

June 20, 2010 — Lazy, Hazy (**nothing-to-do**)Days:

***Enlightenment and the Half-Uplifted Oar – Joan Nelson***

*Most of us—both the well-organized and the less organized among us—have trouble finding, let alone knowing what to do with one of those mythical “nothing”-to-“do” days. This service is designed to help all of us to deepen the experience of laziness. And in the process, perhaps, to strengthen the link between matter and spirit.*

In the interest of full disclosure, I’ve designed this service for Joan Nelson...who has never had a clue about how to slow down. When I’m confronted with an unstructured situation I immediately structure it: With something. Anything. Anything, that is... except laziness.

Perhaps my go-go-get-it-done style is genetic or environmental. I started wondering about my genes and upbringing, in this regard, when I noticed that today is Father’s Day. My Father died on Father’s Day in 1968. He was wired the way I am. (Or I’m wired the way he was.) He was a New Yorker. That might explain the operating system in his brain and mine. But my point, this morning, is that in order for my father to slow down, he had to get sick... sick... sicker. And die. {music}

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

We are being called. You...me...all of us are being called. Called to do “nothing.” Zero. Zip. Nothing. Nothing at all.

This sounds easy. At least, it sounded easy enough 2 weeks ago, right here, when we heard A.A. Milne’s version of doing nothing—through the eyes of Christopher Robin explaining it to Pooh: *How do you do Nothing? Well, it’s when people call out at you just as you’re going off to do it, ‘What are you going to do, Christopher Robin?’ and you say, ‘Oh, Nothing,’ and then you go and do it. It means just going along, listening to all the things you can’t hear, and not bothering.*” “Oh?” said Pooh.

And “Oh!” say I. Like somebody wired like me is going to just go along, listening to all the things I can’t hear, and not “bothering?” Not worrying? Not fretting? Not hassling?

But, Piglet, in “Pooh's Little Instruction Book,” stresses the point: “Don't underestimate the value of Doing Nothing.”

We are being called. Not by A.A. Milne. But by the universe... We are called to “get-it” about nothing. The Buddha thoroughly got-it about nothing: Quite simply, doing nothing is how you get to enlightenment.

To this end, I resurrected a little book that I bought in 1972, when I was still a tourist in California, and San Francisco. At City Lights Book Store. Where did I find it in 2010? In my closet, in a box labeled “Dump.” I consider this a major personal victory. Give me 10 points on the learning-to-be-lazy chart! I’ve actually been too lazy to get that box out of my current house since I moved into it in 2001.

This is my long-ignored “... Lazy Man’s Guide to Enlightenment,” by Thaddeus Golas. I’ve lugged it from state to state. House to house...to shelf to shelf to box and closet. All so I could rescue it from the trash, for you guys, today! Somewhere along this last, self-styled lazy, hazy week, this book has become pivotal for me: Not just in preparing for today’s service; but also as a catalyst for my own personal enlightenment. Yup. I’m going to write a book called, “The Busy Woman’s Guide to Enlightenment.”

{Chalice Lighting} As for “Enlightenment, itself,” May this chalice light serve as a link between matter and spirit—and between all of us—as we allow ourselves to move more deeply into the artful use of laziness. {Music. Poem #1 River Sounds} Poem #2 {voiceover}

- *The trees bend down along the stream,  
Where, anchored, swings my tiny boat.  
The day is one to drowse and dream  
And list the thrush’s throttling note.  
When music from his bosom bleeds  
Among the river’s rustling reeds.*

- *No ripple stirs the placid pool,  
When my adventurous line is cast,  
A truce to sport, while clear and cool,  
The mirrored clouds slide softly past.  
The sky gives back a blue divine,  
And all the world’s wide wealth is mine.*

• *A pickerel leaps, a bow of light,  
The minnows shine from side to side.  
The first faint breeze comes up the tide—  
**I pause: with half uplifted oar,  
While stillness drifts upon the shore.***

**PAUSING WITH HALF UPLIFTED OAR!** What a great image!

Here it is again: yet another summer to create a lazy-day routine. Getting up when the mood hits, lounging around ‘til lunch time. Reading a book in a shady nook down by some river or other...

Perhaps literally rowing on that river and pausing with that half uplifted oar: literally going with the flow.

What a grand old-fashioned pastime. (Warning. Old-song alert.) You could hum some old-fashioned songs while gliding {sing} “up a lazy river”.... Somewhere in Oklahoma, where the “corn is as high as an elephant’s eye.” Watching a “hawk making lazy circles in the sky.” Or chewing on a piece of grass, and contemplating that “lazy old sun with nothin’ to do but roll around heaven all day.”

But laziness gets a bad rap in our work-ethic culture. Take that old-fashioned Hoagy Carmichael (from our own Mill Valley. I shook his hand once, when I was 13—in New York.) He wrote the lyrics to a song called “Lazy Bones.” “Sleepin’ in the sun. How you ‘spect to get your day’s work done, never get your days work done...sleepin’ in the noon day sun”... Then “Sleepin’ in the shade. Never gunn’a get your corn meal made.”

Sometimes, laziness is even equated with the ultimate crime: murder. As in “killing” time. “There. I just killed some time. Now I can check that off my list.” ... That most precious gift of all: The gift of TIME, itself.

Why is the word “lazy” so often followed by the word, “Bum?” As with that lazy good-for-nothing Dagwood Bumstead, the classic couch potato in the Blondie cartoons, either lying on the couch. Or trying to get to the couch. Bumstead’s official philosophy is, “You can’t teach people to be lazy. Either you have it or you don’t.”

And then, there's the classic "laziness" cartoon that pops up from time to time. It was in the "New Yorker" again last week...showing a guy "walking" his dog... Holding the leash in his left hand while his right hand is on the steering wheel of his car.

I promised a participatory service today. And here comes the part where you could actually fine-tune your relationship with life. I've been trying it for a week. And something IS shifting inside.

Given that our culture is so disapproving of lazy-bones, bums and time-killers, we tend to forget that our negative reactions to laziness are learned. So let's take a few minutes to reflect on our attitudes toward laziness.

Here's a brief reflection for you: As a child, what ideas, notions or messages did you receive about laziness? Who gave you these impressions? Take a minute of silence {I'll time one minute} to recall at least one image of laziness that got lodged in your brain. -----

Did anyone get a positive image of laziness? Raise your hand if you got *negative* images.

My mother used to take a nap every day. My father told her she should get out and do something. This get-out-and-do-something message never stuck with her, but it wore a deep groove in my brain. Even after I learned that Albert Einstein and Thomas Edison regularly napped and advocated naps in general. I don't care if Jesus Christ, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King took naps. I still feel a little guilty if I take a nap.

I wonder what would happen if all of us lazed around this summer. And when we got up, we sipped mint juleps on our verandas. (Anybody here have a veranda?) The mint julep routine might, in fact, be good for someone like me, who constantly feels *driven* to improve the world and myself in it.

Just think what a few lazy sips of bourbon, mint leaves and sugar might do to improve our contemplation of the nature of ultimate reality. Or enhance our appreciation of laziness, itself.

There are many, various reasons to appreciate laziness. For starters, it's the mother of all inventions. (Or, in honor of today, the "father" of all inventions.) As stated by that chronically lazy guy W.C. Fields, "The laziest man I ever met put popcorn in his pancakes so they would turn over by themselves."

Think about it: Such laziness could help this church raise money with a pancake breakfast fundraiser. People would come from far and wide to see the pancakes flip themselves.

A little more seriously, a couple of weeks ago, while preoccupied looking for a parking place, I heard a snippet of a radio interview with a high-level legal mucky-muck... a Washington lawyer, I think... a big-time political-legal-eagle history-maker of some kind. He told an anecdote about how, as a teenager during the summer of 1973, he sat on the couch, glued to the family TV, while his mother pleaded with him to get off the couch and DO something! Can someone here, today, tell us why his mother was way off base?

He was preparing himself for his highly productive, history making career by watching the Watergate hearings.

Today, we're caught up in a collective mad dash to keep moving and get...do...have...become... somewhere...something...someone... else. If you're a parent, you watch your kids like a hawk. (A hawk with no time for making lazy circles in the sky.) You're on guard for wackos who might do God-knows-what to your kids. Even summer vacation turns into a boot camp for kids to get ahead in athletic, academic, or other disciplines.

As a product of this kind of training, I find myself in my so-called "retirement" years, still perpetually moving, getting, doing, having and becoming. For example, when I told the Worship Committee that I'd come up with a theme for today, yet one more person told me to slow down. She said I should relax and enjoy the "lazy hazy days of summer." Voila! There was my theme!

The challenge was to develop my theme and remain lazy at the same time. Hummmmm. Did I do it? Yes and No.

Maybe I should have gone out—literally—found a rowboat, and practiced my (now-sacred) ritual of pausing...and half uplifting my oar.

But. No. First thing I did was turn to Google. When it comes to laziness, Google is the tool of the devil. Remember when you used to have to go to the library? Or at least lift a volume and turn a few pages in an encyclopedia?

Googling “lazy” pops up a complex array of negative images and words: idle, slothful, inert, torpid. (There’s a word for you. Torpid: (stagnant: eeeeeooo.) Google leads to a quote from a “Life Coach” who says laziness is “suicide on the installment plan.”

He’s referring to chronic, dysfunctional laziness. Regarding ordinary laziness, there are lists of 5 (or 10, 15, or 100) tips to overcome, beat or cure it. + 11 ways to stop procrastinating.

And then, as if to refute Christopher Robin, and confuse the heck out of me, Google takes us to a smart aleck blogger who says, “Frankly, I’m not a fan of doing ‘nothing.’ Because you can’t ever tell when it’s done.” Huh? Sounds like a Zen koan to me.

If this wordplay seems silly, try the coffee mug (only \$12 – plus shipping, etc.) with the mind-bending twist: “Do nothing. And nothing will remain undone.” More Zen, I guess. This is—exactly—the problem with doing nothing: We don’t understand it.

So... Let’s forget that lazy, crazy Google machine, and look inside ourselves for the benefits we might reap by observing the stillness at the core of a few good old-fashioned lazy hazy days this summer. In a few minutes, I’ll ask you to identify a specific benefit that you might find by s l o w i n g d o w n...and pausing (literally or symbolically) with half-uplifted oar now and then.

In the interest of authenticity today, I started, early last week, to practice the uplifted-oar meditation that I planned to preach. I deliberately chose to lift my symbolic oar several times. For a few seconds. Then a few more. Keeping it half uplifted for longer and longer periods of time. Thus stilling the water for a few moments now and then. Not easy. But getting easier.

For starters, I thought I’d keep it simple and just read from the “Lazy Man’s Guide to Enlightenment.” But, No. I wanted to make it my own. So I

did it: I went on automatic and started to work in earnest. Over-Googleed with information, I noticed that, like most jobs, this one was expanding to fill the time available for its completion.

When I realized that I was failing at my laziness experiment, I knew I had to do some kind of ritual intervention to get out of my automatic default rut. Otherwise I had no business preaching laziness to you guys.

In a flash of deadline-motivated insight, I got it! The mint julep thing! With visions of a ceremonial ritual dancing in my head, I went to my garden and picked some mint leaves. But...alas...there was no bourbon in my cupboard.

But on top of the cupboard is a resonant bowl. It doesn't look like the singing bowl, here. But it does resound...with an echoing vibration. I also have a resonating Chinese brass bowl, and two Model-T brake drums that respond to a gentle tap by pealing like a church bell throughout the neighborhood.

I made several copies of the last line of the poem: "I pause with half-uplifted oar, while stillness drifts upon the shore." And placed the quotes near the resonant objects.

Now comes the hard part: I had to really...really...really stop: To deliberately choose to pause... Long enough to actually observe the ritual I had created for myself. I had to learn to halt my various headlong dashes into other rooms, for this or that imagined urgency. And p a u s e...long enough to gently tap into the resonance. Then allow myself to remain stopped, then and there—and just "be," until the bowl no longer seems to resonate. I've discovered—by moving my ear near the bowls—that they resonate far longer than I had thought. In fact, I understand, the sound waves go on forever.....

When I'm in a hurry (which is when I *really* need to lift an oar) it's particularly hard to stop and remain stopped. The universe—in its no-nonsense way—is teaching me that hurrying tempts me to go beyond a gentle tap...into a knock, strike, bang or beat. But this only lengthens the time of resonance during which I must find some kind of stillness and just "be in it."

Slowly but surely, I'm learning to just "be" for a few moments now and then, with no thoughts of "Becoming" in the future. It gets really interesting when I "try" to "do" "nothing." If I manage to create any kind of void in my mind, a thousand thoughts still pop up to fill it.

I haven't tried the mint julep thing yet, but I dare say that Thaddeus Golas, who wrote "The Lazy Man's Guide to Enlightenment," has it all over the bourbon thing.

### **THIS IS WHERE ENLIGHTENMENT COMES IN.**

According to "Lazy Man," Thaddeus Golas, awareness—profound, pure universal awareness—is everywhere. Like fish in water... birds in air... we are so deeply surrounded by and embedded in awareness, that we are not consciously, intellectually, aware that awareness, itself even exists.

Nevertheless, it does exist: everywhere... in complex multifaceted ways that cannot be reduced by the human mind into the science of water and air.

Another useful analogy might be radio, TV and wireless electronics. These are everywhere, and can be experienced only with specialized instrumentation.

Awareness of awareness is made possible through the instrumentation called the human brain. Anything and everything can be experienced via various frequencies of electro-chemical activity in the brain. We are free to tap in to any frequency we wish. But to get the brain frequency into the vibrations of "enlightenment," we have to learn to "do" absolutely nothing. Not even thinking. From this state of thought-free pure aware consciousness, we can understand the laws of cause and effect. Bottom line: No matter how the world looks to us, all relationships—personal, political, and global are as honest and exact as the laws of physics.

According to the "Lazy Man's Guide to Enlightenment" we can't come from enlightenment until we get to that brain wave frequency. (Which is something like the frequency of the bowls.) We're not going to go there today. But we can take a short do-nothing mini-vacation right now. Let's do the best we can to "vacate" our minds, and lift our oars half way. For about 5 minutes. {background river sound} simply allow your body to find a

comfortable position, and—just for fun—simply imagine that your mind is doing nothing. {continuing sound}

You get to “guide” yourself into “enlightenment” simply: Just pretend that you are—effortlessly—doing, thinking, even feeling—NOTHING. Without “bothering” to become lazy or relaxed, you are simply BEING lazy and relaxed. Just BEING... Being, being being. Alive and aware. Being...being aware of itself.

Allow yourself to be aware of every sound in and around this room, but attached to none of those sounds. {bowl} Notice that thoughts continue to flit through your brain. The idea is not to get rid of the thoughts, but to let go of *attachment* to the thoughts. Simply observe the process of the flitting thoughts. Notice how like butterflies your thoughts really are. Here. There. Everywhere.

Continuing to let go of the thoughts as they flit by, notice that it becomes easier. Even automatic. Notice a thought. Let it go. Notice another thought. Let it go... Here comes another one. Let it go.

Here comes a negative thought about laziness. Look at it. Observe it. Notice where it came from. Then let it go. You are now free to project ahead and picture yourself in a particularly relaxing situation this summer... wallowing in laziness for a few crazy hazy days. Observe yourself “*just going along, listening to all the things you can’t hear, and not bothering.*” {still continuing sounds}

Imagine yourself gliding down the stream. Allow yourself to still the water by lifting your oar half way. Without “Doing” anything, you continue to glide along effortlessly. Notice the ease with which you can simply be. Just be.

Notice the ease with which you are practicing the art of lifted-oar enlightenment. The more you pause and lift your oar, the more *free* time you will have. After all, this IS what you’re doing: You are literally creating free time. Truly free. You are freeing yourself of the effort (indeed, the struggle) to do or become anything other than you are. The more you practice this kind of laziness, the more (truly) free time you will be creating for yourself. In addition to being relieved of the struggle to “do” or “become” something, the practice of lifted-oar laziness will give you a passage into the literal bliss

of BEING. . . Relieved of the struggle to do or Become. . . Effortlessly. . . Lazily free. Free to just BE. Totally. . . lazily free. Free to just BE. {sound stops}

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Now that I've arrived at this place of knowing, I can put my Lazy Man's Enlightenment Guide back in the box that says "dump." I can dump it. (Or not.) You don't need a book, either. All you need to do is to observe a few lazy moments this summer—by pausing and *lifting an oar once in a while so you can listen to all the things you can't hear. Then let them go.* According to "Lazy Man" Thaddeus Golas, the ultimate goal of doing nothing is to get-it about God. That God IS love. And we are God. It's one thing to say this. It's another thing to KNOW it. The knowing comes spontaneously when you empty your mind of all that busy "stuff" that seems to be "stuffing" it.

There's lots of higher truth waiting—just waiting for a vacancy in your head so it can move into your life. You don't have to study to be a Zen master, Buddhist or mystic in order to evolve to an expanded level of BEING. All you need to do is still your body and brain to the point where you are SO lazy that you are able to find the stillness, hold the stillness, and let the stillness carry you. {Hymn #352 – "Find a Stillness"}

Benediction – May you remember to pause with half-uplifted oar now and then. The stillness is always there, whether you allow yourself to hear it or not.