

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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Restful vacations?? Whatever happened to the *rest and recovery* part of vacations? For countless Americans, they’ve apparently become a thing of the past. This is particularly the case when travel plans include endless hours at airports, train stations and bus depots.

Having recently returned from a couple weeks in Europe (Amsterdam, Ireland and London), I’m discovering that the older I get the less I enjoy the *travel* part of vacations. Too many lines, too much waiting and all the time, *rush, rush, rush*.

Most of the time, I look forward to returning home to actually catch up on my rest and fall back into some uncluttered hours of quiet and relaxation.

Interestingly enough, compared to folks in Europe, we Americans have little vacation time. Typically, in most European countries, six weeks of vacation is common. Imagine, six weeks of *paid* vacation! Many of us are lucky if we get two weeks the first year and we spend lifetimes building up to four weeks-plus.

Still, the reality of *vacation* often brings more stress than we anticipate. It’s the *preparing to leave* part that’s the rub and then the *back to work* that follows.

On many jobs, taking leave for two weeks or more requires hours of planning and preparation. And don’t even talk about re-entry when the vacation days have evaporated. Over night, it seems, the desk is piled high with mail, call backs and calendar reminders for the weeks ahead.

We end up lamenting to ourselves, *why did I ever leave?*

Making our vacations work out. For vacations to truly *be* vacation, we need to resist taking our work-ethic from the work place with us. For starters, how about a more relaxed approach to our daily plans? After all, we don’t have to exhaust all the possibilities of *seeing* and *doing* in two weeks or less.

Can’t we reassure ourselves that it’s actually okay to have some down time each day for rest and recovery, the point of the vacation (in part, at least) to begin with?

What is it about us Americans? Why do we think we have to have *the* total vacation experience every time we fly off to the blue skies of vacation land? Why do we obsess on keeping our days as full as possible, packing in one more tour, one more outing, and one more *whatever the marketing people tell us?*

It’s small wonder we come limping back at the day’s end, worn out and gasping for air. For our vacations to truly *be* vacations, we need to slow down, breathe deeply, and make sensible decisions about our daily itineraries. Again, *it’s vacation, silly!*

Vacations and a restless spirit. Perhaps the weariness of our vacations is in truth a reflection of the restlessness in our soul. But why are we restless? Do we think our days are limited? That we might never come this way again?

Are we worried that we're *missing out*, or *falling behind*? And are we, therefore, crazed with a desire to *keep up* in order to maximize every day and every opportunity?

Sometimes, for our vacations to work and for our spirit to find comfort and renewal, we need to simply *do less* and *for shorter periods of time*.

Ultimately, the restlessness in our spirit will not recede until we convince ourselves that we don't have to *have it all* and *do it all* every day of our lives. *Seeing* and *doing* are always important and have their place. But they always subordinate to *being*, to simply *being* alive and *being* in relationship with the divine and with one another.

Personally, I'm learning at last that the way to *do* vacations is to schedule some considerable re-entry time (as in three or four days) after the return home and before getting back into the work routine. These days of re-entry can do wonders for resting the body and readying the spirit for the challenges ahead.

Still, I'm a vacation advocate because we all need more time—away from our hurried lives—for rest and recovery. As the Good Book reminds us, *even God rested on the seventh day*.