



Touchstones Project

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Wintering



Introduction to the Theme

The Measure of Winter

Taking the measure of winter is a prelude to exploring wintering. Unitarian Universalist minister Greta Crosby wrote, "Let us not wish away the winter. It is a season to itself, not simply the way to spring." Winter varies by hemisphere, latitude, longitude, altitude, temperature, snow accumulation, wind patterns, climate patterns (e.g., La Niña), darkness, and more. The farther north one goes, the more dramatic winter's impact. For example, Inuvik, in Canada's Northwest Territories, has an average winter temperature of minus 7° C (-23° F), while Utqiagvik (aka Barrow), Alaska, gets 67 days of darkness.

Based on the sun's position, astronomical winter starts on the winter

solstice and continues until the vernal equinox (12/21 to 3/20 in our hemisphere). Meteorological winter, based on temperature, begins on December 1st and runs through the end of February. Each captures an aspect of winter: darkness and temperature.

Full moons measured and defined winter. For the Cherokee, the moons from December to March were *Snow Moon* (for the first snowfall), *Cold Moon*, *Bone Moon* (because there was so little food, people had to eat bone marrow soup), and *Wind Moon* (for winds that prepared the land for renewal).

Our species emerged in Africa's tropical environment, so our spread to colder climates required adaptations to deal with winter, including mastery of fire, to move to and through forested areas in northern lands.

The ebb and flow of winter included ice ages. The first ice age began 2.4 billion years ago and lasted 300 million years. Twelve glaciations over the last million years came after Earth's five ice ages. The most prolonged glaciation, lasting 50,000 years, peaked 650,000

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Wintering & Regeneration

Wintering is the process of navigating winter, a season that is, in many ways, a time of regeneration. Of course, there is the external season, but there is an internal season that also requires wintering skills. And, there are individual differences, as Martin Marty noted when he contrasted a summery spirituality with a wintry spirituality. For some, winter pushes them outdoors, while it pulls others indoors. For both, regeneration is an essential process whether by the exhilaration of downhill skiing or the contentment of drinking hot cocoa in front of a fireplace. No two winters are alike, nor two winterings, which is why Katherine May writes, "you'll find wisdom in your winter, and once it's over, it's your responsibility to pass it on."

A Theme-Based Ministry Project

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Wisdom Story

How Coyote Stole Fire, adapted



A long time ago, humans came into being and they loved the world. They loved the springtime with the beautiful emerging green plant life. They loved the summer, a time of berries and growth. As autumn came, the nights became colder and the humans shivered. The children and elders would die from the cold. Winter was a hard time.

One day Coyote wandered by the human village. He could hear the wailing of the humans as they mourned their loved ones who had died in the cold of winter. Spring was finally coming and Coyote heard an old one say, "Feel the warmth of the sun. If only we could have such warmth in the winter to heat our teepees." Coyote was not of the People and had no need for fire, but he felt sorry for the men and women who were sad about the others who had died.

Coyote knew that on the top of a far mountain, three Fire Beings lived. These Fire Beings hoarded the fire and would not share with others. Coyote crept to the mountain to see how the Fire Beings were guarding the fire. Coyote watched the Fire Beings for many days. He watched as the fire was fed with dry

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Regeneration

Never Cold Again

(Continued from page 1) **Coyote Stole Fire** things from the land like pine cones and twigs. He watched how the Fire Beings took turns guarding the fire one at a time at night while the others slept.

Coyote went back down the mountain to speak to his friends among the People. He told them of the shivering hairless humans and their need for fire. He told them of the selfish Fire Beings and their inability to share. He asked his friends among the People to help him. Squirrel, Chipmunk, Frog and Wood all offered to help Coyote bring fire to the humans.

Coyote crept back up the mountain. As the Fire Beings were changing the guard for the fire, Coyote leapt up to the fire and took a burning coal. Immediately, he turned and ran down the mountain. The Fire Beings flew after him, clawing to try and get the fire back. One Being touched the tip of Coyote's tail which has since always been white.

Coyote threw the fire and Squirrel caught it. The coal touched his back and his tail has been arched since then. Then Squirrel threw the ember to Chipmunk, who froze in fear. Finally, he turned and ran. A Fire Being clawed his back, giving him white stripes forever. Chipmunk threw the burning coal to Frog who turned and ran. One of the Fire Beings grabbed Frog's tail, but Frog jumped and tore free and thus he has no tail. The Fire Beings came at Frog again and Frog flung the coal at Wood.

Wood kept the coal safe, but the Fire Beings could not figure out how to get the coal from Wood. They yelled at Wood, they sang to Wood, they even promised presents to Wood, but Wood did not give up the coal. Finally, the Fire Beings returned to the mountain and left the People alone, assuming that if they could not release the coal, neither could the People.

Coyote took Wood to the human village and showed them how to get fire from Wood. He took two sticks and rubbed them together. Then he spun a sharpened stick in a hole in another piece of wood. Fire came to the humans, and they were never cold again.

A More Inward Life

A Winter Walk

Henry David Thoreau, excerpt

This 16-page essay appeared in The Dial, in 1843. This Transcendentalist magazine was edited by Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson. In his journal, Thoreau wrote, "Take long walks in stormy weather or through deep snows in the fields and woods, if you would keep your spirits up."

...We sleep, and at length awake to the still reality of a winter morning. ... The stillness of the morning is impressive.

...Silently we unlatch the door, ...and step abroad to face the cutting air. ... Opening the gate, we tread briskly along the lone country road, crunching the dry and crisped snow under our feet, ...while ...through ...powdered windows we see the farmer's early candle, ...emitting a lonely beam....

...The sun at length rises through the distant woods.... Meanwhile we step hastily along through the powdery snow....

...The wonderful purity of nature at this season is a most pleasing fact. Every decayed stump ...and the dead leaves of autumn, are concealed by a clean napkin of snow.

...At length, having reached the edge of the woods, ...we enter [a thicket as if going] ...under the roof of a cottage, and cross its threshold, all ...banked up with snow. ...As we stand in the midst of the pines, ...we wonder if the towns have ever heard their simple story.

... Nature confounds her summer distinctions at this season. The heavens seem to be nearer the earth. ...

In this lonely glen, with its brook draining the slopes, its creased ice and crystals of all hues, ...our lives are more serene and worthy to contemplate.

...In winter, nature is a cabinet of curiosities.... In winter we lead a more inward life.

... Now commences the long winter evening around the farmer's hearth, ... for now the storm is over....

Source: <https://www.thoreau-online.org/a-winter-walk.html>

A Hidden Grace

Trees in Winter

Jacqueline Simon Gunn writes, "I envied the inanimate, / The trees that stand proudly in winter, / Not missing their leaves." Given her envy, one asks, which is the real tree, the one in its green summer glory, fully clothed in leaves or even its autumnal blaze of colored leaves, or the tree in winter, now bare, with trunk, limb, branch, and twig revealed? Of course, both are the real tree, but trees in winter reveal a hidden grace that invite contemplation.

In his exquisite reflection, *Trees*, Hermann Hesse wrote, "For me, trees have always been the most penetrating preachers." He continued, "Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth. They do not preach learning and precepts, they preach, undeterred by particulars, the ancient law of life." Part of the ancient law of life is how to winter. Hesse wrote, "When we are stricken and cannot bear our lives any longer, then a tree has something to say to us: Be still! Be still! Look at me! Life is not easy, life is not difficult. Those are childish thoughts.... Home is neither here nor there. Home is within you, or home is nowhere at all."

Katherine May writes how trees prepare for wintering, "Even as the leaves are falling, the buds of next year's crop are already in place, waiting to erupt again in spring. ...It's fallen leaves are mulching the forest floor, and its

roots are drawing up the extra winter moisture, providing a firm anchor against seasonal storms.



Its ripe cones and nuts are providing essential food in this scarce time for mice and squirrels, and its bark is hosting hibernating insects and providing a source of nourishment for hungry deer. It is far from dead. It is in fact the life and soul of the wood. It's just getting on with it quietly. It will not burst into life in the spring. It will just put on a new coat and face the world again."

Source: Touchstones

Readings from the Common Bowl

Day 1: “Winter is coming.”
George R.R. Martin



Day 2: “In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer.” Albert Camus

Day 3: “We have seasons when we flourish and seasons when the leaves fall from us, revealing our bare bones. Given time, they grow again.” Katherine May

Day 4: “Winter is the time for comfort, for good food and warmth, for the touch of a friendly hand and for a talk beside the fire: it is the time for home.” Edith Sitwell

Day 5: “When I started feeling the drag of winter, I began to treat myself like a favored child: with kindness and love.” Katherine May

Day 6: “I wonder if the snow loves the trees and fields, that it kisses them so gently? And then it covers them up snug, you know, with a white quilt; and perhaps it says, “Go to sleep, darlings, till the summer comes again.” Lewis Carroll

Day 7: “To get better at wintering, we need to address our very notion of time. We tend to imagine that our lives are linear, but they are, in fact, cyclical.” Katherine May

Day 8: “There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature—the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.” Rachel Carson

Day 9: “Be ahead of all parting, as though it already were behind you, like the winter that has just gone by. For among these winters there is one so endlessly winter that only by wintering through it will your heart survive.” Rainer Maria Rilke

Day 10: “Winter is not the death of the life cycle, but its crucible.” Katherine May

Day 11: “One writes music because winter is eternal and because, if one didn’t, the wolves and blizzards would be at one’s throat all the sooner.” David Mitchell

Day 12: “Spring passes and one remembers one’s innocence. Summer passes and one remembers one’s exuberance. Autumn

passes and one remembers one’s reverence. Winter passes and one remembers one’s perseverance.” Yoko Ono

Day 13: “Wintering is a season in the cold. It is a fallow period in life when you’re cut off from the world, feeling rejected, sidelined, blocked from progress, or cast into the role of an outsider.” Katherine May

Day 14: “Maintain a kind of summer in the midst of winter, and by means of windows even admit the light and with a lamp lengthen out the day.” Henry David Thoreau

Day 15: “And when old Winter puts his blank face to the glass, I shall close all my shutters, pull the curtains tight, and build me stately palaces by candlelight.” Charles Baudelaire

Day 16: “Here is another truth about wintering: you’ll find wisdom in your winter, and once it’s over, it’s your responsibility to pass it on. And in return, it’s our responsibility to listen to those who have wintered before us.” Katherine May



Day 17: “I realize there’s something incredibly honest about trees in winter, how they’re experts at letting things go.” Jeffrey McDaniel

Day 18: “My old grandmother always used to say, Summer friends will melt away like summer snows, but winter friends are friends forever.” George R.R. Martin

Day 19: “In winter, we are invited into a particular mode of sleep: not a regimented eight hours, but a slow, ambulatory process in which waking thoughts merge with dreams, and space is made in the blackest hours to repair the fragmented

narratives of our days.” Katherine May

Day 20: “...it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.” Charles Dickens

Day 21: “We changed our focus away from pushing through with normal life and towards making a new one. When everything is broken, everything is also up for grabs. That’s the gift of winter: it’s irresistible. Change will happen in its wake, whether we like it or not. We can come out of it wearing a different coat.” Katherine May

Day 22: “Melancholy were the sounds on a winter’s night.” Virginia Woolf

Day 23: “Snow creates that quality of awe in the face of a power greater than ours. It epitomizes the aesthetic notion of the sublime, in which greatness and beauty couple to overcome you—a small, frail human—entirely.” Katherine May

Day 24: “I’m still beyond obsessed with the winter season....” Taylor Swift

Day 25: “Wintering brings about some of the most profound and insightful moments of our human experience, and wisdom resides in those who have wintered.” Katherine May

Day 26: “The heart can get really cold if all you’ve known is winter.” Benjamin Alire Sáenz

Day 27: “Music brings a warm glow to my vision, thawing mind and muscle from their endless wintering.” Haruki Murakami

Day 28: “In winter, I want concepts to chew over in a pool of lamplight—slow, spiritual reading, a reinforcement of the soul. Winter is a time for libraries, the muffled quiet of book stacks, and the scent of old pages and dust.” Katherine May

Day 29: “Learn to like the sunrise and sunset, ...and the gentle fall of snow on a winter day.” Lowell Bennion

Day 30: “Wintering... is the courage to stare down the worst parts of our experience and to commit to healing them the best we can.” Katherine May

Day 31: “Winter is not a season, it’s an occupation.” Sinclair Lewis



Faith and Theology

Wintering: A Theology of Care

Winter, especially as you go further north, can be brutal. Of course, most can winter in homes that protect them against cold and snow, but not all. For homeless people or those living in substandard housing, winter can be brutal physically, emotionally, and spiritually. In addition, their resources for wintering are limited.

Beyond this, many people struggle with winter, whether related to the weather outside or the weather within. Wintering is the process by which we attend to both.

To understand how challenging winter could be just over one hundred years ago, we have Laura Ingall Wilder's *Little House* books, which were autobiographical. Her book, *The Long Winter*, was set during the winter of 1880–1881 in the southeastern Dakota Territory when Ingalls was 14 years old. Because of ongoing, severe blizzards on the Great Plains, they called it *The Snow Winter*, beginning with a

blizzard in October 1880 and continuing until March 1881. Snow accumulation reached eleven feet. It cut people off from trade and supplies, and available food stores ran dangerously low.

The following year, as recounted in, *These Happy Golden Years*, Laura, now 15 years old, became a teacher with a two-month teaching assignment (December–January) at the Brewster settlement, which was 12 miles from her home. She boarded with Mr. Brewster, the superintendent, and his wife and taught students in a roughly-constructed claim shanty. While there, Laura witnessed Mrs. Brewster, unstable and homesick, threatening her husband with a knife and screaming that he take her back East.

Life on the prairie could be brutal, especially in winter, because of weather conditions, alternating between howling wind and oppressive silence, harsh living conditions in claim shanties, and extreme isolation. Consequently, many women and some men experienced “prairie madness,” which could manifest as

changes, and, occasionally, violence.

While prairie madness is no longer an issue, winter can still be a struggle. Some people experience “cabin fever” if trapped indoors for an extended time due to extreme winter weather. While this is not a diagnostic term, cabin fever is real, manifesting unhappiness, restlessness, and general discomfort. “Cabin fever” was exacerbated during the height of the COVID pandemic, and often its consequences were severe.

The other winter malady is called the “winter blues.” The awareness that our moods can vary with the seasons is not new; however, in 1984, *Seasonal Affective Disorder* (SAD) was identified as a subset of depression associated with winter. In the U.S., about 4 to 6% of adults experience SAD, while the number in Canada is 2 to 3%. About 15% of adults in both countries deal with a milder form of SAD. While the incidence of SAD increases further north, the lower numbers in Canada are confusing. Some suggest that Canada’s quality of life is better than the U.S. and results in lower



stress, which decreases the prevalence of SAD.

The physical, emotional, and spiritual challenges of winter, call for skills, activities, and practices to use in the wintering process. These are aspects of a theology of care, both self-care and caring for others. Unfortunately, as was evident to Laura Ingalls, Mrs. Brewster was incapable of self-care or caring for others, as evidenced by her neglect of her son.

A theology of care in the context of wintering is grounded in our first three principles, “the inherent worth and dignity of every person,” “...compassion in human relations,” and “acceptance of one another and encouragement to

spiritual growth....” Several UU sources also inform this theology: 1. “a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces that create and uphold life;” 2. “the transforming power of love;” 5. “...the guidance of reason and the results of science;” and 6. “to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.”

A theology of care has to do with praxis, which focuses on doing, on living our principles and values into action. It draws on belief and wisdom, but it is grounded in action. A theology of care is a practical theology as it seeks, notes Unitarian Universalist theologian Thandeka, to be “a faith-in-action way of loving beyond belief.”

A theology of care includes pastoral care, but it is not limited to the role of a minister because of our congregational commitment to shared ministry. Our role in this kind of care is to be a companion, which means *to break bread with*. In this context, bread is a metaphor for paying attention, compassionate presence, deep listening, nurturing, empathy, kindness, respect, holding in heart and mind, hospitality, and emotional, social, and spiritual support. Being a caring companion involves the work of love, of being a spiritual friend. It is not about having answers or trying to “fix” someone. It is being **with** someone and being **for** someone.

In her book, *Wintering: The Power of Rest and Retreat in Difficult Times*, which is a memoir, as well as a trove of wisdom on wintering, Katherine May, writes, “Everybody winters at one time or another; some winter over and over again.” She continues, “Wintering is a season in the cold. It is a fallow period in life when you’re cut off from the world, feeling rejected, sidelined, blocked from progress, or cast into the role of an outsider. Perhaps it results from an illness or a life event such as bereavement or the birth of a child; perhaps it comes from a humiliation or failure. Perhaps you’re in a period of transition and have temporarily fallen between two worlds. Some ...creep upon us more slowly.... Some are appallingly sudden....”

In emphasizing care, she writes that wintering is a “time for reflection and recuperation, for slow replenishment, for

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Go Outdoors in Winter

Meghan Fitzgerald

...Winter is a time of rest for the natural world. Plants and animals in all different climates slow down in winter and benefit from the chance to restore. Even most cacti won't set flowers if they do not get their winter break.

Winter ...offers unique sensory experiences that, when you slow down..., are inspiring and enriching....

...Increasingly, misconceptions have rebranded winter as the season to stay indoors.

...We can't afford to keep our kids indoors and inactive. Studies show that kids today spend, ...[only] 50% to 70% of the time we did outdoors.

...Kids have already lost so much time for healthy play outdoors; how can we take 25% of what is left away by eliminating an entire season?

...The evidence that exposure to nature and play directly benefits health continues to mount.



Kids who spend more time outdoors are more physically active, and there is no shortage of research that physical activity drives positive health outcomes.

...Kids who spend time outdoors get sick less often. The perception that you'll catch a cold outside is just plain wrong.

Stagnant, indoor environments are breeding ...grounds for all kinds of germs....

Nature and play lower stress. Time spent in natural settings is restorative and reduces anxiety for kids.

...Commit to winter outdoors by trying to get outside every day this winter, even if just for a little while.

...Then, build ...great "come back inside" rituals. Think hot cocoa, blankets, warm socks on the radiator. Make "returning to coziness" a part of being outdoors.

Source: <https://tinkergarten.com/blog/why-being-outdoors-is-essential-for-wellness-even-in-winter>

Family Activity:

Winter Scavenger Hunt

Watch the video, *Winter Scavenger Hunt!* by SciShow Kids at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqdnM9MduF8>

(5:01), and make a list of winter things you want to look for.

For the list in the video, see the description below the video. Then take a walk to explore how the world has changed in winter. Collect things, like leaves, dry grass, acorns, pine cones, or take photos of animal tracks in snow, icicles, buds on bushes and trees, etc.

Family Activity:

Adapting to Winter

Watch the video, *How do animals adapt in winter?* by Hudson Crossing Park (4:59) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y47jlyR3mS0>.

Ask them what they liked about the video. Do they have questions, generally, or about something they didn't understand? To engage their imagination, ask them how they would adapt to winter if they were an animal. Then ask what makes winter hard for animals and humans. Finally, make a list of all the things that humans do to adapt to winter.



(Continued from page 4) **Faith & Theology**

putting your house in order. Doing those deeply unfashionable things—slowing down, letting your spare time expand, getting enough sleep, resting—is a radical act now, but it is essential."

While the incidence of SAD is relatively low, many suggestions for dealing with it are also good self-care practices for wintering. Consider the following: **1. Begin focusing on self-care in the autumn.** We have the metaphor of the harvest, gathering good things for oneself. Recall Aesop's fable of *The Ant and The Grasshopper*. The ants prepare for winter while the grasshopper makes music. Self-care can include connecting with friends and doing enjoyable activities. **2. Make social activities a priority.** Dr. Kim Burgess, a psychologist, writes, "Finding creative ways to stay connected with others during times of increased isolation is important." **3. Make sleep a spiritual discipline.** Practice "good sleep," which means going to sleep on time, getting enough sleep, and getting up on a set schedule. Oversleeping can occur due to higher melatonin levels in the winter, but too much sleep does not enhance one's mood. **4. Befriend the light.** In winter, natural light is a mood enhancer. Open the blinds or curtains, work in spaces with natural light, and use full spectrum light bulbs which replicate natural light. Consider using bright light therapy and dawn simulators if SAD is an issue. Get outdoors on sunny days at noon when natural sunlight peaks. **5. Go outside.** When weather permits, go outside on walks or run errands, especially when the sunlight is brightest. **6. Make moving a spiritual discipline.** While an exercise routine is always essential, it is vital in winter. At a minimum, simply walking outside can be beneficial. **7. Help others.** Not only is it wise to get outside, but in winter, it is essential to get outside ourselves. Consider making time for community service, social justice activities, or volunteering. **8. Address stress.** While we may not be able to stress less,

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One Must Have a Mind of Winter

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years ago. The most recent glaciation peaked 18,000 years ago, with glaciers covering Canada and reaching down to Illinois and Missouri.

A “Little Ice Age” occurred from 1300 to 1850 in Europe and North America. The impact was severe. As an example, a glacier advanced down the Chamonix Valley in the French Alps and destroyed six villages from 1600 to 1650. The Bishop of Geneva performed an exorcism in 1645 to prevent its relentless advance. It failed.

Winter has been a season of hardship and despair for most of our existence. Adam Gopnik explored winter in his 2011 Massey Lectures, *Winter: Five Windows on the Season*, delivered in Canada. He notes that wood as

a fuel worked well enough until it didn't. Given population growth, England experienced its first energy crisis from 1550 to 1640. Fuel-wood prices

rose ten-fold because of deforestation. Tim Adams writes, “winter was a time of great expense for the rich, and great misery for the poor.” Burned in small quantities since the 12th century, coal, ironically given global warming, became a savior as it replaced wood as the fuel of choice. Between 1640 and 1700, England switched to a coal economy for home heating and industry, which led to reimagining winter. Gopnik writes, “The romance of winter is possible only when we have a warm, secure indoors to retreat to, and winter becomes a season to look at as much as one to live through.” “These two worlds—the world of the safe window and the world of the white wilderness outside—always, in the end, merge and become one in the modern mind.”

The Mind of Winter

Winter entered the artistic imagination. The violent eruptions of the Indonesian volcano Mount Tambora in April

contributed to colder weather in 1816, a *Year Without a Summer*. Mary Shelley conceived her gothic novel *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus*, that year while on a summer vacation at Lake Geneva in Switzerland, where it was raining continuously and cold. Shelley set her novel in the Arctic and other frozen climes.

Gopnik writes, “This new idea of winter races from the Gothic landscapes of the German Romantics to the lyrical snowfalls of the Impressionists, and from the city Christmas parables of Charles Dickens to the iceberg visions of Lawren Harris, and right on to Nat King Cole singing *Baby, It's Cold Outside*.” In *The Snow Man*, Wallace Stevens began, “One must have a mind of winter / To regard the frost and the boughs / Of the pine-trees crusted with snow....”

The Myth of Winter

The Greek god, *Boreas*, was the master of the north wind and the bringer of winter. *Despoina*, the Greek goddess of winter and frost, was the daughter of *Poseidon* and *Demeter*. Perhaps the ancient Greeks understood winter best through the heart of *Demeter*, the Greek goddess attending to the harvest and agriculture. Grieving the loss of her daughter, *Persephone*, for the six months she lived in Hades each year, *Demeter's* sorrow caused winter. *Persephone* means the “bringer of destruction.”

The Japanese believed that if a woman died from the cold, she could become a *Yuki-onna*, a snow spirit. Inhumanly beautiful and able to float across the snow, with no footprints, her eyes struck terror in those lost in the snowy mountains. The myth arose in the *Muromachi Period* (1338-1573), spawning gruesome and hopeful folktales. For example, Zack Davisson writes, “one story says the *Yuki-onna* appears on the cusp of spring to bid a temporary farewell to winter.”

In Norse mythology, *Jotunheim* was the world of Eternal Cold, one of the nine worlds connected by the branches of *Yggdrasil*, the World Tree. It is the home of the *Jötnar*, the frost giants who threatened the gods in *Asgard* and the humans in *Midgard*.

The hag *Cailleach* in Gaelic mythology was the goddess of winter. She assumed

human form to rule from Samhain to Beltane, when she turned back to stone. *Cailleach* brought strong winds and freezing weather. Her staff could freeze the ground at a touch. The goddess *Brighde* ruled for the six warm months.

Hans Christian Andersen's *Snow Queen* (1844) was a different kind of *Yuki-onna* or *Cailleach* who bewitched Kay and eventually imprisoned him in her palace. At the end of the story, the Snow Queen flies away to torment warm countries as Gerda enters the castle and rescues Kay. Elsa was a “Snow Queen” in the Disney movie *Frozen*.

Winter myths continue, as illustrated in the *Game of Thrones* with the ominous mantra, *Winter is Coming*. It was the motto of House Stark of Winterfell and a foretelling of danger.

The Mirth of Winter

Diverse holidays launch the winter solstice, the year's darkest day, with mirth and merriment. The Roman celebration of *Saturnalia*, which began around 217 BCE with carnival-like festivities held in honor of *Saturnus*, the Roman god of agriculture and harvest, was an early winter solstice celebration.

The Julian calendar, adopted in 46 BCE by the Roman Empire, marked the winter solstice on December 25th. The church in Rome started to celebrate Christmas on December 25th, the winter solstice, in 336, as decreed by the emperor Constantine. According to the Gregorian calendar, adopted in 1582, the winter solstice now occurs around December 21st. As Gopnik notes, the power of Christmas lies in the fact that it is a profoundly compound festival, combining Christian themes with strong pagan and secular influences.

Stonehenge, located on Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire, England, was constructed between 3000 and 1520 BCE in seven stages as a stone circle monument to the dead, given its use as a cemetery. Its astronomical design involves a calendar corresponding to moon cycles, solstices, and more. Gatherers attend to witness the sun setting on the winter solstice, called midwinter in some places, and rising on the summer solstice. Some watch the sunrise on the day after the winter solstice.

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Mending the Soul

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Yaldā Night emerged as a winter solstice celebration in Persia (now Iran) during the reign of Darius Great (522 to 486 BCE). On *Yaldā*, meaning “birth,” families gather amidst candlelight, reading poetry and feasting on watermelon, pomegranates, and nuts.

Toji, the winter solstice celebration in Japan, is marked by eating *kabocha*, a winter squash (aka Japanese pumpkin), and taking a bath in water infused with a lemon-like citrus fruit called *yuzu*. Seeking to balance yin and yang, the yin of darkness and cold is most dominant on the winter solstice.

In China, the *Dongzhi Festival* on the winter solstice marks the beginning of an increase in yang, growing daylight, and more energy. Families gather and enjoy a large meal with dumplings, *jiaozi*, filled with ground meat or vegetables in the north and sweet bean paste in the south. In South Korea, *Dongji* (“Little New Year”) features *patjuk*, a red bean porridge, and gifts of calendars and socks. In addition, a wish is made for snow to ensure a bountiful harvest in the fall.

The *Feast of Juul*, held in Scandinavian countries at the time of the winter solstice, predated Christianity. A Juul or Yule log is burned on the hearth in honor of the Norse god, Thor. By the 9th century, Juul became part of Christmas, and Juul/Yule became names for Christmas in Scandinavia.

The Mending in Winter

In *Mending*, Unitarian Universalist minister Nancy Shaffer wrote, “How shall we mend you, sweet Soul? / What shall we use, and how is it / in the first place you’ve come to be torn? / Come sit. Come tell me. / We will find a way to mend you.” The Soul is not broken but worn. While one definition of wintering refers to snowbirds flocking to Arizona, Florida, New Mexico, and Texas, as well as the Gulf region, it also means “to care during winter.” Wintering is also about resilience, the ability to adapt and overcome challenges. Caring, engaging challenges and adapting, rest, silence, solitude, mending, and more make wintering a spiritual discipline. And that is our task.

Praise in Poetry

First Writing

W.H. Auden wrote, “Whatever its actual content and overt interest, every poem is rooted in imaginative awe. Poetry can do a hundred and one things, delight, sadden, disturb, amuse, instruct—it may express every possible shade of emotion, and describe every conceivable kind of event, but there is only one thing that all poetry must do; it must praise all it can for being and for happening.”

Unitarian Universalist minister Greta Crosby wrote, “Winter is a table set with ice and starlight. / Winter dark tends to warm light: fire and candle; / Winter cold to hugs and huddles; winter want to gifts and sharing; / Winter danger to visions, plans, and common endeavoring —/ And the zest of narrow escapes; winter tedium to merrymaking. / Let us therefore praise winter, Rich in beauty, challenge, and pregnant negativities.” How would you praise winter?

Katherine May writes, “Here is a ... truth about wintering: you’ll find wisdom in your winter, and once it’s over, it’s your responsibility to pass it on.” What wintering wisdom can you offer?

In Japan, a ritual for greeting the New Year is *Kakizome*, which means “first writing.” It involves writing a poem using calligraphy at the beginning of a new year, traditionally on January 2, but consider writing a haiku (three lines with 5 syllables / 7 syllables / 5 syllables) at any time throughout the month. For topics, consider winter or wintering.

Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694), the most famous poet in the Edo period in Japan, wrote, “Winter solitude— / In a world of one color / The sound of wind.” Given translation, the number of syllables change from Japanese to English. Bashō also wrote, “First snow / Falling / On the half-finished bridge.”

Regarding winter, “Trees in winter snow / Stark beauty in limb and branch / Praise in poetry,” or wintering, “Wintering is hard / Snowstorms without and within / Yet dawn comes anew,” or both / “Wintering winter / Endless possibilities / Imagine summer.”

Source: Touchstones

Praise Winter

(Continued from page 5) **Faith & Theology**

we can mitigate the effects of stress. Many of the practices listed above can reduce the impact of stress. Also, consider: eating dark chocolate, drinking green tea, listening to music, and eating well. Cooking can be a burden, but it can also be an activity that gives pleasure.

Consider cooking some comfort food from your childhood as a treat. Finally, laugh more. As Jessamyn West said, “A good time to laugh is when you can.” **9. Meditate.** Consider meditating for 10 minutes by sitting comfortably, closing your eyes, breathing out for 5 seconds, and breathing in for 5 seconds, over and over. Once this is an established practice, you can add other techniques. **10. Keep a journal.** Each night, reflect on and write down what was notable about the day. Reflect on your thoughts and feelings. Capture any concerns that you might



have. Consider setting one intention for the next day, something that you did today that you want to do differently, something you want to pay attention to, something new that you want to try, etc. Your journaling should take note of the wisdom of Jesus in the proto-Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*, “If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.”

Self-care and caring for others are fundamental to a theology of care. May the depth and breadth of our care in wintering be such that, with the Rev. Greta Crosby, we can “praise winter, / Rich in beauty, challenge, and pregnant negativities.” Source: Touchstones

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion Wintering

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “More than any other season, winter requires a kind of metronome that ticks away its darkest beats, giving us a melody to follow into spring. The year will move on no matter what, but by paying attention to it, feeling its beat, and noticing the moments of transition—perhaps even taking time to think about what we want from the next phase in the year—we can get the measure of it.” *Katherine May*

Chalice Lighting: (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page one.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “In our winter, a transformation happened. We read and worked and problem-solved and found new solutions. We changed our focus away from pushing through with normal

life and towards making a new one. When everything is broken, everything is also up for grabs. That’s the gift of winter: it’s irresistible. Change will happen in its wake, whether we like it or not. We can come out of it wearing a different coat.”

Katherine May

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. What was winter to you as a child? What is it now?
2. Do you prepare for winter? How?
3. How would you define wintering?
4. Have you ever had, as Katherine May writes, “a melody to follow into spring?” How have you taken the measure of winter?
5. What wisdom was passed on to you about wintering? What wisdom do you have to pass on about how to winter?
6. Katherine May writes, “We may never choose to winter, but we can choose how.” Consider a time when you have wintered. How did you winter at that time?
7. Have you ever had winter blues? What did you do in response? What helped? What didn’t?
8. In winter, what do you look forward to? How does this sustain you?
9. Have you ever found within yourself, per Albert Camus, an “invincible summer?” What were the circumstances?
10. Have you ever experienced a transformation as part of wintering? What was it like? Have you ever come out of winter “wearing a different coat?” What was the experience?

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice: (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Closing Words: Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Silent, Tender Snow

Winter Meditation (excerpt)

Winter invites meditation, a reflection on things for which we have no words. Meditation is the discipline by which we move beyond words to what is. Mystics are unable to speak directly about their experiences. Poets and watercolor artists convey as much with silence and empty space as they do with words and images. The sacramental aspect of winter and art draws us into the mystery, without ever finally naming it. Patricia Hampl writes, “winter seemed to partake of religion in a way no other season did, hushed, solemn.”

Winter offers a way of being religious. May Sarton wrote, in “a tenderness of snowing,” “silence assumes the air.” Dogmas and doctrines: so many words and so little understanding. Let us seek silence to protect ourselves from the idols of our own certainty. Let our gaze return again and again to some familiar winter landscape, perhaps the one outside our kitchen window. Let us meditate on it like a verse from scripture, allowing it to teach what we still must learn and already know. As



winter alters the outer landscape, wintering alters our inner landscape. By paying attention, the most religious act of all, we learn that winter is not one season, but many. Even if we can not name the changes in snow and ice, we can learn to sense them. Religion is not words, but experience. In her poem *Snow Fall*, May Sarton wrote, “There is nothing to do / But drift now, more or less / On some great lovingness, / On something that does bless, / The silent, tender snow.”

Source: Touchstones

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