



Embracing Winter

By Wendy Marks

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The fall this year is beautiful. We have the wonderful combination of amazing weather and beautiful foliage. But it cannot continue indefinitely. Winter will come. I am choosing to believe NOAA, our national weather service, and expecting a mild one, rather than the Old Farmer's Almanac, or the acorn profusion, but winter is winter, and whether (weather) harsh or easy, it is on the way.

Winter is a time for introspection, and also a time to really get your spiritual house in order. Summer is fun, and all the outdoor activity is amazing. Fall is transition, and Spring is renewal, but Winter is for the soul. We have planted, raked and prepared; now we are ready to go inward and think. Just as we are changing how we eat, we are changing how we feel and believe.

Winter slumber is longer with shorter days. We dream amazing dreams. This winter try to take the time to take down your dreams. Put a recording device or a note pad beside your bed, and before you get up and start your day take a few deep breaths, let yourself calm, and record your dreams. Your subconscious will provide you with valuable information about who you are and what you want, and also what you still have to work on. If you do this several times a week you will begin to see some thought patterns.

Learn from them, meditate on them, and get some spiritual guidance from them. Either share your dream journal with buddies, or get professional assistance from a therapist or spiritual teacher. Dreams are a goldmine. Use them. One of the things that I have always known, which has been proven many times by research, is how important sleep and dreams are. The ultimate form of torture is to stop allowing someone to sleep. People who are deprived of sleep will often die sooner than people that are deprived of food. It is important to budget your time to get a full eight hours, thus allowing yourself to enrich your waking life by acknowledging your sleeping life.

Create or renew your meditation practice. I have been meditating since I was 14, but every once in a while, even after all these years, I fall off the wagon and have to restart my meditation practice. Those who meditate live, on the average, about seven years longer than those who do not. The joke, of course, is that they spend all of the extra time in meditation. But even if that's true, meditation provides a type of brain stimulation that cannot be obtained in any other way. It is a rest from your day - a time that is

totally me time and not for anyone else - and an opening of your spirit to connect with the greater experience.

For best results it is good to meditate twice a day, usually in the morning and in the evening. It does not have to be a long stretch of time; even fifteen minutes can be very stabilizing. Meditation does not have to be complicated. It can be as simple as implementing breath work. In my book I talk about some very simple meditation approaches. But you can go online and look to YouTube and find a meditation that works for you very simply.

Another area of concern is getting enough exercise during the winter. Shoveling or skiing will not do it for you. These activities are certainly cardio-stimulating, but they are more in the category of straining than of exercising. You need regular cardiac stimulation to maintain your health, especially if you're among those of us over 40. So join a gym, drag out that old exercycle, or buy a DVD that appeals to you and "shake it." I know it is hard to get motivated when the days get dark so early, but cut out some time from your day several times a week and move. I always say there are two types of people: the people that love going to the gym, and the people that love leaving the gym. I am in the second category, but oh, that feeling of righteous satisfaction when I am walking out the door of the Y.

In summary, have a great winter and enjoy the wondrous things the season has to offer. Enjoy the time that we have to work on ourselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Namaste,

Wendy