

## SUMMER SABBATH

*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. <sup>2</sup>And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. <sup>3</sup>So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.*

(Genesis 2:1-3, NRSV)

Unitarian Universalist minister, Rev. Tim Haley,  
writes:

*Amid all the noise in our lives,  
we take this moment to sit in silence --  
to give thanks for another day;  
to give thanks for all those in our lives  
who have brought us warmth and love;  
to give thanks for the gift of life.*

*We know we are on our pilgrimage here but a brief moment  
in time.*

*Let us open ourselves, here, now,  
to the process of becoming more whole --  
of living more fully;  
of giving and forgiving more freely;  
of understanding more completely  
the meaning of our lives here on this earth.*

<http://www.uua.org/worshipweb/opening/haleytd-open01.html>

While these reverent words were intended to be used at the beginning of worship services, it seems to me they might be a good credo for summer, maybe even for life. Too

many of us live life at a breakneck speed. Not only do we not take time to smell the roses, we're not even aware of the blossoms as they go whizzing by in the blur of our daily lives. What a shame that all too often we are so busy that we are more like robots in hyper speed than children of God relishing and reveling in this wonderful gift, this amazing life, which we've been given. If you find yourself facing such challenges, I believe summer comes just in the nick of time. Summer arrives with its slower pace, its fewer commitments, its long lazy days that are ours to savor if only we will.

Let's face it, if God Almighty needed a little rest and relaxation in the second chapter of the Book of Genesis, I think we need our down-time too. In today's scripture lesson, which is the end of the first Creation account, God takes a day off after creating for six days. The text says in essence that on the seventh day, God took a break, God relaxed, God rested. Genesis 2:3a says, "God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested." This seventh day became known as the Sabbath Day and was included in the Ten Commandments in the words, "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy." Keeping the Sabbath holy meant resting from work and instead going to synagogue or temple to worship God. The early Christians continued to observe the Sabbath on Saturdays, though in time they switched their services to Sunday because Jesus was resurrected from the dead on a Sunday.

If God believed rest so important that it was included in the first creation account as well as in the Ten Commandments then certainly we ought to take it seriously too. After all, the word recreation can be thought of as re-creation, to be created and rejuvenated all over again. Rest and relaxation should be times when our minds are at ease, our emotional energy renewed, and our spirits refreshed.

Tim Hansel, the founder of Summit Expedition, a wilderness survival school for people seeking deeper experiences with themselves, others, and God writes, “*Leisure* has become a word with bad connotations, implying comfort, convenience, and complacency. Many try to resolve their guilt and frustration by working harder and longer... We begin to feel that everything must be useful. Thus, our false guilt compels us to read for profit, attend parties for contacts, exercise so we can work better, and rest in order to be more efficient... A curious and familiar psychological need to justify everything emerges, leaving no room for discovery and pure enjoyment. Words like *wonder*, *joy*, *rest*, and *freedom* have become faded replicas of what Christ taught. Time becomes a tyrant instead of a friend. Joy becomes something we will do later. Play becomes something for children. Creativity becomes the unattainable quality of artists and poets instead of the essence of our lives... Our watered-down gospel of prudence, caution, and familiar... routine becomes suffocating dullness. Then we resort to all kinds of things to make us happy—which never quite succeed. The simple joy of existence seems ever more distant and evasive” (*When I Relax I Feel Guilty*, pp. 12-13).

What can we do if we find ourselves in the sort of trap Hansel describes? The good news is that, with God’s help, we have the power to change our lives. It worked for the Apostle Paul, obviously a success-driven individual when God turned his life around on the Road to Damascus. When the notion of grace, the reality of God’s unconditional love, caused a revolution in the life of Paul, he was freed from having to be a Pharisee’s Pharisee in order to earn God’s love. Rather all he needed was faith in Christ, a simple childlike trust in God. This new attitude changed his life so that instead of climbing the ranks of the religious elite he instead spent his life joyously serving God by serving others. From a Roman prison of all places Paul wrote, “I have *learned* in whatever condition I find myself to be

content” (Philippians 4:11b). This was not second nature to Paul. As this verse points out, he had to learn contentment.

Tim Hansel reports having to learn the same lessons in his own life. Having done so, he formulated the Four Commandments of Contentment in his book, *When I Relax I Feel Guilty*. The First is THOU SHALT LIVE HERE AND NOW. He contends that, “Avoiding the present moment has almost become a habit in our society. For the major part of our working lives we are taught to sacrifice the present for the future” (Ibid. p. 82). All too often we view the idealized past through rose-colored glasses while the future becomes the grass that is always greener than the present. Hansel encourages us to, “Avoid the temptation of wishing, hoping, and regretting—the most common tactics for evading the present... [Instead he urges us to] Invest in the present... It is not necessary to surrender tomorrow or next year, but abandon yourself to God’s presence and [God’s] will as it unfolds in your life moment to moment” (Ibid. p. 83). With God’s help we can live in the here and now.

The Second Commandment of Contentment is THOU SHALT NOT HURRY. Hansel observes, “Our world seems intoxicated with hurry... For in our impatient desire to make things happen, we have, inadvertently, overlooked what [is] really important. Small wonder, then, that we have lost the ability to immerse ourselves in the simple delights of the earth—the wind against our faces, savory aromas in our nostrils, moist grass beneath our feet, a child in our arms. In our hurry to be someplace other than where we are, to be someone other than who we are, we have lost the ability to wonder” (Ibid. pp. 84-85). Hansel points to Jesus and the eternal rhythm of his life as the best example of a person living life at the sacred pace of one day at a time. With God’s help we can learn to slow down and live unhurried lives.

The Third Commandment of Contentment is THOU SHALT NOT TAKE THYSELF TOO SERIOUSLY. Whereas Jesus encouraged his followers to be childlike, he criticized the Pharisees for taking themselves too seriously. Hansel confesses, “One of the greatest obstacles I wrestle with is that of taking myself too seriously. The result is a pretentious, defensive, brittle man who works five times harder than he needs to in order to continually prove himself to the world, and who forgets to laugh—especially at himself” (Ibid. pp. 86-87). With God’s help, we can learn not to take ourselves too seriously.

The Fourth Commandment of Contentment is THOU SHALT BE GRATEFUL. Someone has said, “Success is getting what you want. Happiness is wanting what you get” (Ibid. p. 88). No one enjoys being around someone who is constantly negative, critical, or ungrateful. Ingratitude runs contrary to the ideal Christian life. In the classic words of Psalm 100, the writer calls us to lives of praise and thanks to God. Notice the many positive and uplifting words in these verses, “Make a *joyful* noise to the Lord, all the lands! Serve the Lord with *gladness*! Come into God’s presence with *singing*...Enter God’s gates with *thanksgiving* and God’s courts with *praise*! Give *thanks* to God, *bless* God’s name! For the Lord is *good*; God’s steadfast *love* endures forever, and God’s *faithfulness* to all generations” (vv. 1-2, 4-5).

Hansel points out that, “Gratitude can be expressed by hard work, by patience, by laughter, by creativity, by persistence, by the quality of your love, by the depth of your hope, and by the certainty of your peace. Gratitude has no substitute. It’s the surest way I know to emotional and spiritual health” (Ibid. p. 89). With God’s help, we can live gracious and thank-full lives.

In a piece entitled “Slow Me Down Lord,” Orin Crain writes: “Slow me down, Lord. Ease the pounding of

my heart by the quieting of my mind. Steady my hurried pace with a vision of the eternal reach of time. Give me, amid the confusion of the day, the calmness of the everlasting hills. Break the tensions of my nerves and muscles with the soothing music of the singing streams that live in my memory. Teach me the art of taking minute vacations—of slowing down to look at a flower, to chat with a friend, to pat a dog, to smile at a child, to read a few lines from a good book. Slow me down, Lord, and inspire me to send my roots deep into the soil of life’s enduring values, that I may grow toward my greater destiny. Remind me each day that the race is not always to the swift; that there is more to life than increasing its speed. Let me look upward to the towering oak and know that it grew great and strong because it grew slowly and well” (Ibid. p.9).

As we begin what I hope will be a relaxing and refreshing summer, my wish is that we will make it a sabbath time, when we learn to slow down that we might better enjoy ourselves, others, and God, being content this day and always. AMEN.

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## **PASTORAL PRAYER**

Eternal God, Spirit of life -- mysterious power in all creation -- we stand before you now as countless others have stood asking that you make yourself known to us.

Let us find you in the glories and wonders of the world and in moments of great joy and ecstasy.

But most of all, let us find you in the commonplace: in that which we touch everyday. Let us find you in the familiar: in those whom we touch every day. Let us find you in ourselves: at the center of our being.

Teach us in the careless, casual moments when we do not ask to be taught. And let us know that we are, indeed, part of the mystery.

Through Jesus Christ our Savior and Friend we pray. Amen.

The piece was adapted from a prayer by Andrew C. Backus as found at <http://www.uua.org/worshipweb/meditations/backusac-prayer01.html>.