



## Use Your Inside Voice

BY VICTORIA SAFFORD, MINISTER, WHITE BEAR UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH, MAHTOMEDI, MINNESOTA

In a congregation I once served was a man who'd been there many years—not a noisy person, but one who was pretty loud in his dislike of silence in the Sunday service. "That's not what we pay you for," he told me when we introduced a time of meditation every week—the briefest eye-blink of silent meditation, like a splinter of a plank of driftwood we can cling to in the turbulent wild waters of our crazy days and busy weeks, the slenderest sliver of quiet. "We're not paying you to not talk," he said, "I can be quiet by myself at home, or by turning down the volume," which he frequently did, on his hearing aid, if he didn't like the sermon or the choir or the announcements. Deliberate silence, shared silence, seemed to him a waste of time, and he sat each Sunday in the front row with three watches on his arm, all set to the time zones where his grown children were living. As the meditation began, he'd hold up his arm, tapping his wrist, timing the wasted seconds when nothing was spoken or heard or accomplished or solved or sung. After one minute he'd raise an eyebrow; after two minutes, he'd clear his throat or blow his nose or cough or accidentally drop his hymnal.

Silence is not the only way in. Meditation, reflection, contemplative prayer—they're not the only doors to the interior life, not the only way in to the hidden chambers of the heart, or the deep recesses of the mind where memories are kept in scattered drifts like dust beneath a bed, and conclusions are drawn and creative ideas incubated in the dark subconscious. Silence is not the only way in to the deepest core of your being, which strangely is the part of you that connects most authentically to everyone else and everything else and even to the holy. (It's so strange that we have to go inward in order to reach out to others with integrity and clarity and courage and love.) Silence is not the only way in to the soul, but it is one way. We practice it to rest and to remember that we are more than the sum of our opinions and fears, of our intentions and words and ideas. We breathe in and remember, even as fleetingly as the air fills the lung, that we're embodied; we exist as bodies, made of air and water, fully mortal, only briefly here. We breathe in and acknowledge the body; we breathe out and remember the spirit, the spark, the light, the ember of divinity present at our birth and burning still, inside. Breathing in, breathing out, we come back to what we are. Or, at the very least, we let go of the reins for a single, blessed moment—let go of the will and the worry and the wanting, the endlessly wanting. For a second, we just breathe, and to do so together is a holy communion.

A woman wrote to me:

*I would like to come into the church to sit for a moment in silence, or to meditate on a passage printed in the bulletin, or to listen to music, or even softly sing. Loving and large-hearted as they are, I would like to begin by not greeting my neighbors. By greeting something inside. For me it is a rare and needful thing.*

For her it was, but for my friend with the three watches it was excruciating. He had been a scientist, a pragmatist, a lover of scheduled efficiency, complex problems with straightforward solutions. He was for a time the church treasurer, and for another time the chair of the social action committee: busy and task-oriented. He was also a lover of music—and when the organ filled that church with sound, or a string quartet or a single oboe pierced us, or a Gospel choir stomped and shook the house, he was in a kind of reverie. He had his own ways in to the life of the spirit, as each one of us does. He knew how to get there, how to

# Quest

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The songs  
of the guardians  
of silence are  
the most powerful  
• Joy Harjo •

A monthly for religious liberals

### THINKING ABOUT SILENCE

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go deep, how to shut his eyes and let the music, and sometimes the words of the readings, wash over his brow and smooth out the tension. He was a person not afraid to cry in church, to let tears fall, and I wondered sometimes about those grown children in their far-off time zones, and his wife who'd died, and how he lived alone. He knew how to get there, how to go deep, and how to come back to us restored.

There are a thousand ways to pray.

In the other hours, every day, we are driven to distraction by ten thousand large and little things, demanding things and enticing things, seductive, mind-numbing, dutiful things, night terrors and regrets, fears both justified and foolish, work things, play things, electronic things. It takes such discipline to be still, to be quiet, to listen to no sound. To be non-productive, ineffective, inefficient, slothful, prayerful, reverent, ready... for nothing.

*When the house is clean,* we say.

When my desk is clear, bills paid, account balanced, my inbox empty, the decomposing Jack-o-lantern scraped from its puddle on the porch, the Christmas presents purchased, wrapped, hidden or mailed—then I'll take a cleansing breath, because then I will deserve it. Once I stop eating, start exercising, stop working, start working, then I will listen to the winter night, light my candles, pray my prayers, take a conscious breath. I'll get around to giving thanks, making amends, forgiving someone's trespasses, maybe starting with my own. I'll listen to my inside voice, and find the words to tell my children, tell my parents, tell my friend, how I love them. When everything's in order, perfect order, when everything's under control, my own control, I'll be ready. I'll be fully present to my life. The only trouble is, I may be very old by then, or dead.

I don't know what in the life of my parishioner led him to be so deeply disturbed by silence, what history made silence terrifying. I do know that I learned about the beauty of silence when I was very young.

I have an old December memory, many decades old, that comes to me at this time of year, especially if there's snow. It's like an old Christmas card or treasured ornament: you hold it in your hand and it works like a time machine, transporting you back to a universe so far from where you are right now, and yet so familiar you can feel the scratchy wool and smell the mothball mittens. In this memory, my father and I are all bundled up, and together, after supper. It's late at night (probably about 6:30), and we're going for a walk outside, just the two of us, without my mother or my brothers. I am maybe five or six years old, and we are going to look at the holiday lights in our neighborhood. It's magical. Everything is silent because of the snow on the ground and the snow shawling down, and silent also because of my hat and earmuffs and scarf. There are no cars, so we walk down the middle of the street, a wide white corridor with no other footprints, and colored lights all the way down, on both sides. Every house is like a silent diorama, with a Christmas tree or menorah in the window, and people moving in their living rooms or kitchens, playing the piano, watching TV, like life-size dolls in dollhouses. It is absolutely silent except for the scrunching of my jacket and snow-pants, which I only notice when we stop to eat snow or count the plastic reindeer on a rooftop. When we stop, we stand in a frozen ocean of quiet. We go hand in hand, very tall and very small, not talking, for miles and miles, hours and hours, all the way around our block. (It probably took about half an hour.)

All these years later, all this life later,

when I feel myself being swept into the vortex of holiday expectations, the stress and noise and jangling, cheesy music everywhere, and white knuckle driving, and the requisite worry about money and family and losses and love, whether I look for it or not, this memory returns to me. Not just the snapshot image, but rather the visceral traces of wonder I felt as a child that night; the deepest dark, the coldest cold, the thickest snow, my father fully present (which at other times he really wasn't), the snug houses, the enchanted lights, and silence.

This is a memory of a very simple thing—a walk round the block after dinner. I don't really know if it happened just once or many times, but I do know that it set in me a longing in December that has nothing to do with holiday frenzy, nothing whatsoever to do with shopping or theology, and if I can remember to remember it, and dwell inside it, it centers me and anchors me, and reminds me that what I love at this time of year and what I need is a cold night, very dark, a little snow, and maybe someone to go walking with.

In the quiet, we remember what we are, which is not perfect, but wholly human (in both senses of the word, wholly/holy). The whole motion of Advent in the Christian calendar, as half the world goes dark, is toward remembering and waiting. Not for a single, exceptional, mythical child, but for the quiet conviction, the silent confession, that each life within all life is a gift. Each life, including your own. For that conviction to take root, to find words to give voice to that confession, you have to be willing to travel through darkness and silence. You have to be willing to wait.

Now is the time, there is no other time, for listening and breathing, to open your hands and let go of what-

ever it is that you're clenching too tightly. To let go, and to let come, all that's beyond your control.

We apprehend the holy in the spaces and the emptiness, the intervals, interstices, and pauses. It's also where our own most true and honest voice resounds, long before we're ready for prime time. We also know, and need constant reminding, that there is only one way to hear another person, only one way to behold and honor and acknowledge the worth and dignity and beauty of another person, the living holy scripture that is another human being. That is to bless their truth, their voice, their experience, to shut up and let them talk, to make space to amplify all the stories, all the words, that are not our own.

Silence is a spiritual practice and an ethical requirement, but only when balanced by speaking. We go within (in meditation, contemplation, prayer) in order to come out, to bring to full volume, full courage, full love the power and integrity and force of our conviction. Use your inside voice. Find your truth in listening to your heart, to your God, to the stories shared by other people, their testimony landing on your spirit like a holy offering. We share quiet to let that all sink in, and then encourage one another to use the full strength of our inside voices to bless the world, to heal and transform it. Silence is a practice, not a permanent condition. There's a time for silence and for breaking silence; for waiting, and for sounding the alarm, for proclaiming why we can't wait, why we won't be silent anymore.

We go within in order to come out. Breathing in and breathing out, even for a fleeting moment in the middle of a Sunday, or any day, we listen for the breath of God, the breath of life and conscience. We restore the soul, and then repair the world. ■



## Silence as a Spiritual Tool

BY PEGGY CLARK,  
SENIOR MINISTER,  
COMMUNITY CHURCH OF  
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Silence is the tool that brings us back from fragmentation into wholeness. So many of us live lives of division, running from one thing to the next, waiting for moments just to sit down. When we do, it's often in front of a screen or while waiting for whatever's next, possibly someone who's late who's also living a life of fragmentation. There's an accepted state of constant semi-attention to the sound of voices, music, traffic, the generalized noise of what goes on all the time around us or the volcano of words that crash on our computer screens with their attachments and links to more words and tweets and updates. This keeps us immersed in a flood of racket and words, a diffuse medium in which our consciousness is half-diluted: we are not quite thinking, not entirely responding. We are not fully present and not entirely absent; not fully withdrawn yet not completely available, leading us all into a state of semi-consciousness as we make our way through busy days. Silence is the healing balm that brings us back to ourselves and into right relationship with the world around us.

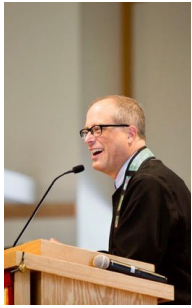
I'm talking about silence as a powerful spiritual tool. I'm also aware that silence can be a powerful tool of oppression. *Silencing* is not a gift, nor is it healing. When you are silenced by political or social norms, when your voice can't be heard, when your experience isn't recognized, when you've been erased by dominant culture, you've been silenced. When our government removes mention of LGBTQ protections from anti-discrimination guidelines, millions of people are silenced. When the talking heads on TV

giving their opinions about the day's events are all white, millions of people are erased. When subways are designed so only people with working legs can use them, millions of people are disappeared. When previously incarcerated people aren't given a vote, millions of people are muted. When bathrooms are labeled for men or women, millions of people are forgotten. When I list ways people are marginalized in my sermons, but I forget the way *you* live differently in the world, *you* are also silenced.

Silence can be a wrench closing the opening where the steam can get out, used by people in power to keep the hissing noise down. It can become a weapon of dominance, wielded to ensure submission and irrelevance. Language is used in courtrooms and welfare offices and at child protection hearings to ensure the silence and continued existence of an underclass.

But silence can also become the resistance, a non-participation in the language of oppression. A response to subjugation. A liberation rather than an accommodation. Sometimes we use silence because it's the only response to a world of too many words, of violent words, of threatening and destructive words. Silence can be self-determination. When systems use language to oppress, our nonparticipation can use silence to express sovereignty.

But, mostly, I'm talking about silence as a spiritual tool, the silence that brings us back to ourselves, back to the Source of our being, the single place where we are most authentically who we are. There's a voice that has to be heard without language. It's the healing silence we experience when we first walk in our doors after a busy day, when we take that first deep breath; or that magical silence after a hymn of shared faith is over, when the last word was sung, the final note played; or the meditative silence of standing in a field while it snows. ■



## Sanctuaries of Silence

BY **ROGER BERTSCHAUSEN**,  
INTERIM SENIOR  
MINISTER, FIRST  
UNITARIAN SOCIETY IN  
MADISON, WISCONSIN

Three sanctuaries of silence come to mind as I think about creating more space for silence in my life. The first is a quiet lake I love up north in Wisconsin. Shoe Lake is about a twenty-minute walk from a little place we used to have in the Nicolet National Forest. There are only two human dwellings. There's not an easy boat access. In fact, I've never seen a boat other than my kayak on the lake.

At least once a winter, I like to hike to Shoe Lake and stand by the shore. Trudging along, each step I take makes a sound in the snow. I walk off the path and make my way through the deep snow down to the lake. Then I stop and stand as still as I can. The sounds of my footsteps crunching in the snow cease. And there is no other sound. With the leaves off the trees, even the wind is silent. The lake is frozen, so no waves lap onto the shore. I can't hear any cars on nearby roads, or snowmobiles. Sometimes snow gently and noiselessly falls. All is quiet, absolutely quiet. The silence is stunning, and arresting. I hold my breath so that even that sound ceases. It is a sacred moment. The expansiveness of the silence fills my soul. That moment of beauty alone can just about get me through the long winter.

My second sanctuary of silence wasn't actually silent at all. But it was unplugged. My wife and I went on a backpacking trip in the San Juan Mountains, near Silverton, Colorado. We left the main road and drove along a pockmarked, unpaved forest road. We parked on the side of the road near a trailhead, and then hiked up three

and a half miles and 3000 feet to the Lower Ice Lake Basin. We picked the most isolated campsite, out of earshot and eyesight of other backpackers. We camped in a stand of trees near a waterfall—hence the lack of silence. From there we could do day hikes up another thousand feet to the Upper Basin and some of the most gorgeous mountain lakes I've ever seen. Our timing was perfect: it was the peak of wildflower season in the Upper Basin.

Maybe best of all: we were far out of cell phone range. There was no point in even turning on the phone. For four days, we were blissfully unplugged. It was just Amy and me and the astonishing beauty and peacefulness of the mountain basins resplendent with wildflowers. Nothing distracted from the beauty that enveloped us. In its own way, there was a silence to the place: no ringing phones, no TV, no cars, no lawn mowers, no music. Just the sounds of the wind and the waterfall and the afternoon thunderstorms. Only the occasional drone of a jet far overhead reminded us that we were in the modern era.



The third sanctuary of silence was one I found on a visit to the Philippines, in my former congregation's partner church village of Banaybanay. Like the Ice Lake Basin in Colorado, there was noise, and actually plenty of it. But plugging into the world of cell phones and the internet was not even an option: there was no signal available, no wireless, no computers.

Lots of things contributed to the magic of the visit. Not unimportant among them was the fact of being unplugged. Distractions were not available on my

cell phone or iPad. I was able to fulfill my desire to be completely present, savoring each moment with joy and delight. No, Banaybanay is not silent. But there was a quality of silence that nonetheless pervaded my visit, just as much as standing by Shoe Lake or relishing the beauty of the Ice Lake Basin. It is that silence that I desperately need more of in my life.

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“Silence reminds me to  
take my soul with me  
wherever I go.”

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Why? Maybe more than anything, the quality of silence opens up our imaginations. Silence liberates our imaginations. When we live totally plugged-in lives, drowning in the cacophony of information and data and media overload, our imaginations tend to shut down. When I stand by Shoe Lake in the utter silence, when I sit among thousands of brilliant wildflowers in the Ice Lake Basin, when I walk around Banaybanay fully present with and connected to my new friends and the place they live, my imagination soars. I imagine what it might be like to live a centered, open, peaceful life truly connected to other people and place. I imagine new possibilities for my life and the world. My creative juices start flowing.

The health of my spirit and the vitality of my imagination might depend on my creating sanctuaries of silence in this world that is so full of noise and constant input from all directions, and the exhaustion that comes from trying to sort through it all. As a little North Dakota girl wrote in response to a classroom experiment that author Kathleen Norris did with noise and silence, “Silence reminds me to take my soul with me wherever I go.” May we find sanctuaries of silence that continually bring our souls back home. ■



## Profound Silence

BY **DEBRA ANDREWS**, LAY MINISTER,  
FOX VALLEY UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST  
FELLOWSHIP, WISCONSIN

The day Gerry and I moved to Neenah from Milwaukee was a long, exhausting one. Done in from moving boxes and furniture all day, we fell into bed. Something woke me in the middle of



the night though—something odd. It was the absence of sound.

We had moved from an urban neighborhood where buses, cars, shouts and laughter, music and the occasional street argument were the background to our days and our nights. When I woke up to all this silence, I was uneasy. Had something really bad happened? Was the power off? I checked on our baby, flicked a switch on and off in the kitchen and wandered out to the front porch. All seemed well.

Then it dawned on me. It was just that quiet here, at least at this particular moment. Of course, quiet is relative. These days I hear a factory letting off steam in the middle of the night, and switching trains clank loudly about 4AM. We live near a hospital, and their helicopter can make quite a racket. Still, my neighborhood is quieter than most.

It's even quieter than many campgrounds. Even in remote areas, the thrum of traffic noise intrudes into parks and natural areas, making it harder to be attuned only to the sound of birds, water, wind and fire.

It's challenging to be truly silent in our world, and when I find that silence it's hard to know what to make of it, how to adjust and move into it. You know what I do? I turn on the radio. It drives my husband crazy, but I guess it reassures me and make me feel less alone with my thoughts.

Annie Dillard, in her essay "A Field of Silence," writes about a moment of profound silence she experienced while living on a farm:

*... the silence gathered and struck me. It bashed me broadside from the heavens above .... There was only silence. It was the silence of matter caught in the act and embarrassed. Its poise and its stillness were unendurable, like the ring of the silence you hear in your skull when you're little and notice you're living, the ring which resumes later in life when you're sick.*

Well. Clearly silence is not for the faint-hearted. Later, when Dillard tries to describe this moment to a friend, the story tumbles out in ways that surprise even her. It was a deeply spiritual moment for Dillard—one so outside of her experience that it caused her to look at an everyday scene in a completely new way. I'm willing to bet that she's still pondering the significance of that brief but eternal moment of silence.

May we all invite and make room for silence in our lives, to hear the ring in our skulls that reminds us we're alive. ■

## Silence

BY **TIMOTHY**, CLF MEMBER INCARCERATED IN FLORIDA

When I was a child I used to fear the silence. One of the tortures I endured was being thrown into a small closet with no light, and being left there for days at a time.

As a six-year-old, I was terrified of the silence because it represented that closet. Dark, lonely, cramped. All alone, after a day the air would become stale and permeated with the taint of urine and feces from where I soiled myself. The only sounds I would hear were my shallow breathing and my quiet sobs, for I had learned the hard way to remain quiet in that closet, and *never* bang or knock on the door.

I am in my fifties now. I've served over thirty years in prison, and it is almost funny, because now I miss the silence.

When I chose to alter my reality, to change who I was into someone I could love and accept, I spent over a decade working through the trauma of my childhood. Years and years of analyzing myself, doing self-therapy and facing brutal truths about myself have resulted in someone who has conquered that fear of silence.

Now I am surrounded by noise 24 hours a day. Seventy other men talking, arguing, laughing. The TV blaring, the fans constantly running—many of which squeak. Even at 2am the fans are going. In addition, I can hear men snoring, the whir of PAP machines, the occasional couple laying on the floor rutting.

Now I long for silence once in a while, and I am amazed how, by changing my mindset, my fears have become my desires.

However, I have found one place that I can go to escape all of the noise, a place of blessed silence—inside myself. I took up meditation a while back, and I have discovered a place of silence while sitting in the middle of a madhouse.

Sometimes my meditations are as peaceful as the most remote island on a perfectly calm day. Other times, when I am meditating to work on my issues, it is scarier than even that closet used to be. But it is always silent within myself. ■

## From Your Lead Ministry Team

### Dark of Winter

MICHAEL TINO, LEAD MINISTRY TEAM

Where I live, December marks the beginning of winter. And in the Hudson Valley of New York, those winters are often cold, silent, and dark. I have learned to embrace all three of those qualities as annual gifts to my spirit.

It has not been an easy journey to accept the gifts of winter. It is deeply engrained in many cultural traditions that what we need to do is bring light, warmth, and noise into our homes to oppose the forces of winter.

We adorn trees, festoon our houses, hang lanterns and light candles. We light bonfires and gather around fireplaces. Societies have spent a lot of energy rejecting winter, as winter was harsh and cruel to our ancestors. But it doesn't have to be for us—life is harsh and cruel enough.

So instead, I greet winter with the knowledge that it is asking us to find something deep within us. Cold calls out for companionship. Silence for reflection. And darkness invites healing and transformation.

This December, I wonder if you can find and hold onto some silence. Maybe your silence will come while you work, or in those moments after everyone around you has gone to sleep.

And in those moments, listen to the still, small voice within. Think about those with whom you are connected—though time and space may separate you. Pray to whatever you hold sacred for strength and guidance. But listen.

I hope, too, that you can find some healing darkness. It is a common and misguided metaphor that equates dark with evil—one that has done more harm than good in our society.

And if winter's cold reaches you wherever you are, I pray you know your community's love surrounds you. ■

### Moments of Silence

AISHA HAUSER, LEAD MINISTRY TEAM

During my first year living in Seattle, I heard a news report of a woman being arrested for throwing a frozen chicken out her apartment in the middle of a crowd of runners in a 5K race. When asked why, she said that the race woke her up. She had just completed an overnight shift at her job and she was exhausted. She just wanted quiet.

I thought about the expectation and need for quiet, and how in a city setting, it is simply unheard of. I've lived in a few cities in my life, and while any city may have some moments of quiet, silence is elusive. The only times I've encountered silence in a city were during a blizzard. Even then, it wasn't completely silent because snow has a sound, subtle and haunting.

It's been almost ten years since I've lived in a climate where a blizzard is a possibility, and I miss it. I miss the stillness. I'm not sure I've experienced silence in its truest form. I've heard of pods that are filled with water and one can pay to float in this enclosure which is dark and silent. I'm not sure I would want to try this, but it is tempting.

Tempting, to encounter true silence. No rustling of leaves of a tree, no birds chirping, not even snow falling. The closest I come to silence is to quiet my mind, and even then I need to imagine nature and soothing noises. I've learned to use my breath as a way to calm my spirit and bring internal silence to my busy and cluttered thoughts. If I'm needing to turn off the noise around me, I close my eyes and concentrate on my breath. This helps me quiet my mind in the midst of so much noise. While not silent, it is as close as I can get in this noisy world. ■

### Universal Truths

CHRISTINA RIVERA, LEAD MINISTRY TEAM

As we head into the depths of winter I am always reminded of that in other parts of the world, people are experiencing the height of summer. Indeed, it is possible that some of you reading this are in those locations. How often do those of us in the United States center ourselves as the arbiters of what is going on in the world? How often do we as individuals center ourselves as the arbiters of truth?

Sometimes it takes us a moment of silence to realize that our "truth" is not the only truth. Our long nights of winter are an apt time to reflect on what we hold as both universal truths, as well as our own personal truths. Our Universalist heritage says that our universal truth is that we are all worthy of love. That we create a heaven on earth by loving each other and finding our shared humanity. What other universal truths do you find in our UU faith? Are they truly universal?

One of my personal truths is that I know that lived experience produces many truths. It is one of the hardest concepts we teach our children. This graphic helped me explain it to children, because they could see that for each perspective that person was correct.

What are some of your own personal truths? Are they true for you and/or are they universal? Do you value only those truths you have experienced? What do you do when someone else has a different perspective which makes their truth

the one that needs to be centered? These long winter nights (or summer days!) are a good time to reflect on these questions. We'd love to hear your answers. You can always send them to us at [quest@clfu.org](mailto:quest@clfu.org). ■





## REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR,  
MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN  
LEARNING, CHURCH OF  
THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

*Let all mortal flesh keep silence...* begins an ancient hymn that is still a popular Christmas carol. *Let all mortal flesh keep silence* is not the way we generally go about celebrating holidays. More often, holidays are a time of frantic preparation and raucous gatherings and music and stuffing our mortal flesh with festive foods. There are a lot of holidays of the season—Christmas and Chanukah and the solstice just for starters. And they all have different traditions of story and song and feasting. But silence? Not so much.

Many of us are used to thinking of the holiday season as beginning with Thanksgiving, and ramping up from there through New Year's Eve with celebrations with friends and family, all making a joyful noise. I'm thinking about this in June, throwing my imagination forward, and I have no way of knowing, but my guess is that, at least for those of us in the U.S., holidays are going to be very different this year. It's looking like just about the most dangerous thing you can do, in terms of spreading COVID-19, is to have a big gathering at your house where you talk and laugh and sing and eat together.

It's not very likely that holiday celebrations are going to take place this winter in the ways we are used to. Some of us have already done Passover Seders by Zoom—turns out it is really not at all like gathering together in person to share story and food and wine. We are not going to have office parties if people are not going in to their offices. We will not have big gatherings of extended family if people are not traveling—or not gathering.

Which sounds like an enormous let-down. We've been through a lot. We need our celebrations and our connec-

tions and our stories that remind us of the baby who is a living manifestation of the love of God, of the light that refuses to go out, of the way the light will always shift and stretch through the seasons. Celebrating is a big chunk of religious practice, and kind of a big piece of how we are human together.

If we can't get together to celebrate—to feast and to sing and dance and hug and tell stories and open presents and light candles and all—then what does that leave us? A big hole full of silence. Or maybe a mountain of silence.

After all, quiet is a part of our beautiful humanity as well. The held silence of a group together in silent prayer. The silence as we pause to reflect in a chal-



lenging conversation. The silence of standing out under the stars. The silence that falls over a household as everyone finally drifts into sleep.

*Let all mortal flesh keep silence...* Not for always. Maybe not even for very long. We need the joyful noise of celebration and connection. We need the powerful noise of people speaking up for change, for justice. We need music and conversation, the hubbub of children or pets, the sounds of birds singing or branches moving in the wind.

But we also need sacred silence. Time to remember that our flesh is mortal, and therefore precious. Time to center down, to develop roots and not just leaves and flowers. Time to be with our thoughts, to nurture our own creativity. Time to consider what might come next, out of this place of emptiness.

Time to be—where we are and when we are, open to the present moment.

Perhaps your holiday celebrations might include sitting quietly with the lit

beauty of a Christmas tree, or crafting gifts with love. Maybe you will take quiet time by the light of the Chanukah candles, rejuvenating the light inside yourself so that it burns strong even when circumstances threaten to snuff it out. You might go for a quiet walk in your neighborhood to enjoy the festive lights. Maybe you will walk out into the late sunrise after the longest night of the year—or the late sunset on the longest day of the year—and try to feel in the silence how we are all spinning together on this great ball, tilted in relation to the sun.

I am betting, that, no matter what, we will find ways to gather (if only virtually), to make music, to share stories, to celebrate. I wouldn't be surprised if, like so many other years, it feels a bit frantic, a bit flustered, even a bit loud.

Whatever the season brings, I am hoping that it offers you some bits of sacred silence, of peaceful darkness, of quiet rest, of energizing reflection. Whether or not you celebrate the silence, I hope that you find moments to celebrate *in* silence, finding renewal for the days to come. ■

## A Fond Goodbye

Close to 20 years ago Rev. Jane Rzepka invited me to join the CLF team as the editor of *Quest*. A few years later my role expanded as the “cyber-minister,” doing our first foray into church online with covenant groups hosted by the UUA's list serve. Then my role expanded again to take on religious education as well. As CLF has changed my roles have shifted, coming to include, amongst other things, leading worship and writing the Daily Compass reflections. And now roles at CLF are shifting again, as is the vision for *Quest*. I am enormously grateful for all my wonderful years with the CLF, and all the ways I have been privileged to connect with so many of you. —Rev. Lynn ■



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## Ode to Silence

You, silence,  
are the ground on which we build  
the fragile sandcastles of our every spoken word.

You, silence,  
are quicksand where curses and cockiness  
and arrogance find their end.

You, silence,  
are the strand of beach we stroll where loneliness  
turns into solitude,  
and our small heartbeats join the much vaster  
heartbeat of tide and wave.

You, silence,  
are the hand in which the pearl of the universe,  
grown around the painful grain of human suffering,  
rests in heartbreaking beauty.

You, silence,  
are the wide, bright delta into which  
the river of this prayer fans out,  
before it flows into the indigo Deep,  
quiet, dark and lovely.

Come, silence, fill this moment. ■



From Sonata for Voice and Silence by **Rev. Mark Belletini**, published by Skinner House in 2008, and available through *InSpirit* at [uuabookstore.org](http://uuabookstore.org).