

Centering through Spiritual Practices

By Reverend Jane Smith, Channing Memorial Church, UU Ellicott City, MD February 28, 2021

Every morning I sit on the porch outside of my apartment and drink my first cup of coffee. In the crisp morning air, I take time to pause, and simply be. Noticing the warmth of the mug in my hands, the aroma of the coffee rising to my nostrils, the bitter taste on my tongue. My eyes land on the same tree each morning, thick trunk rising from the ground, these days surrounded by crisp, white snow. This practice, even if I find only have ten minutes, serves to calm me, center me, and allows me to set my intention for the day. Noticing my own body, emotions, naming any anxieties I may have, and noticing the glimpses of nature – I connect with myself in a much-needed time of calm and simply being.

We all need practices of self-care if we are to fully engage with ourselves and the world around us. We are living in difficult times. Without time to center and be, our minds and our beings can be overrun by the needs, anxieties, and rush of the day. If we find ourselves in a time of hardship, this centering becomes all the more necessary – a space for healing when we may simply feel lost. As our reading elaborated, “I take care of myself first, because I am deserving of exquisite care.”¹ We are each deserving of exquisite care. Before we can take care of anything or anyone else, we need to care for ourselves.

Our inner selves need to be spiritually fed, whether that’s understood as our souls, or our inner light, or our heart space, or simply our beating hearts and expanding lungs. Connecting with our true selves – our core. We can also connect with our holy – whatever that may be. God, Goddess, Allah, spirit of life,

¹ “My Commitments to Myself” By Laura Mancuso

higher power, science, nature – connecting with something greater than ourselves – if even for a few moments.

We heard a poem earlier – a poem about roses. Roses – that flower that is often gifted as a symbol of love. Pink, red, yellow, white – long green stems riddled with thorns and dark green leaves, the calming sent of nectar emanating from the petals. Emerson speaks of the roses, “they are what they are; they exist with God today.” He writes, “[the rose] is perfect in every moment of existence.” He concludes, “We cannot be happy and strong until we too live with nature in the present, above time.”²

As we take this time to center, I remind us: We are what we are, and that is beautiful. We exist with our holy today – whatever that may be. We are perfect in every moment of existence. Let this sink in – our own worth, our own dignity, our own beauty, each one of our special, unique characteristics. We are perfect in our imperfections – just who we need to be, even though we each have things to work on. Emerson proclaims we cannot be happy and strong until we too live with nature in the present – so let us pause. Let us center. Let us simply be in the present moment, so we too can be happy and strong.

I invite us to pause and reflect on this idea of a community where everyone is accepted – no matter labels or stigma or assumptions or differences – just as we have been this past month. A space of profound love and wholehearted acceptance – of getting to hear each other’s stories. Rev. Victoria Safford writes that living to intentionally create this sacred community in each day of our lives this is a “way of being.” An “attitude.” An “orientation of the heart.”³ Engaging sincerely with each soul in the interdependent web of life - unless, of course, it is harmful for you to do so. Loving others and accepting others for who they are and hearing stories and asking questions – living life where everyone is beloved and held in community – this too is a spiritual practice, just as we did with our loving kindness

² “These Roses” by Ralph Waldo Emerson

³ Victoria Safford from *Soul Matters Worship Packet: Beloved Community*

meditation. We can bring little bits of loving kindness meditation with us each and every day. When we are frustrated or angry or impatient or confused – offer the refrain “may they be held in loving kindness. May they be happy and safe. May their hearts know peace.” We can be forces of love in the world, one brief blessing at a time.

We heard earlier, “the beauty of life is all around us.”⁴ Let us live into this! Whether it is that cup of coffee, or the stretch of our muscles as we move, or a calmed mind after a practice of meditation, or the joy we feel as we notice a songbird while centering in nature, or the connection with our holy we feel after a practice of prayer – beauty is all around us. Let us connect with our senses, our hearts, our imaginations. The warmth or iciness of a touch, the tender feelings in our chest when we feel loved, the taste of a cup of tea, the nourishment we feel in our stomachs after a healthy meal, the warmth in our hearts as we fully engage with those around us, and finally all of the creative beauty brought forth each day through our imaginations.

Regular spiritual practices – even if simply engaging with one’s morning cup of coffee – are needed to live a full, meaningful life – to calm our nerves and put at ease our anxieties. To center with our hearts and our holy, fully living each day – setting intentions. When life gets hard – as it inevitably will – we have these tools to return to our center – our true selves – and bring forth healing. We are each deserving of exquisite care.

“The beauty of life is all around us. Let us softly say, each in our own way, thank you... and may we smile in delight.”⁵

⁴ “Sensory Reflection” By Claudene Oliva

⁵ *ibid*

We will now pause for a movement meditation, centering with body and mind. We will then have time for lectio divina – a spiritual practice where we pause to reflect on a few sacred words from the Sikh tradition, connecting with our inner selves and our holy.