too!

This might be a part you want to pay extra attention to!

You might stretch your arms or legs

Or wiggle a little bit before settling down

Or put your feet on the stools

Or take your shoes off,

But let your body relax

And if you are comfortable, close your eyes.

Take a few slow, easy breaths,

Breathing in through your nose

Holding it for a moment

And breathing out through your mouth

Take a few more breaths in this way

And now, imagine in your mind's eye

sitting in a cozy room

it can be a room you've been in before

or a room that you'd like to be in

It's a space where you feel safe, comfortable, and cozy

You could be alone

Or others could be there

Choose whatever makes you feel most peaceful

If you are alone—what is around you?

If there are people there, who is with you?

Is there a fireplace? Warm blankets?

Are you inside, or outside?

A favorite warm drinks?

What do you see around you?

Do you smell pine? Or hot chocolate? Or something yummy baking? Or a fire?

Are there animals there?

Notice the sounds around you

Do you hear a fire crackling? Or loved ones laughing?

Notice the temperature—are you warm? Or just right?

What is the light like? Is it bright and cheerful? Or is it dim and soothing?

What sensations do you feel in your body?

Can you allow your body to relax?

You have no obligations in this time carved out of space

No where you need to be, no things you need to get done

You have a moment to just sit, fully present, in this space

Notice all the surroundings in this space

Hold them in your mind's eye
Lingering there for a moment
And now, take a few deep breaths, (pause)
And come back to this space.
This sanctuary
This space where we have carved out sacred time to connect with one another and
with the Holy.

And I invite you to sing twice through again, "Comfort Me"

Sing Comfort Me

I've been thinking a lot about the role of coziness in our lives and our communities
Which connects me to ideas of Sabbath,
of rest, of renewal, of self-care and nurturing and joy
and making spacious time for our relationships with ourselves, with one another,
and with the Holy.

Just like our Warm Fuzzies story I told earlier, I believe that comfort and coziness do
not necessarily need to be an inner circle, hunkering down

A closing off

There is a way where in communities of people,

Feeling sustained and cared for yourself allows us to extend the feelings of
nurturing and caring for others:

An extra cup of tea

A shared blanket

A guest room offered

A extra meal brought to a friend

An unexpected card of gratitude, or encouragement

Shoveling out a neighbors car

Movie nights with family or friends

Moments of nurture and comfort that build community and sustain relationships.

I've found myself wondering,

Given the way the world feels to me right now

How to balance my own desire for hunkering down

Comforting myself with rest and creating art and hot cups of tea

With a feeling of urgency, of neededness, of "there's so much to fix, who am I to take
time for myself?".

As author E.B. White said, "I arise in the morning

torn between a desire to save the world and a desire to savor the world.

This makes it hard to plan the day."

A mentor of mine recently shared a metaphor

Where in a group of singers,

The group as a whole can sustain a note for an indefinite amount of time
Because the singers space out their breathing.
So in a really long, sustained note,
The group is only singing at, say, 90% capacity,
Because there is always a portion of the group that is resting, breathing, taking
pause before continuing on.
So too, my mentor reminds me, is this a metaphor for how we might build
movements, and communities,
With our lives ebbing and flowing, our capacity waxing and waning,
With each of us needing some way to refuel
In order be the long-haul people we are called to be in community

And I believe it's not just because we are called to be doing the work of justice and
community over the long term, either.
The Puritans, who are our spiritual ancestors, and whose beliefs and architecture
inspired this sanctuary space around us,
They were all about the opposite of comfort and coziness.
There is some irony for me in considering this topic
When I know how little these pews can inspire coziness.
There is a judgment about human nature underlying the Puritan belief
A judgment that says "you are not worthy of comfort." And "anything that even hints
at living in your body is surely a heartbeat away from mortal sin".

Well, first of all, both my feminism and Unitarian Universalist faith tell me that
having a body is not a sin, no matter what kind of body you have.
And, I believe our Universalist ancestors, who told us that a loving God would not
condemn anyone to hell,
Would also say that each and every one of us,
Which is to say, you, and you, and you, and people who may never find themselves
in this room,
Are all deserving and worthy of dignity, and self-care, and feeling safe, and warm,
and comforted, and cared for, and loved.

I believe that coziness and comfort is a type of grace,
an unearned but so very needed gift,
That we can extend to ourselves and others.

As we continue through this winter,
And as we continue through our lives
And as we continue to work for a world of justice and love
May we also take time to also rest
To sustain our souls, both so that we may become those long-haul people
And because we are inherently worthy of comfort just as all are inherently worthy
of comfort
May we love and nurture ourselves and our communities
And manifest the spiritual practice of coziness, Sabbath, rest, and renewal.

May it be so, and amen.

In invite you to rise in body or spirit and sing all of the verses of our final hymn,
Comfort me.