

PDF - Lancaster - Sunday, February 21, 2021 - The Lenten Practice - Wil Darcangelo

Today is the first Sunday in the Christian season of Lent. And while many UU churches do not explicitly observe Lent and Easter in the traditional sense, there is still much of value in its symbolism to be reflected upon that has benefit for anyone, of all faiths or none.

Lent is a roughly six-week period of time beginning on Ash Wednesday in mid-February to early-March, and ending just before Easter. Lent is traditionally described as lasting for 40 days, in commemoration of the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the desert before beginning his public ministry, during which, according to the story, he endured temptation by Satan.

The word lent is a shortened form of the Old English word *lencten*, meaning "spring season." And while many of us do not subscribe to the lenten story of Jesus' temptation in the desert in a literal way, there is still something of great spiritual value in examining the tradition and what it represents.

The season of Lent is an observance of renewal and reflection. It is a preparation for the spring. In the stories, Jesus was baptized just prior to his 40-day fast. Baptism is a ritual of purification much older than Christianity. It's not specifically about the purification of sin, however, but of sorrow. Baptism is a cleansing of despair. It is a sweeping away of the weight of our past mistakes, losses, burdens, and resentments. The stuff we don't realize we're carrying around voluntarily. Let it go.

Considering this, Jesus' baptism prior to his 40-day ordeal in the desert, which itself was a preparation for public ministry, it becomes a preparation for the preparation. One might meditate upon the spiritual elegance of ritually cleansing oneself of sorrow before embarking upon a spiritual journey.

For those of any faith considering observing Lent for the purpose of personal spiritual growth, consider ways in which you could allow yourself a certain amount of time every day for quiet and personal reflection. Even a few minutes, but be committed to it on the level of a promise. Also, consider anything in your life that you might be willing to give up for a little while in order to create more of this time.

Consider looking at your regular activities which may require a lot of mental real estate but might be willing to wait a few weeks in the background. Or relegated to attention from you only one day a week.

Some people give up chocolate for lent. And if you spend a couple hours every day on the hunt for or manufacturing of your daily chocolate intake, it's an excellent choice. Most people don't put that much effort into their chocolate consumption. But if it consumes your thoughts and takes up time that might otherwise be spent in reflection, definitely give up chocolate for Lent. And perhaps longer.

The task of Lent isn't necessarily to give up something that you love in order to create more time for just being quiet. But we should consider at least temporarily giving up those things which prevent our introspection. We should give up some of the things which give us stress or cause us anxiety. We should temporarily put on hold our busyness. Give your inner voice some airtime. Lent is the observance of allowing stillness to occur on a daily basis for a while. If you're brave enough to try it, notice when you resist continuing it. Notice when you feel like quitting. Because that's when you're starting to get somewhere, and a little part of you doesn't like it. Don't be tempted by it.