

HOLY SPACE

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1. The Sunday Circle is a time for alternative perspectives, a time for embracing bigger pictures that open space for the Spirit to grow within us beyond the confines of our egos. The Spirit flows through all that exists—and so do we when we let go of the small self and surrender to the Big Self. The first line of Surah 94 speaks directly to this opening, this surrender, “Have we not caused your heart to open?”

2. We have not each had the coronavirus personally, but collectively speaking we are all going through this pandemic—and it has been a severe challenge on so many levels. We’ve mourned for too many people who have died, too many people have lost their businesses and seen their careers evaporate, and too many people are suffering the ill-effects of isolation, such as depression.

3. And yet the pandemic has also opened up a space in time that is holy, a space that is allowing us to reevaluate our lives and our society. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel talks about this kind of holy space in his famous book on the Sabbath—just like stopping business as usual once a week on the Sabbath, the pandemic has forced us to slow down...to reflect more deeply...and to find healing. Simply by stopping we open up a space that can become a holy space. For example, our national conversation about racism is going deeper than ever before...but if we hadn’t stopped doing so much else, would we have had the energy for this? And so I am finding truth today in the Qur’an’s affirmation that with difficulty comes ease and with hardship there is relief. It’s part of the karmic nature of the universe that everything invites its opposite.

4. In my experience, this space, this relief from busyness, is part of the grace of this otherwise harrowing time. Since the pandemic began, have you noticed more space in your own life to grieve? Have you found ways to tell your story differently, to change directions? Maybe you’ve been able to let go of something heavy you’ve been carrying. This is the kind of relief I hope we might find.

5. This time out of normal time is holy. Let's make use of it for healing, for reimagining, and for preparing to live differently as individuals and as a community when this pandemic ends.

6. The pandemic is like a collective meditation. After only, let's say, 5 minutes of sitting, a person is still distracted by the thoughts of the monkey mind that keep trying to get them to go back to normal, to the busyness of their lives. Maybe that was us, collectively, 5 weeks into the pandemic.

But when a person keeps sitting, passing the 10 minute mark, they go deeper, the busy mind loses hold, they can let go of the to do list. The mind quiets down considerably after 20-30 minutes. Now with this pandemic, what we thought would be a ten or fifteen minute meditation is turning into a full day-long retreat, or maybe more. It's a long time for us to let go of normal.

7. But what is normal? I would say that normal is all the ways we attempt to make the impermanent permanent. Normal is the way of life we make permanent through repetition, to comfort the ego and trick ourselves from recognizing impermanence and accepting death. And yet this normalcy becomes like a hardened shell around us—we think for our protection—but it also ends up confining our lives...it does not allow the living being inside the shell to have the space to move and grow as it must. And so it is a gift to lose this shell of normalcy...we now find ourselves in an open space, a holy space, a space where forgiveness, change, and growth are much more possible than normal. And again, I want to encourage us: Let's make use of this holy space that the pandemic has made for healing, for reimagining, and for preparing to live differently as individuals and as a community.