

# Welcoming Unwanted Visitors

## A Contemplative Retreat for Turbulent Times

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### Before You Begin

If possible, set aside an hour in the day that is free from distractions and interruptions. Take a few moments to prepare your space. You may want to create a small home altar and include a small candle, a journal or other symbolic elements that encourage contemplation and reflection. This self-guided retreat includes poetry, silent contemplation, walking and reflection. Feel free to adjust these materials to suit your needs and your landscape.

### Opening Worship

Find your balance on holy ground. Breathe deeply the breath of life. Be emptied of all concerns. Open your heart. Receive a moment of stillness. Settle into this place and multi-species community.

### Read: “May Perpetual Light Shine” by Patricia Spears Jones

We have encountered storms  
Perfect in their drench and wreck

Each of us bears an ornament of grief  
A ring, a notebook, a ticket torn, scar  
It is how humans know their kind—

What is known as love, what can become  
the heart’s food stored away for some future  
Famine

Love remains a jewel in the hand, guarded  
Shared fragments of earth & air drift & despair.

We ponder what patterns matter other than moons and tides:  
musical beats—rumba or waltz or *cha cha cha*

cosmic waves like batons furiously twirling  
colors proclaiming sparkle of darkness  
as those we love begin to delight  
in the stars embracing

### **Practice: Mindful Walking**

Take 10-15 minutes to walk quietly and softly through your landscape. Allow your pace to be relaxed so that as you walk, you can also pay attention to your senses. What do you see in your landscape? What sounds do you hear? What textures or sensations do you feel? What scents do you smell? Gather 3-4 small objects (rocks, leaves, branches, pinecones, etc.) and bring them back to your sacred space.

### **Practice: Naming Our Grief**

Look at the objects that you have gathered. Hold each one in your hands and notice its shape, weight, texture, etc. Allow each object to become a symbolic vessel for griefs, fears, or worries that you carry. As you hold each object, speak aloud or in your mind I fear... I miss... I hope... Arrange your objects in your sacred space as a reminder

### **Read: “The Guest House” by Rumi**

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
As an unexpected visitor.  
Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.  
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.  
Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

### **Practice: Silent Contemplation**

Find a comfortable, upright position and close your eyes or soften your gaze. Allow your attention to settle on your breath, noticing each in-breath as it travels through the nostrils, expanding the lungs and the belly. Follow your out-breath as your belly softens and the air travels up through the lungs and out the nostrils. If your mind wanders – which is very natural – simply notice it wandering and gently bring your attention back to your breath. (5-10 minutes)

## Read: “Undressing” by Rumi

Learn the alchemy true human beings  
know: the moment you accept what  
troubles you’ve been given, the door  
will open. Welcome difficulty  
as a familiar comrade. Joke with  
torment brought by the Friend.  
Sorrows are the rags of old clothes  
and jackets that serve to cover,  
then are taken off. That undressing,  
and the naked body underneath, is  
the sweetness that comes after grief.

## Practice: Silent Contemplation or Mindful Journaling

Repeat the silent contemplation outlined above or practice mindful journaling. Write slowly with a relaxed grip. Listen to the sound of the pen or pencil as your hand moves across the page. See if you can also notice your breath as you write. Allow yourself to write in a steady, stream-of-consciousness way about whatever is arising in the present moment. (5-10 minutes)

## Read: “Go to the Limits of Your Longing” by Rainer Maria Rilke

God speaks to each of us as we are made,  
then walks with us silently out of the night.  
These are the words we dimly hear:  
You, sent out beyond your recall,  
go to the limits of your longing.  
Embody me.  
Flare up like a flame  
and make big shadows I can move in.  
Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.  
Just keep going. No feeling is final.  
Don’t let yourself lose me.  
Nearby is the country they call life.  
You will know it by its seriousness.  
Give me your hand.

## Sending Prayer

O Lord, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*