

# The Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden

## “The Power of Pause”

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There are two kinds of pause we're going to talk about today.

And they're not

1. the pause on your remote  
and 2. the paws on your animals.

No, today we'll be talking about p-a-u-s-e pause,  
Next Sunday at the Blessing of the Animals  
there will be plenty of the p-a-w-s paws here, though.

So back to the pause on our remotes  
or of our super-person pause who  
graced our presence with the children of our congregation earlier today.

There are two kinds of this type of pause:  
intentional  
and forced.

Intentional pause might be the self-awareness and discipline  
for a daily spiritual practice  
or to pause and think about what you're doing  
every time you're wanting to just grab  
the proverbial cookie.  
We're going to talk more about this in a couple minutes,  
but for now, let's focus on forced pause.

Forced pause might be  
a superhero or parent or friend that says – stop! think!  
before you do that thing you were going to do

without really thinking or having awareness.  
(Grabbing the cookie, perhaps)

Or that feeling of illness after you ate the whole cookie  
Or guilt when you see your friend so sad  
and realize it is probably because of you that they are.

Forced pauses might be a celebration or a tragedy  
that really forces you to reflect – to stop  
that last straw that broke the camel's back.

Forced pause might be a birthday  
An anniversary of life, or death.  
Finding yourself in a place you never imagined.  
Finding yourself in the hospital.  
Finding yourself feeling so high – finding yourself feeling so down.

There's a saying by Rumi that I love  
and that seems to really encapsulate this forced pause.

He writes:

“So just be quiet and sit down.  
The reason is – you are drunk,  
and this is the edge of the roof.”

I'm going to read that once more:

“So just be quiet and sit down.  
The reason is – you are drunk,  
and this is the edge of the roof.”

Now for some of us,  
being drunk and looking over the edge  
isn't quite enough to force us to  
“just be quiet and sit down”.

The height, the view,  
where we've taken ourselves isn't quite enough  
for us to “just be quiet and sit down”

No, some of us have to fall right off that roof  
and it is not until we are quite literally incapable

of doing much else but sitting that we can finally  
“just be quiet and sit down”.

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I know I have, time and time again,  
had to be frightened enough by where I was  
or my own disorientation  
to stop and reflect on where I was and what I was doing.

And other countless times  
When it was not until I was on the ground after falling  
that I stopped and reflected on where I was and what I was doing.

I invite us now to take a moment and think about  
times in our person lives that have been this kind of  
wrong way, do not enter,  
drunk and on the top of a roof  
or lying flat on our backs after a fall  
forced pause, kind of moment.

And of course, there can also be similar moments  
that are affirmative  
signs that we are living how we are supposed to be living.  
Perhaps it is making ends meet in a job that it satisfying,  
but we feared wouldn't be able to pay the rent or the mortgage.  
Or an apology or even acknowledgement from a family member or friend  
we were about to give up on.  
Moments we were are hit in the head with an affirmation,  
yes, this is the way, keep going.

I invite us now to pause and think about times like this in our lives  
when we have been forced to pause and realize all that was right or good.

And finally, there are moments where we are simply forced to pause  
reflect, re-asses  
and they may not be overtly good or bad  
not overtly – you're on the right path  
or you're so far down the wrong path  
but more like a, here you are look around and take it in for a while.

Birthdays, anniversaries, milestones  
births, deaths  
may serve these purposes as well.

This congregation seems to be quite full  
with these forced pauses right now,  
don't we?

And these forced pauses can happen in an individual life  
or in the life of a congregation.  
Certainly when you all decided to go into search for a full-time minister  
several years ago  
this was a time for a forced pause and reflection  
for you as an entire community.

In our larger American culture,  
Ferguson has become a forced pause  
Though Michael Brown is not the first person of color  
to be killed by law enforcements,  
his death and it's aftermath has become a collective pause.

The details so horrifying and inhumane  
that many of us who do not regularly have to deal  
with the realities of  
a racist legal system and militarized police system  
were hit over the head with the harsh and bloody reality.

Michael Brown's story caused us to pause.  
It yanked our heads to news stories,  
to cries for justice  
and said look!  
You can no longer ignore these atrocities!  
This system!  
Look!  
His body in the street for four hours.  
So many gun shots.

And look! Tamir Rice!  
12 years old, who died one week ago from gunshot injuries  
from an officer who shot him no more than 2 seconds  
after getting out of his car.

Look! Listen! Stop!  
Hear! See!  
A black man killed every 28 hours  
by police or vigilantes in our county.

Ferguson was a fall from the roof.  
a getting knocked right over.

This has been happening in our country  
In our streets  
In our neighborhoods  
for too long now.

Stop. Listen. Pay attention.  
Reflect. Learn. Reassess. Communicate.  
And then. Move.

Now.  
The good thing about falling down,  
or getting knocked over.  
Is that we are certainly humbled  
And able to be honest with ourselves and one another  
And able to reflect and learn and work together in authentic ways  
And able to move out of authenticity and understanding  
instead of pride.

Really, we won't know all of what to do  
after we've fallen off of the roof  
or realize we need to get down off the roof  
as a culture, as a congregation, as an individual.

We kind of just need to be where we are  
in that uncomfortable place of realization  
and then act with integrity from what we learn.  
Continuing to reflect as we move.

That is certainly a scary place to be  
as we don't hold the map.  
Nor is there a map of what to do.  
That's why we have to take a step, pause, reflect, look around.  
Take another step, pause, reflect, look around.  
And repeat repeat repeat.

We simply need to be aware and present.  
We need to be honest, and live in what is happening,  
staying true to ourselves and our new realizations.

So we see that part of what we do after being the recipients  
of a forced pause, is to reflect and learn from this,  
and that part of this process is taking many intentional pauses.

So intentional pauses and forced pauses are closely linked here.  
Intentional pausing helps us authentically respond to our forced pauses.

And how can we help ourselves not wind up  
disoriented and on the top of the roof so much  
or from falling right off it so much?

Well, it might be impossible to never be in those places of forced pause  
but it is possible to not be in the forced pause for the same thing all the time.  
We've all had forced pauses over the same issue before, I'm sure.  
Or I hope.

I certainly have.  
Sometimes there are just issues, things,  
we don't want to have to think about  
or work through.  
And so we find ourselves knocked over, flat on our backs, fallen  
time and time again.  
When we don't do that intentional pause after the forced pause  
The forced pause is just going to have to happen until we acknowledge it!

And by being better at having intentional pauses,  
we are better at recognizing the forced pause for what it is  
and not just get upset about it, or annoyed

we can take it and learn from it, reflect from it.

We get better at knowing what to do when we are there,  
Perhaps we can shorten our time on the ground  
after we've been knocked over  
Or perhaps we realize we need a little more time on the ground  
after we've been knocked over  
before hopping up and jumping back into the game  
lest we jump into it in the same way we were doing before  
and wind up here again far too soon.

Having a practice of intentional pausing  
Makes us more present and aware.

What is this magical intentional pause  
that can help us have more life-giving,  
and maybe less often or less painful forced pauses?

It is, quite simply, the pauses we create in our lives.  
The spiritual practices, moments of solace  
or reflection that we make regular pillars in our daily lives.

Perhaps the most striking example of intentional pause for me  
is found in Islam, the religion our children and youth are currently  
learning about downstairs.

In Islam, Muslims adherents of the faith  
are supposed to pray five times a day,  
at specific times based on the sun.

In many countries where Islam is a dominant religion,  
you might find people simply stopping in the streets to pray  
or ducking into an area to pray.

At many hospitals in the US,  
you can find muslim patients and doctors  
ducking into chapels to pray.

Now many of us might have daily moments of pause  
daily rituals that we may or may not call prayer.

They might be a morning cup of tea or coffee,  
an afternoon walk,  
a 3pm daze into nothingness,  
a late night sink into a comfy chair.

Who here has a way that they pause their day?  
Yeah, just shoot your hand up.

Feel free to shout them out if you want.

Great.

Okay.  
So it might be clear how meditating  
staring out of the window  
with our cup of coffee or tea  
can help us live a more aware life  
and help us be more prepared for daily struggles.

But how can it truly help with death?

Death will always be challenging.  
And it should be.  
I would never say it won't be.  
But by having a spiritual practice, intentional times of pause  
we have space to process and reflect on these issues  
we are more grounded  
we are more aware of our own feelings  
and can acknowledge and work through them.

It won't make things less hard.  
It will just enable us to be more present.

Now certainly intentional pause  
can't save Michael Brown's life  
and an evening plop in a comfy chair  
can't reform our legal system.

But I truly believe that by being more present in our selves



we can also be more present in the world.  
And I do believe that when we allow ourselves to be moved  
To reflect and learn and act – and continue this process  
reflect, learn, act  
We can change not only ourselves but the world around us.

By being more aware and present people in the world  
We are able to keep ourselves and our communities more honest.  
We do not sleep through the revolution.  
We are aware and we can see oppression and injustice.

We might be less shocked when the next Ferguson comes around  
Because we know what really happens.  
And we have been continually  
reflecting  
learning  
and acting  
on issues off oppression, militarization and racism.

Intentional pause helps us be more aware generally.  
And hopefully we become so aware  
that we can recognize when we are anxious or acting on default  
and take moments to pause there,  
without needing pause superperson to remind us to do this.

And it's hard to do this here in Connecticut  
In America  
In the dominant culture many of us are part of  
and all of us are affected by and forced to live in at times or all the time.

We live in a go go kind of world  
So it can be really hard to pause.

But it's really important.  
We become more present, and we remember ourselves.  
And we remember one another, our community.

Remember how in our meditation today  
we became more grounded after we breathed in our collective

joys and concerns?

I think that in that moment of pause we can,  
and often do  
find connection with the interconnected web of life.

We realize how we affect other people.  
How we are a part of other people.

We gain strength from the knowledge  
that this is an issue that does not affect only us,  
and realize that we have agency –  
and also support in the problem at hand.

The moment of pause can bring to reality  
our seventh principle of Unitarian Universalism,  
respect for the interconnected web of life of which we are all a part.

It also leads directly into our second principle.  
Justice, equity and compassion in human relations.

In addition to making myself a more aware,  
healthier person to be around for other people,  
I like being with myself better when I take moments of pause.

I can't help but bring up some more principles,  
and our first principle –  
the inherent worth and dignity of every person,  
is what I think of.

And the worth and dignity we're respecting here is our own.  
By pausing, we are giving ourselves space and permission  
to be our best selves.

This is such a service to us!  
Simply pausing allows us to achieve 3 of our 7 principles!

It's just a really great and simple way to remind ourselves of  
and connect to our interconnected web,  
to make room for the holy,  
to make room for our best selves.

With every Breath in,  
we breathe in peace.  
we breathe in joy and suffering.

For every Breath out,  
we breathe out love.  
We breathe out compassion.

We receive grounding and connection.  
We are able to give compassion and understanding.

Will you breathe with me for a moment?

May we remember to pause.  
In a world of speedplay, may we pause.  
May we breathe in and breathe out.  
May we be aware.  
May we remember to inhale, connect and ground ourselves –  
and exhale, spreading compassion.

May what is guiding us be our best selves, our connection with our  
interconnected web, our whole and holy self.

Please rise, and join me in singing– Our closing hymn, “Guide My Feet”,  
number #348 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.