

**Seasons of the Day**  
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Someone recently recommended the book: **Music of Silence: A Sacred Journey through the Hours of the Day** to me. She was inspired by the idea of us taking pauses throughout our day – a topic I've mentioned before in my monthly e-zine, HEN. Her review:

It is a gem. Written by the Benedictine monk David Steindl-Rast in collaboration with Sharon Lebell, with a foreword by Kathleen Norris, it is a wonderful guide to the kind of reflective pauses you suggest, and offers a thoughtful framework for considering the different rhythms inherent in any day that combines productive activity of some sort, communing, solitude, meditation, prayer, and, not to be missed, sleep!

Of course, I was intrigued and immediately got the book! In my line of work as conflict and leadership coach, mediator and trainer, it seems there is a never-ending need for pockets of peace throughout my day – and the day of the life of my clients.

It's a wonderful little book – and as a gift to you – please find below my summary of the seasons of the day Steindl-Rast speaks of. I've taken some liberties here and there with the summary – but hope you will find some pleasure and perhaps a bit of peace, through it!

Enjoy and please let me know of your experiments!

Steindl-Rast outlines eight phases to a Benedictine monk's day. As you read each one, see if any link up to phases you may have noticed in your own day:

**1) Vigils**

Vigil means to keep awake - to watch. This is the time of the "night watch." Most monks are up in the dark before dawn to go to oratory. Symbolically, the darkness is "an invitation to trust in night," to trust the mystery present in darkness. It is a time for spiritual pursuit, meditation, prayer, silence, listening to music, lectio divina.

This practice could be something like taking 15 minutes before your day starts to do one of the practices above.

## **2) Lauds**

Laud means to praise or "applaud." Lauds is the attitude we feel when we applaud: one of gratitude. The breaking of the dawn symbolizes our gratefulness for the coming of light bringing us out of darkness. Lauds can act as a daily reminder to see sunrise as a gift come unbidden - and to see everything coming to us unbidden, as a gift.

We could practice "lauds" as a natural extension of our vigil time - for example: to take a pause to be intentionally thankful after our meditation time.

## **3) Prime**

Prime means first - or beginning time. This is the time when work begins. We pause before we start the work day to "plan" - taking time at the beginning of our work day to think ahead, to get priorities clear, to give some thought on what matters most. To set our priorities according to our heart-felt intentions. Taking the time to pause before we start our work can also function to remind us of how our work contributes to "the whole human enterprise." What we do on a daily basis matters - even the littlest of our actions can leave a legacy.

## **4) Terce**

Terce (or tierce) means "third." It is the third hour of the day - the monastic coffee break time.

How many of us take a mid-morning break and use it as a time to reflect? Having a monastic attitude to work suggests we look at our coffee break time as a kind of "prayer break." Steindel-Rast suggests we could use our break to pray in this way: pause to pay attention to our breathing. "Each breathe flows in as a blessing...Blessing is well-wishing... Each breathe out flows out as a sharing of that blessing." There is an art in learning to recognize a blessing when we see one!

## **5) Sext**

Sext means six - and this time is reserved for the sixth hour of the day: noon. Steindel-Rast describes this as a "time of transition, rousing us to stay the course, not be lured by the devil of depression - slipping resolve." Sext is also associated with crisis - where we face a barrier or challenge and need guidance to know what to let go of to be able to make it to the other side.

We can incorporate this practice over our lunch-hour. Perhaps just before or just after we eat - we can ask: "What do I need to let go of so I can re-focus on what's most important this afternoon?"

## **6) None**

None is nine: the ninth hour of the day - mid to late afternoon. It is the fading part of the day, the time of decline, when shadows begin to lengthen. The fading of time brings home death and impermanence and the need to connect with something transcendent (beyond time). This perspective helps us connect with what is most important. It is an opportunity to acknowledge the limits of our lives (families, jobs) as having meaningful things that happen there.

Incorporating a time for "None" can mean taking time near the end of our work day to consciously let go of unmet expectations, reminding ourselves to live fully within our lives as they are. It is also a time to decide the next steps needed to deal with the essentials. A time to find the end, to bring things to a point where we can leave them as they are and where we need not take them home with us.

## **7) Vespers**

Vespers mean evening and this time of the day celebrates the coming of the night. It is a healing time - in the sense that "healing involves knitting together of what is apart or broken." Early evening is also a luxury time, a time for culture in the sense of evening meditation, music or good food. When evening arrives, people have a "universal desire to find a serene place where they can put all the parts of the day together - to let go of the day and luxuriate in the quiet beauty of the evening." This practice can be as simple as taking time just before starting your dinner meal to acknowledge the blessings you received that day.

## **8) Compline**

Compline means complete. It is the conclusion of the monastic day. Late evening is devoted to preparations for sleep and for reviewing the day that is about to end. It is time to take stock, perhaps by writing a few lines in one's journal about what the day taught us or about what we might still need to consciously let go of from our day (that still binds us to the day). "We confront our inner darkness at Compline by examining our conscience, by asking: "What went wrong today? Where did I fail to meet the challenge? Ask for forgiveness and resolve to do better tomorrow."

As we turn to sleep, Steindl-fast offers that we can see "God as a mother hen who gathers her chicks under her wings. Infinite darkness is maternal - returning to our spiritual womb to be reborn again the next morning."

*Julia Menard specializes in helping middle-level managers, leaders and professionals navigate difficult conversations and debrief 360s. She also publishes a regular monthly ezine and can be reached through her Web site at [www.juliamenard.com](http://www.juliamenard.com).*