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CONGREGATION OF FREDERICK
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Rest Is Resistance

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Can you feel the “Wheel of the Year” turning? During this season when each day here in the Northern Hemisphere becomes incrementally shorter, can you feel the inexorable pull toward Winter Solstice, the longest night of the year?

The Sixth Source of our UU living tradition is “Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.” And I am regularly grateful for the reminders from the Pagan traditions to keep tuning myself more fully to the turning of the Wheel of the Year.

There are four major turning points:

1. Winter Solstice - Yule
2. Summer Solstice - Litha
3. Spring Equinox - Ostara
4. Fall Equinox - Mabon

As significant as these four major high points are on the Wheel of the Year, I have come to particularly cherish the four “cross-quarter days” because they call me to notice more subtle shifts:

5. Imbolc (“Groundhog’s Day”) - The midpoint between Solstice and Equinox which invites us to be more aware of nature’s *tipping point* toward spring
6. Beltane (“May Day”)

7. Lughnasa (“First Harvest”)
8. Samhain (“Halloween”)

Approximately every 6.5 weeks, the Wheel of the Year calls us to realign ourselves more deeply with the natural rhythms of the Earth.

There are related schools of thought that invite us to consider that certain spiritual practices may be particularly fruitful to experiment with in certain times of year. **Spring’s** most natural spiritual practices might be artistic, creative endeavors corresponding with the flowering of new life. In **summer**, you might notice yourself being drawn more naturally to active, kinesthetic forms of spiritual practice, dance, play, or games—particularly in the sun-drenched outdoors. **Autumn** may be a particularly ripe time to focus on *transformation* in parallel with the leaves changing color and falling. **Winter** may find spiritual practices of darkness, silence, turning inward, and saying “No” to be particularly fruitful. The Danish practice of *hygge* (coziness and comfortable conviviality) — a roaring fire, hot tea, warm socks, a blanket — have also become increasingly popular.

With Winter Solstice approaching on Wednesday, we are entering into a season in which the Earth is inviting us to notice if there are ways we might benefit from more silence, from slowing down and saying “No” in order to create more space and stillness in our lives—like the hush after the first snowfall.

As an expert guide to what such a shift can look like, allow me to introduce to those of you who don’t already know her, Tricia Hersey. A few years ago, she founded the Nap Ministry, and calls herself the “Nap Bishop.” She says, “I realized **I had been navigating decisions from a space of toxic urgency**. I began to experiment with the radical notion of deliberately and forcefully slowing down.”

Let me hasten to add that the Nap Bishop is about a lot more than twenty-minute power naps to increase productivity; indeed, that goal is perhaps the *opposite* of her mission. From a perspective deeply grounded in Black liberation theology and Afrofuturism, Hersey offers us the mantra, “**Rest is resistance.**” Hers is a powerful prophetic voice for rest as a form of nonviolent resistance to the exploitative 24/7 “grind culture”: the relentless demands that push us to keep working at an inhumane,

non-stop, machine-like pace. Hersey says: **“Grind culture wants us to keep going no matter what. I sit my [butt] down and daydream. The answer is NO.”** Hersey has described her tone as **“tender rage.”** Her intention is to “jar” us — to *wake us up* enough from grind culture that we might begin to give ourselves permission to *rest* ([The New York Times](#)).

She has spent many years researching and weaving together the worldview behind her Nap Ministry. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in *Public Health* (so she is deeply informed by the science of sleep and the adverse impacts of sleep deprivation). She also holds a Master of *Divinity* degree from Emory University’s Candler School of Theology, evidence that the importance of rest is also a profound theological value for her. Hersey is also an artist who has transformed many public spaces into what she calls Collective Napping Experiences: “sacred, safe spaces for attendees to publicly nap and benefit from the healing and revolutionary power of sleep” ([Prism Reports](#)).

And although she champions rest as a human right for everyone, she also advocates for rest as *reparations* ([60](#)). Forcing Black bodies to labor was at the center of 400 years of enslavement, Jim Crow segregation, and the ongoing New Jim Crow of racially-biased mass incarceration. *Well-rested black bodies* will be a key part of creating a new way of being in the world that centers peace, liberty, and justice *for all*. And she prophetically proclaims that, **“A Black woman in a rested state is a radical act”** ([Instagram](#)).

Hersey views her Nap Ministry as a **“spiritual antidote** to the very earthly problems that are plaguing communities: exhaustion, chronic diseases and mental health crises,” issues she attributes to what bell hooks called the “White Supremacist, Capitalist Patriarchy” ([The New York Times](#)). Hersey is raising our collective awareness that, **“sleep deprivation [is] a racial and social justice issue.”** And she says powerfully that, **“The refusal to grind [is] a political act”** ([Interview](#)).

Do you know that old peace activist saying from A. J. Muste that, “There is no way to peace, peace *is* the way?” Hersey’s message is like that: “There is no working hard enough to finally be worthy of rest. *Rest is the way.*” Hersey contends that more

rest for everyone is a pivotal part of moving us toward the better world we dream about. Indeed, rest literally gives us the time and space to dream!

She challenges us to come to realize that,

We exist in a culture that supports sleep deprivation; we have been brainwashed by capitalism to work at a machine-level pace, and to equate our worth with how much we can produce. The same engine that drove millions of enslaved people into the forced terror of brutal labor on plantations is the same engine driving grind culture today... **Rest is a form of resistance because it disrupts and pushes back against capitalism and white supremacy.** It says, “No, I am enough now, and I am not a machine.... Our collective rest and radical care will save us and will be the foundation for a new world rooted in liberation for all.”

(Interview)

On any day and at any time of the year, Hersey would say that there is no better time to start resting than right now. (If you fall asleep during this sermon, I can imagine her saying, “Wonderful! Listen to what your body needs!”) And with Winter Solstice and the winter holidays approaching, now is an auspicious time to experiment with rest.

Hersey was inspired to create the Nap Ministry during the three years she spent working as a graduate assistant in Emory University’s African American archives. Immersed in historical documents, she learned in great detail about the daily lives of her enslaved ancestors, who were so often treated as if they were:

human machines. They were working 20 hours a day. Women were giving birth, then the midwife came to take the baby and the mother returned to work the same day. That shook me to my core, being a mother and having given birth. I could barely lift my head up [after I gave birth]. The details that people usually gloss over [about the daily lives of enslaved human beings] became important to me. They haunted me.

But **what would [my ancestors] have experienced or done if they were allowed a space to rest?** (“Testimony on Liberation Theology and Rest as Inheritance”)

What a powerful question.

I first learned about the Nap Ministry on [Instagram](#), where Hersey has more than half a million followers. The archive of her feed is very much worth scrolling through; however, her most recent post shows that she practices what she preaches. After launching her first book in October that quickly became a *New York Times* bestseller, she is now on a two month Sabbatical in November and December: "Sabbath Time: No labor. No media. No requests."

In her words, "When I take a digital Sabbath away from social media, I come back feeling smarter, less anxious, and tapped into an expansive energy I was unable to access while scrolling every day.... An exodus and intentional detox from these platforms are the North Star for our rest practices" ([Instagram](#)).

If you are interested in going deeper, I highly recommend her short and accessible new book titled *Rest Is Resistance: A Manifesto*. There is much more in there than I can share with you. I do read a lot of books, and it will easily make my Top 10 Best Books of the Year list. It's also available as an audiobook, and I know the Nap Bishop would approve if you decided to listen to this book while lying in bed. "The medium is the message" (Marshall McLuhan). There is no way to rest; *rest is the way!*

As the Nap Bishop, Hershey is inviting us to live into a much more *human* and *humane* way of being in the world (4) as an act of political defiance. What does such assertive resting look like, specifically? Here's a top ten list from the Nap Bishop of what "resting can look like":

1. Closing your eyes for ten minutes
2. A longer shower in silence

3. Meditating on the couch for twenty minutes
4. Daydreaming by staring out of a window
5. Sipping warm tea before bed in the dark
6. A Sun Salutation
7. Not immediately responding to texts and emails
8. Deep listening to a full music album
9. A meditative walk in nature
10. Knitting, crocheting, sewing, quilting, playing a musical instrument (85-86)

Ultimately you have to experiment with what works best for you

As I move toward my conclusion, I would be remiss if I failed to address the number one question that Hersey is always asking: some variation on **“I would love to rest more but I have bills. How is it possible”** (15)?

Hersey’s basic answer is to start where you can by carving out even a little more time for rest. She writes:

All of culture is working in collaboration for us not to rest, and when we do listen to our bodies and take rest, many feel extreme guilt and shame. Embrace knowing that you have been manipulated and scammed by a violent system.... This is the beginning of the new world we can create. So, stay here in rest, even for a few minutes each day.... Resting is an embodied practice and a lifelong unraveling. It is not something that is trendy, quick, or shallow. Resting is ancient, slow, and connected work that will take hold of you in ways that may be surprising. Let deprogramming from grind culture surprise you. Let your entire being slowly begin to shift. Get lost in rest. Pull up the blankets, search for softness and be open to the ways rest will surprise and calm you. (17)

Along these lines, there is one other important connection to the vitally-important nap ministry—if we’re thinking it is all on us to figure out as individuals. Sure, it may start with you finding time and space to carve out even a little more rest for yourself and for those within your immediate sphere of influence. In the coming days, this might look like leaning into those archetypal winter spiritual practices of darkness, silence, and saying “No.” More broadly, “Rest is resistance” is about what is sometimes called *communal care*. We need to continue advocating for systems, structures, and institutions in this country and world that are less hateful, greedy, and delusional and much more compassionate, generous, and wise. Communal care—sharing and supporting one another—makes rest increasingly possible for all.

I was heartened to see that my colleague, The Rev. Dr. Sofía Betancourt—currently the only candidate running to be elected in June as the next President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, has named communal care as one of the three main planks in her platform. If you are curious, her other two priorities are “collaborative leadership” and “facing the unknown together.” She describes herself as a “queer AfroLatine cis woman of mixity, complexity, and multicultural, multiracial heritage” (sofiabetancourt.com). And she has tremendous potential to be an incredible leader for the next chapter in our journey as a larger UU movement. I am grateful to be on that journey with all of you.