

Leisure

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY, May 2012

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Opening Words Sue Monk Kidd (from *When the Heart Waits*)

My grandfather was a lawyer, a judge, and a farmer. He was frequently busy and conquering, but I remember also that he sometimes entered into golden moments of *wu wei* [pronounced “woo-way”]. He and I used to go fishing at one of the little ponds on his farm. He would sit and hold his cane pole over the water, becoming as still as the stumps that jutted up from the water. I usually tired of fishing fairly soon and went on to other things, like dandelions. One day having given up on the fishing, I was playing in his old black truck when I noticed that his fishing bait was still on the seat. I remember being surprised that my grandfather had been out fishing an hour or more without bait. I grabbed the bait basket and raced over to him. “Granddaddy, how can you fish without bait?” He tilted back his hat and smiled as if he had been caught in some delicious secret. “Well, sometimes it’s not the fish I’m after,” he said, “it’s the fishing.”

[One of Taoism’s most important concepts is *wu wei*, which is sometimes translated as “non-doing” or “non-action.” A better way to think of it, however, is as a paradoxical “action of non-action.” *Wu wei* refers to the cultivation of a state of being in which our actions are quite effortlessly in alignment with the ebb and flow of the elemental cycles of the natural world. It is a kind of “going with the flow” that is characterized by great ease and awake-ness, in which - without even trying - we’re able to respond perfectly to whatever situations arise.]

Chalice Lighting and Silence

Covenant (Optional)

Check-in

Topic Introduction

Our cultural heritage is ambivalent about leisure. On one hand, we inherited from Judaism the idea of a day of rest for spiritual refreshment and joy, a day to be aware of our ability to be free from every day work. On the other hand, we have inherited from early Christianity the idea that leisure time invites laziness, and from Protestantism, the idea that our lives should be focused on hard work and discipline.

Leisure can be defined as the time you have to spend as you please when you are free of work and other kinds of obligations. It can be contemplative or active, but it is meant to result in relaxation and rejuvenation. Doing something solely because you enjoy it can help you re-create and re-vitalize your body, and your spirit. It can help you feel that your life is your own, even if only temporarily. It can allow you to take a deep breath and remember who you are and what you love.

Quotations

Activity *Facilitators:* Ask participants to take a few minutes to make a list of the different ways they have spent their leisure time over their lifetime and how they enjoy spending it these days. The intent of this activity is to help people identify experiences they can use later in answering the questions for group reflection.

Questions for Group Reflection

1. Did you have difficulty making your list? Why or why not? Did anyone mention a leisure activity you've never tried, but would like to? Could you?
2. In your family of origin did adults and children take time for leisure activities? Were you encouraged to explore leisure activities? What kinds of messages did you receive about taking this time for yourself?
3. What were some of your favorite ways to spend leisure time as a child? Was leisure time encouraged or discouraged?
4. Are you satisfied with the balance in your life between the time you spend on meeting your obligations and the time you spend on resting, re-creating and re-vitalizing? If not, what changes would you need to make in order to move towards greater balance?
5. The definition of *wu wei* (part of Opening Words) seems to resonate with the last quote, the one by L.P. Jacks. Do you think it is possible to live a life in which your attitude and approach to work and leisure time are indistinguishable? What would it take for you to experience being "effortlessly in alignment with the ebb and flow" (*wu wei*) to the extent that all your actions and activities are qualitatively the same? Does this way of being sound desirable to you?
6. How do you feel when you are anticipating a period of leisure: selfish, happy, overwhelmed, anxious, excited, guilty?
7. Would you consider any of your leisure activities to be religious or spiritual in nature?
8. Do you have any plans or ideas about how you will spend any summer leisure time you might have coming?

Likes and Wishes Considering both the topic and the group process, was there anything especially interesting, exciting or helpful about this session? Was anything missing, confusing, annoying or hurtful?

Closing Words and Chalice Extinguishing

There are millions upon millions of people who battle just to stay alive every day. They spend all of their time and energy trying to secure food, clothing and shelter for themselves and their loved ones. Let us acknowledge our gratitude for the time and opportunities we have for pure leisure. Leisure time is a luxury. Let us remember with compassion and concern those in this world who cannot enjoy it.

And finally, this excerpt from Mary Oliver's poem "The Summer Day":

I don't know exactly what a prayer is
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
With your one wild and precious life?

Quotations

The time to relax is when you have no time for it. ~Sydney J. Harris

Millions long for immortality who don't know what to do on a rainy Sunday afternoon.
~Susan Ertz

I would not exchange my leisure hours for all the wealth in the world. ~Comte de Mirabeau

To be able to fill leisure intelligently is the last product of civilization, and at present very few people have reached that level. ~Bertrand Russell

Leisure is the most challenging responsibility a man can be offered. ~William Russell

They talk of the dignity of work. Bosh. The dignity is in leisure. ~Herman Melville

The secret of being miserable is to have the leisure to bother about whether you are happy or not. The cure is occupation. ~George Bernard Shaw

Leisure is the time for doing something useful. ~Benjamin Franklin

It is better to have loafed and lost than never to have loafed at all. ~James Thurber

The best test of the quality of a civilization is the quality of its leisure. ~Irwin Erdman

It is well to lie fallow for a while. ~Martin Tuper

We seldom enjoy leisure we haven't earned. ~H. Jackson Brown Jr.

We are closer to the ants than to the butterflies. Very few people can endure much leisure. ~Gerald Brenan

Life is best enjoyed when time periods re evenly divided between labor, sleep, and recreation... all people should spend one-third of their time in recreation which is rebuilding, voluntary, activity, never idleness. ~Brigham Young

The best intelligence test is what we do with our leisure. ~Dr. Laurence Peter

There is not enough time to do all the nothing we want to do. ~Calvin and Hobbes

The master in the art of living makes little distinction between his work and play, his labor and his leisure, his mind and his body, his information and his recreation, his love and his religion. He hardly knows which is which. He pursues his vision of excellence at whatever he does, leaving others to decide whether he is working or playing. To him he is always doing both. ~ UU minister Lawrence Pearsall Jacks