

Valuable Stillness

A Message for All Faiths

Unitarian Congregation

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This morning we begin to explore
our monthly theme of stillness.

When we hear the word “stillness”
we immediately think of it as the
opposite of movement - but
stillness is something quite
different altogether. Stillness is an
energetic quality of being. It is
naturally present in the heart of

every human being, equally so.

Sometimes after a few cups of

coffee or a fight we might not feel

it, but it is still (pun intended)

always there – it is only us who

have chosen to disconnect from it.

The word stillness comes from the

Middle English word stillness via

the Old English stilnes, ‘meaning

silence, absence of noise or

disturbance, tranquillity, quietness

and absence of movement’. The

root still appears to derive from

the Old English stille, related to

the Old German stilli, meaning ‘be

fixed, to stand’. It is also related to

the Classical Greek word *stèle* which means 'a post'. In Latin the word for stillness is *silentium* meaning 'silence and immobility'.

Similarly, the Sanskrit word for stillness meant 'immobile'. What does stillness mean to you?

The history of the word shows how across different languages, stillness has been used with the meaning of silence, immobility and quietness or it has been perceived as something fixed or something that stands still. Indeed, according to contemporary

dictionary definitions Stillness is described in terms of being; 'motionless', 'stationary', 'silent', 'subdued', 'gentle' etc. but as we have seen, it is a fallacy to believe that stillness is simply the absence of motion or sound and an even greater one to not acknowledge the incredible power that true Stillness contains. Stillness is a choice. It can be felt by living in a state of presence where we remain connected to ourselves and are completely present in our body. We are at one with everything, and everyone in all that we do.

Life flows with a simple rhythm –
the rhythm of our stillness.

In this quality of presence there is
something that ‘stands still’, but it
is not absent of physical
movement. Rather, it is our
beingness that remains unaffected
by any movement, action or doing
even though it moves, acts and
does. It is the depth of the ocean
unaffected by its waves. It is the
ability to surrender to our inner-
heart and live from here in all that
we do. Therefore, Stillness is not
something we have to go in search

of nor is it a journey into escapism or numbness. It is where we come from and what we are innately made of and thus it is our natural state of being. You can cultivate stillness while walking on a busy street, while chaos swirls all around you. “[S]ome of the coolest experiences are to be in the busiest of places and to foster an internal and external stillness for yourself,” said psychologist Karin Lawson.

Some of her favorite spots include the airport and mall. The key is to

create an intention of stillness —
to have some intentionality about
how we're carrying ourselves in a
given moment — and to focus on
what is within our control, she
said. For instance, you might
physically slow down by sitting,
slowly walking or even lying
down. You might reduce external
stimuli in your environment by
lowering the lights and turning
down the music. Stillness is
powerful. “Being still is like
replenishing the stores. It allows
us time and space.” It gives us
time and space to self-reflect and

actually hear our thoughts.

“Stillness has a lot of looks and there are no right or wrong ways to do it,” Lawson said. “Because once we start talking about the ‘right way,’ then there we go right back to the productivity and achievement mindset.”

Remember that “just because the world around us is in full-blown chaos, doesn’t mean we always need to join [in],” Lawson said.

She shared this I recently read a quote from the german-swiss poet Hermann Hesse: He wrote

“Within you there is a stillness and

a sanctuary to which you can
retreat any time.”

So, why is it so difficult to be still
if Stillness is our natural state of
being? It seems as if everything in
the way we choose to live takes us
away from ourselves. The constant
distractions, being ‘too busy’,
noises, stress, emotions,
stimulating food and drink, ideals
and beliefs, protective
mechanisms, anxiety – you name
it – and this way of life then
becomes our daily lived
experience which we perceive as

“normal”, when it is not and we allow it to perpetuate. But still, the stillness is always there and is so needed, longed for and worth reconnecting to.

I use stillness because it is meaningful to me. I remember how restlessness used to be such a part of my existence. I couldn't sit still for anything. Through some shadow work and some new practices, I have been able to become more present and authentic which allows me to enjoy the benefits of stillness. It

truly has opened up a new world
to me. And besides, if people
describe me at times as sedentary I
can just tell them I'm actually
practicing stillness. Several years
ago, stillness sounded like prison.
Today, it sounds like heaven.
Think about the difference you
might feel between walking
through the woods / timber to
complete a trail walk vs sitting on
a log among the trees being still
and letting nature speak to you
without expectation. There are
benefits to walking, but there is a
whole new world that opens up

when we can embrace this kind of solitude occasionally. It is said, that a rolling stone doesn't gather moss. Think about that thought in light of doing and stillness. When we are still, "things" are better able to come to us—to find us—and, in essence, to stick to us. I used to be so afraid of those things that might come, so I kept moving. Now I know that I have nothing to fear, so I experience stillness and wait for the good stuff. It is so peaceful and deep and rewarding to be still and let the good stuff find me!

It's important to comprehend the difference between isolation and solitude! I'll save that discussion for another time, but suffice to say that I am enjoying a much deeper thriving by going inside and experiencing the practice of stillness than I ever experienced from the orchestrated activity of my old life. In 1661 Quaker Isaac Pennington wrote, "Be no more than God hath made thee. Give over thine own willing; give over thine own running; give over thine own desiring to know or to be any thing, and sink down to the seed

which God sows in the heart, and
let that grow in thee, and be in
thee, and act in thee, and thou
shalt find by sweet experience that
the Lord knows that, and loves
that, and will lead it to the
inheritance of life, which is his
portion.”

To sink down to the seed we need
not only silence, we need also
stillness. When we adults fidget in
a Quaker meeting, we
unconsciously reinforce our
habitual ways of thinking and

being and doing. Fidgeting is a way of avoiding something. When we sit still we come closer to who we are and are more able to observe the shifting sands of the mind that we label I, me, and mine. If we can be still, we can be moved. We need to sit still in order to free ourselves from our habitual, often unconscious ways of avoiding what we most need to address.

Why is stillness so important for us today? Because it is a gateway to peace. We all need more peace

in our lives. A lot of us feel like we're constantly living off balance and under pressure. It can sometimes only take the smallest thing to tip us over. It feels like many of us are operating on the edge of our energy. But within the busyness it's hard to really listen to ourselves. It's only when we find stillness that we truly begin to notice what's happening below the surface, and sense what the deep drivers in our lives really are. And as we find a bit of peace and a bit of comfort with who we are, we begin to listen to each other better too.

It's only when we pause and think
a little more deeply that we
understand other people, and find
our love or respect for them.

There's also something that
changes when we come into any
activity from a place of stillness.

We're just better at it. We're more
resourceful, we're more attuned,
we're happier.

Stillness is more than just a
reflective practice – it's a life skill.

It's all very well intentionally
going away on retreat or going for
a walk and finding peace there.

But can you find your stillness in
the midst of a frantic day, an
argument, or a crisis situation?

Our ability to come in and out of
stillness is an essential life skill.

When we get busy, it's easy for
things to become slightly manic or
distorted. So we need to learn to
pause, breathe, and ground to our
deeper selves. Then, we find more
resourceful ways of engaging with
others, and make better choices in
our lives. The ability to pause and
to find an answer from a different
place is what differentiates people
who live well and are able to

respond to life creatively from
those who get scattered and
respond to life reactively.

Learning to keep our stillness in
the middle of the busyness, the
pressure and the noise that's in the
world today is at the core of a lot
of our work. Stillness is a training
ground where we can learn to be
less neurotic and more wise. In
the words of Sufi poet Rumi, "The
inspiration you seek is already
within you. Be silent and listen."

May it be so.

