



One Earth Sangha

On Fallowness and Rest, Meditating in Winter

Audio Transcript

Sometimes you need the fields to lie fallow in order to gain nutrients.

– *Cheech Marin*

In days of old, winters were a blessed time of rest. The earth lay fallow, often frozen, muddy, or blanketed in snow. Work on the land was minimal, and when we lived according to the rhythms of the sun, as the winter nights drew short, we would sleep earlier and longer. Our rhythm mirrored the cycle of nature, which slows down and becomes dormant. Every natural cycle has periods of growth, abundance, decay, and death. The earth and her seasons express just that. Our life also moves to the same rhythms. Yet, we live in a culture that prioritizes spring and summer, celebrates growth, productivity, high yields. We have mostly forgotten how to slow down or to rest.

We seldom allow for fallow periods, necessary for the body and heart to replenish, to be ready for the next season of activity. Yet winter provides a beautiful opportunity to do just that. Fresh snow on the ground hushes all sound into quietude, inducing a tranquility into the landscape. Falling rain invites us to gaze peacefully at the replenishing waters. Frozen lakes and ponds remind us to be still, to rest in place. In this meditation you may choose to do this outside if the elements allow. Or you can do this looking through a window at a natural landscape at a time when winter's weather is unleashing its gifts.



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Begin by walking outdoors if you can, even if it is raining or snowing, just wearing suitable clothing. Pay attention to how the landscape reflects the season. Notice the ground and whether it's frozen, hard, or muddy from rains. Observe the flora and how plants have withered into the soil. Be mindful of the bare trees silhouetted stark against the sky. If possible and comfortable enough, take a seat, perhaps on a tree stump, on a fallen tree, or a suitable rock, and bring awareness to all of your senses. Feel the coldness of the air and how it feels against your exposed skin. Feel the invigoration that that may bring. It is possible to stay relaxed even though there can be a natural contraction against the cold.

Attuning to the stillness that's so often present in winter, observe how little life stirs, how quietly the trees stand frozen in place. Be mindful of the silence and aware of the absence of bird song or insect life. How does the silence in the soundscape touch you? If you are out on a snowy day, take in the serenity of falling snow and the beautiful way it dusts the landscape white. Attune to the beautiful quietude that snow brings and the way it can make even the ugliest things sparkle. Observe how silent everything is and the way it hushes all sound. Be present to what the outer stillness evokes within you and how it supports an inner quietude.

If you are walking in the rain or standing under a tree as rain falls, give that experience your full attention. Notice the sounds of the rain on leaves, and as it splashes the ground. What qualities are evoked within you, as you gaze at the rain falling from the heavens replenishing the earth? As you continue to sense into this wintry landscape, how does being outside at this time of year influence your mind and body and heart? Being curious if the quietude of the landscape, the fallowness of farmers' fields and the frozen grounds impact you in some way, does it invite within you a similar desire to be quiet or fallow or still?



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Does the restfulness of this season evoke the desire to rest more in your own life? Continue to meditate and reflect in this way either sitting down or, if too cold, then walking or standing. Keep attuning to the gifts of this season and what lessons are being offered in wintertime. In what ways can your inner landscape and the terrain of your life reflect more the qualities and temper of this season—quiet, fallow, still, reflective—and continue this reflection as you move back into your day.

This is a meditation featured in Mark Coleman's book, [A Field Guide to Nature Meditation: 52 Mindfulness Practices for Joy, Wisdom and Wonder](#).