



December 2018 Monthly Theme

SILENCE

the practice of waiting

The intention of the themed year is to help Unitarian Universalists build a robust spiritual and ethical vocabulary. The themes are points of departure for religious liberals seeking to think, speak and act theologically, prophetically and prayerfully. The themes reclaim religious language, casting old terms in a new key to deepen spiritual grounding and sharpen moral reasoning. More at: wbuuc.org/themes or sign up for a circle at wbuuc.org/classes.

QUESTIONS

How much space for silence is there in your relationships?

Does silence make waiting longer or shorter?

What is the value in learning to be patient in the not-knowing, not-doing, in the waiting?

QUOTATIONS

The music is not in the notes, but in the silence between. **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people. **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

We have two ears and one mouth and we should use them proportionally. **Susan Cain**

In silence there is eloquence. Stop weaving and see how the pattern improves. **Rumi**

Silence is argument carried out by other means. **Ernesto Che Guevara**

POETRY

My dreams, my works, must wait till after hell

I hold my honey and I store my bread

In little jars and cabinets of my will.

I label clearly, and each latch and lid

I bid, Be firm till I return from hell.

I am very hungry. I am incomplete.

And none can tell when I may dine again.

No man can give me any word but Wait,

The puny light. I keep eyes pointed in;

Hoping that, when the devil days of my hurt

Drag out to their last dregs and I resume

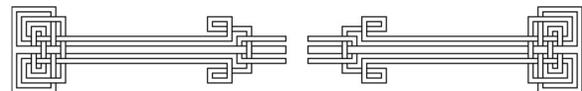
On such legs as are left me, in such heart

As I can manage, remember to go home,

My taste will not have turned insensitive

To honey and bread old purity could love.

– Gwendolyn Brooks



Silence

There is the sudden silence of the crowd
above a player not moving on the field,
and the silence of the orchid.

The silence of the falling vase
before it strikes the floor,
the silence of the belt when it is not
striking the child.

The stillness of the cup and the water in it,
the silence of the moon
and the quiet of the day far from the roar
of the sun.

The silence when I hold you to my chest,
the silence of the window above us,
and the silence when you rise and turn away.
And there is the silence of this morning
which I have broken with my pen,
a silence that had piled up all night
like snow falling in the darkness of the
house—
the silence before I wrote a word
and the poorer silence now. -Billy Collins

Wait Without Hope

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing;
wait without love,
For love would be love of the wrong thing;
there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all
in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready
for thought:

READINGS & EXCERPTS

We wait. We are bored. (He throws up his hand.) No, don't protest, we are bored to death, there's no denying it. Good. A diversion comes along and what do we do? We let it go to waste. Come, let's get to work! (He advances towards the heap, stops in his stride.) In an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone more, in the midst of nothingness! -**Samuel Beckett, from *Waiting for Godot***

56. Those who know, don't talk. Those who talk, don't know. Shut your mouth. Be still. Relax. Let go of your worries. Stay out of the spotlight. Be at one with the world and get right with Tao. If you get right with Tao, you won't be worried about praise or scorn, about winning or losing, about honor or disgrace. That's the way to be. **From Ron Hogan's translation of *The Tao Te Ching***

So the darkness shall be the light,
and the stillness the dancing.
Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning.
The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,
The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy
Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony
Of death and birth. - T. S. Eliot, *East Coker*

"Ode To Silence" by Mark Belletini

You, silence, are the ground
On which we build the fragile sandcastles of our
every spoken word.
You, silence,
Are quicksand where curses and cockiness
and arrogance find their end.
You, silence, are the strand of beach we stroll
where loneliness
Turns into solitude,
And our small heartbeats join the much vaster
Heartbeat of tide and wave.
You, silence,
Are the hand in which the pearl of the universe,
Grown around the painful grain
of human suffering,
Rests in heartbreaking beauty.
You, silence,
Are the wide, bright delta into which
The river of this prayer fans out,
Before it flows into the indigo Deep,
Quiet, dark and lovely.
Come, Silence, fill this moment.

Friends don't generally call what we do in the silence "meditating." I learned later in life about meditation practices like focusing on the breath or repeating a mantra. As a child in Meeting, I understood that we would sit together in silence and wait. We wait for a sense of the spirit that unites us. Some of us wait for more direct messages from God, while others simply wait for calm.

After studying meditation techniques, I worried I wasn't doing the right thing as I sat in Meeting. Yoga teachers and meditation workshop leaders urged me to let go of my thoughts, frequently invoking the meteorological metaphor, "let them pass by like clouds." My thoughts usually do not attain that airy status. I examine certain ideas, worries, or questions. I organize and prioritize, attending to my thoughts, from the lofty to the mundane. As a parent, the rare moments I have to spend with my thoughts have become precious. I don't resent the busyness of my mind but rather find peace in noticing that all those thoughts are still there.

But a silence where you interact with your thoughts is also a sacred act, a way of owning your interior being. Sometimes you need to wade through your thoughts in order to let them settle. My presence to myself, in all its detail, gives me a platform to recognize a unifying divinity, sometimes contained in mundane messages from other people. **Excerpt from Rediscovering Sacred Silence by Heather Mcrae-Woolf**

The season of Advent, more than any other time of the church year, invites us to embrace the spiritual discipline of waiting. The season of Advent will not be rushed. The Advent carols must be sung, the Advent candles must be lighted week by week, and the doors of the Advent Calendar must be opened day by day. Christmas will finally come when all the expectant Scriptures have been read and when the baby has finally been born." That's a beautiful description of the first season of the Christian church year from Holly W. Whitcomb, a United Church of Christ minister, in her book *Seven Spiritual Gifts of Waiting*. She sees this four-week period that ends on Christmas Eve as going against the cultural grain of the times; we don't like to wait for anything; we expect instant gratification, even in our spiritual lives. But God is not to be rushed. As Pierre Teilhard de Chardin advised, we need to "trust in the slow work of God." That is what the Israelites did during their long sojourn in the desert and what Christians do during Advent.

From www.spiritualityandpractice.com

During the time I spent living in monastic silence, I learned to distinguish between the letter and the spirit of silence. The letter of silence is just that: not speaking and not disturbing the silence around you in any way. Practicing the letter of silence, you tread as lightly as possible, do not utter a word or any other sound, do not use sign language or body language, and even avoid reading written communication, except perhaps, on occasion, inspirational articles or books.

The letter of silence has both an interior and an exterior character. On the outside, you are careful not only to remain silent but also to avoid intruding on the silence of others—or, for that matter, of the "silence" of nature. On the inside, you stay away from "noisy" or useless thoughts. Useless thinking is the running of interior mental tapes that are set in the past or in the future.

The spirit of silence poses a slightly different way of regarding being silent. When you practice the spirit of silence, you will actually find yourself speaking when it is necessary. For instance, you have decided to be in silence for an afternoon. You have turned off the television and the radio, you have switched off the telephone ringer and the computer, and you have closed down all the other noise-generating appliances in the house. You sit down with an inspirational book. Then the

doorbell rings unexpectedly—the mailman is delivering a package. Practicing the spirit of silence, you go to the door, accept the package gracefully, and say, “Thank you.” You have not broken your silence. In fact, you have enhanced it with a simple expression of gratitude. **Splendid Spiritual Practice from Joseph Dispenza, a former monk.**

MUSIC

Waitin

*"Waitin" is one of William Bolcom's **Cabaret Songs**, all of which set the lyrics of Arnold Weinstein. The choir will sing an arrangement of this on December 2*

Waitin waitin
I've been waitin
Waitin waitin all my life.
That light keeps on hiding from me,
But it someday just might bless my sight.
Waitin waitin waitin

The Sound of Silence Simon and Garfunkel

Hello darkness, my old friend
I've come to talk with you again
Because a vision softly creeping
Left its seeds while I was sleeping
And the vision that was planted in my brain

Still remains
Within the sound of silence
...
And in the naked light I saw
Ten thousand people maybe more
People talking without speaking
People hearing without listening
People writing songs that voices never
shared
No one dared
Disturb the sound of silence
...
And the people bowed and prayed
To the neon god they made
And the sign flashed out its warning
In the words that it was forming
And the sign said "The words of the prophets
are written on the subway walls
And tenement halls
And whispered in the sound of silence"

PRACTICE

Seven spiritual practice of waiting are: patience, loss of control, living in the present, compassion, gratitude, humility, and trust in something beyond oneself.

How to Practice an Hour of Silence Every Day

1. Schedule your hour of silence at a particular time every day.
2. During that hour, turn off the phone, TV, radio, computer, and all other appliances and communication devices. Put down all books and other reading material.
3. Light a candle to be a witness to your hour of silence.
4. Sit quietly and rest—or look carefully at a natural object—or engage in work that does not require you to hear, see, or express words. Gentle housekeeping or gardening are excellent activities of silence, or a long walk in nature.
5. Listen to the silence, all the time enjoying this hour-long respite from thinking, reviewing, planning, and imagining. Stay in the present moment.
6. Breathe deeply and mindfully, bringing in the silence and expelling mental “noise.”
7. At the end of your hour of silence, let your first word be an expression of gratitude or love; then put out the candle and go about your business.