

THE WONDER CLUB™



September 2018: No. 2
Fall Equinox / Mabon





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*“Autumn is a good time for visiting;
During its short days there is work for all...
There are sweet acorns in the high woods,
Cornstalks are kind over the brown earth.
~ ancient Irish poem of the seasons,
translated by Caitlin Matthews, *The Celtic Spirit**

Hello, beautiful!

Welcome to this special Field Guide issue celebrating the Autumn Equinox, also known as Mabon in many modern magical traditions. I know I mentioned before that other than Samhain, Beltaine was my favorite of the seasonal celebrations. But as I sit here thinking about it, I’m having a good chuckle. Because the truth is that I love so many of the holidays and the rich traditions surrounding them, it’s hard to pick my favorite. I love them all in their own way, but in addition to Beltaine and Samhain, I especially adore the Autumn Equinox (and Yule, too!).

All the holidays in the Eight-fold Wheel mark important transitions in our year and help us to cross the threshold intentionally into each new season and its energies. As Caitlin Matthews says, “If we can live each moment of the year as it is happening, with attention to the seasonal thresholds and their gifts, we may discover a new resourcefulness that

will enrich our lives with special joy.”¹ This is the difference between simply noting the change of season and “keeping” the season.

“I love the eighteenth-century English expression of “keeping” a season, which refers to the traditional ways people in the country restored their bodies and nurtured their souls by honoring, in their daily rounds, the rhythm of the natural world. Sowing, reaping, sitting still.”

~ Sarah Ban Breathnach, Romancing the Ordinary

When we fully step over the threshold into the season with intention and presence, we align with the rhythm and energies of the natural world around us. We become part of it and it becomes part of us in deeper and richer ways. Our creativity, work, and personal lives are nourished because of it and we feel a deeper sense of belonging to our own lives and the world as a result.

There’s also a spirit of adventure in the air as fall begins, isn’t there? Think about how many of the myths and stories you love have adventures and journeys that begin in the fall. There’s a romantic wonder to the season that often has us *wondering* about new paths...and wandering a few, too. A certain hobbit certainly wasn’t immune to that call as the season turned:

“He found himself wondering at times, especially in the autumn, about the wild lands, and strange visions of mountains that he had never seen came into his dreams.”

– J.R.R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring

Let’s intentionally step into fall together with wonder and a spirit of adventure, shall we? I’ll bring the hot cocoa (yes, of course...with loads of tiny marshmallows on top).

¹ “The Seasonal Thresholds” in *The Celtic Spirit* by Caitlin Matthews, 1999.

Autumn Equinox



Fall officially begins on the Autumn Equinox (a.k.a., fall equinox, autumnal equinox, Harvest Home, Modron, and Mabon), which falls on September 22nd this year (2018). The word "equinox" derives from the Latin *aequinoctium* (equal night), which was also the Latin name for September. As with the Spring Equinox in March, the Autumn Equinox occurs in September on the day when there are equal hours of day and night.

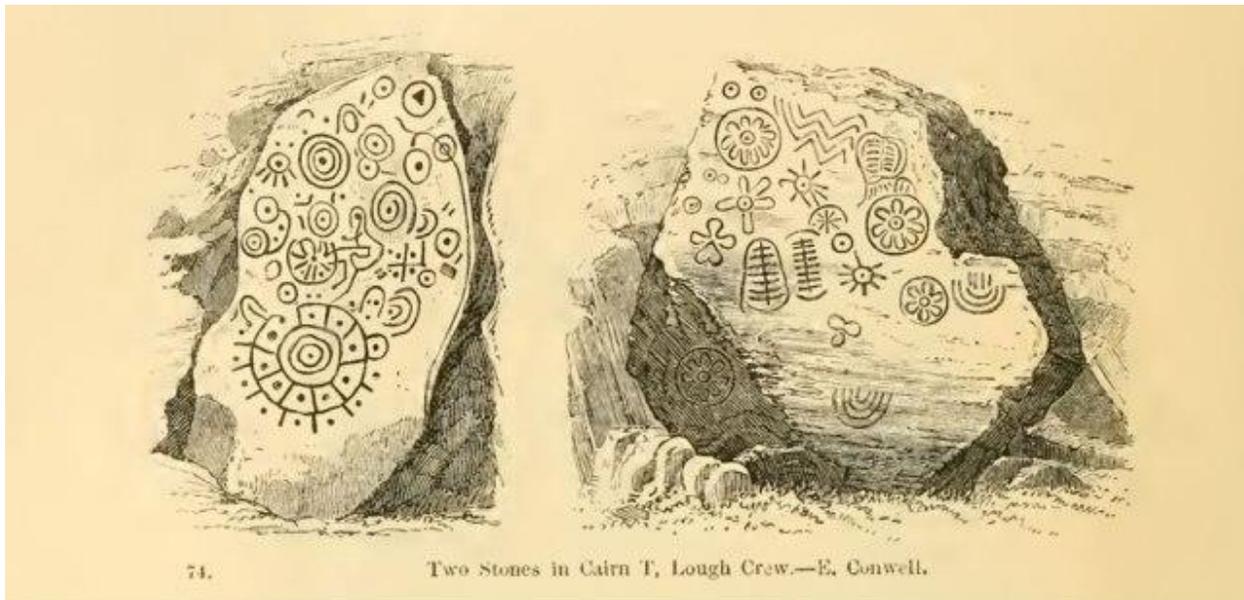
"During the equinox, the Sun crosses what we call the "celestial equator" (just imagine the line that marks the equator on Earth extending up into the sky) from north to south. Because of this, Earth's two hemispheres receive the Sun's rays about equally. The Sun is overhead at noon as seen from the equator, so at this point, the amount of nighttime and daytime (sunlight) are roughly equal to each other." ~ The Old Farmer's Almanac²

² <https://www.almanac.com/content/first-day-fall-autumnal-equinox>

The exact date of the Autumn Equinox varies from year to year, but usually occurs between September 20th and 23rd here in the northern hemisphere. We'll see less and less daylight as the days progress from this equinox until the Winter Solstice in December (Yule).

Just like the Spring Equinox, the Autumn Equinox has been formally observed by traditions worldwide since antiquity. In many places there are ancient archaeological standing stones, arches, niches, passageways, and other constructions that marked the arrival of the equinoxes by the light falling across them or through them in a certain alignment at sunrise or sunset.

There is an intriguing example of one such feature at the Sliabh na Callaigh Passage Tomb Complex (a.k.a., the Lough Crew Complex) in the northwest of County Meath in Ireland that dates back more than 5,000 years. One of the largest of the passage tombs there, Cairn T, was constructed with an entrance alignment such that on the spring and autumn equinox sunrises, the first light of the day shone through the opening, extending down the passage to the rear of the tomb, and then moved across a decorated backstone, ending on a carved sunburst symbol.³



74.

Two Stones in Cairn T, Lough Crew.—E. Conwell.

³ Read more about the Sliabh na Callaigh Passage Tomb Complex and Cairn T at <https://pilgrimagemedievalireland.com/tag/autumnal-equinox/>



In classic mythology, the autumn equinox marks the day when Persephone returns to her husband Hades in the Underworld for the next half of the year. With her departure from the world above, her mother Demeter, grieves and withdraws her magic from the natural world.⁴ All becomes cold, dark, and lifeless until Persephone returns to her mother in the spring.

Autumn Equinox & Harvest Celebrations (and what's the Mabon connection?)

The harvest theme we began exploring at Lughnasadh in early August continues here at the Autumn Equinox in late September. This is the “second harvest” in the Wheel of the Year, a time of abundance and celebration. It’s a day for expressing deep gratitude for our blessings and the fruits of our harvest, and sharing our bounty with others (friends, family, and those in need). The equinox is also a time for honoring the shift toward the inward-turning energies in nature and within ourselves, an energetic shift that deepens as the fall season does. We’re encouraged to take stock in our lives (and larders) and to gently begin gathering our energy back to ourselves and prepare for the colder and darker days to come.

But goodness knows, there’s also a sparkle of energy at the fall equinox that nudges us to play, celebrate, and enjoy the glories of the first days of autumn before the days turn cold. Embrace that, too! Dance, sing, and make merry in celebration (think of how the hobbits would celebrate ~ they’re always fabulous role models when it comes to food, drink, and good cheer). There’s also a bit of wanderlust that sparkles in the air as we cross over into autumn, so don’t be surprised if you feel your feet getting itchy to get out and explore a few new paths and interesting places, too.



While the equinoxes marked important seasonal transitions that were clearly observed far back into antiquity, historically the actual harvest festivals didn’t necessarily align

⁴ Demeter was the Greek “Goddess of the grain, agriculture, harvest, growth, and nourishment, who presided over grains and the fertility of the earth.” She presided over the cycles of life and death. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demeter#Demeter_and_Persephone

with the Autumn Equinox exactly. Furthermore, the celebration of “Mabon” as a holiday is a creation of the modern neopagan community and not an ancient tradition:

“... there is no ancient Pagan festival of Mabon....[w]hat was celebrated centuries ago were local harvest festivals. These Harvest Home celebrations were celebrated all over Europe at different times throughout the harvest season, depending on when the crops were ripe and ready to be gathered in.”

~ Ellan Dugan

In modern times, the Autumn Equinox has become a day of celebration for many who walk an earth-based spiritual path. It’s a quarter day in the Wheel of the Year (that some refer to as Mabon) when we honor the abundance of harvest time both in terms of farmers’ crops and the yields from our own efforts in our lives and work.

What is the significance of the Autumn Equinox for our purposes here in the Wonder Club? First and foremost, the equinox marks the official crossing over to the fall season (yay!). By bringing our attention to that transition, it helps us to step into the new season with intention and awareness and to align ourselves with its energy and rhythm. As the equinoxes (spring and autumn) occur on the two days of the year when the amount of light and dark are in balance, they serve as reminders to check in with ourselves to see if we need to make any adjustments in our routines and habits for a healthier and happier balance in the coming season. And, of course, the equinox is a fabulous time to celebrate, feast, and give thanks for the harvest yields from the fields and gardens and in our lives.

And don’t forget that in the Celtic Coligny Calendar,⁵ this is “Song Time,” the Celtic month of *Cantos* that straddles our modern months of September and October (from full moon to full moon). I love how the name *cantos* reflects celebration and joy. That’s a fabulous energy to embody as we greet the autumn equinox and enter the fall season.

⁵ You’ll find more about the Coligny Calendar in the Wheel of the Year Field Guide (January’s Field Guide No. 2 for full-year members, and provided as a Field Guide for the Pre-Field Prep/Orientation for new mid-year members).

The magic of apples



“She set off on a ramble, running up the hill to leave a piece of one of her breakfast biscuits under the boughs of the Apple Tree Man. That’s what Aunt called the oldest apple tree in their orchard gone wild....

She probably daydreamed as much about him as she did fairies, especially when she was laying under his branches. Sometimes when she dozed there she imagined she could hear a distant voice telling stories she never remembered when she woke.”

~ Charles de Lint, The Cats of Tanglewood Forest

No doubt you’ve noticed all the apple imagery in this month’s materials thus far. I’ve been laying a trail of apple seeds along the way here for several reasons (besides the fact that apples are my favorite fruit).

Our beloved domesticated apple has its origins in the wild apple trees of ancient Central Asia. They've been cultivated in Asia and Europe for thousands of years, and eventually made their way to the Americas with the European colonists. During that time, they have become woven deeply into our cultural memory, symbolism, and traditions.

It's no surprise then that autumn in our culture has become inexorably associated with apples. To me, apples *are* a sweet part of the transition into fall. But it's not just because the farmer's markets and grocery stores are bursting with bushels of the delicious apple harvest this time of year. It's also because apples have become imbued with such deep meaning, mythic associations, and magic over the ages:

“The apple was a sacred fruit and staple crop, and a good part of [our ancestors] livelihoods over winter relied upon its yield. It was so important to them they conceived of faerie spirits that oversaw the trees, such as the Apple Man. The apple became part of their magical and spiritual rites.”

~ Cliff Seruntine, Seasons of the Sacred Earth

Just think of the myths, religions, folk tales, and stories that come quickly to mind in which apples play a key role. Snow White and the apple bespelled by the Evil Queen with a sleeping curse always comes up for me. There's a thread about Old Man Apple, a kindly and wise tree spirit, that runs through tales and songs from the Old Country that continues to pop up in newer creations today (e.g., in *The Cats of Tanglewood Forest* by Charles de Lint). And of course, there's Eve eating the Forbidden Fruit of knowledge in the Garden of Eden. I could go on and on, and I bet you could do the same.

And don't forget the old tradition of giving teachers an apple in the fall in gratitude for the knowledge and wisdom they share.

Apples were considered “a sacred and honorable fruit” in myths and folktales throughout time and across many cultures. They came to represent wisdom, knowledge, fertility, healing, wholeness, the soul, physical pleasure, abundance, generosity, magical power, women's mysteries, death and rebirth, and more in various traditions. Ah, but

eating an apple (or trying to steal one) could initiate a perilous journey or personal transformation (often both). “We see them featured as the objects of quests, as the catalysts of personal trials and tests, and as the custodians of wisdom and immortality.”⁶

Then there’s also the association of apples with the misty Isle of Avalon, a landscape steeped in myth and legends that still resonates powerfully for many of us today.⁷

The Avalon Connection



Did you know that another name for the Autumn Equinox is the Feast of Avalon? Some of the modern Goddess traditions and Druidic orders celebrate the Feast of Avalon as part of their Mabon practices. The apple harvest is celebrated with a feast, cider is pressed, and apples are placed on the graves of loved ones who have passed to signify rebirth and remembrance. It’s a lovely tradition.

But the association of Avalon with apple trees⁸, the Fae, and the feminine divine goes much further back into Celtic history:

⁶ Jheah Telyndru in *Avalon Within: A Sacred Journey*, 2005: pp. 8–9.

⁷ Happy sigh.

⁸ “Avalon. Ynys Affalon. The Island of Apples. Etymologically, the name Avalon can be traced back to the Proto-Indo-European root word *abel* (meaning “apple”), which passed into the Celtic languages as *afal* in Welsh, *aval* in Cornish and Breton, and *ubhal* in Irish Gaelic. Jhenah Telyndru, *Avalon Within: A Sacred Journey of Myth, Mystery, and Inner Wisdom*.

"It may be unwise to seek a physical place for something as elemental as Avalon, but before Glastonbury (a Saxon name), the site was known by another name, Yniswitrin, which can be interpreted to mean "the Island of Glass," ruled over by Avalach, who is also called Rex Avalonis, King of Avalon. It is he who is the father of Morgan (later Morgan le Fay), described in another text as "the Royal Virgin of Avalon," a title that can only refer to a hereditary guardian.

So Yniswitrin became Avalon, the Island of Apples, a place of wonder and mystery where it was known that some great and mysterious object was kept—guarded, perhaps, by a college of priestesses (as suggested by Dion Fortune) under the leadership of Morgan, she who was elsewhere known as Arthur's sister and perhaps a goddess herself...

But Avalon was (and is) a place where eternity touched the earth, where anything could happen. It was (and is) both a gateway between the worlds and the home of the deepest mysteries of Britain. It was one of "the Fortunate Isles," a place of apple trees and the perfume of flowers.

In other cultures this would have been called an earthly paradise; to the Celts it was the otherworld, a place as simple and real as any one might find in the realms of men."

~ John & Caitlin Matthews, Arthurian Magic

There's a poignant connection between the autumn harvest of apples (and all they symbolize) before the land slumbers through the cold months until spring with the wounded King Arthur being transported by boat to Avalon to rest, be healed and sleep until his country needed him again. Like the season of fall, Avalon is associated with the element of water—it was originally an island surrounded by water and mists, a place of

healing presided over by a circle of nine priestesses, and legends hold that a sacred well was located there, flowing with healing waters and rejuvenation.

When you think of Avalon, how do you envision it? Perhaps you could create a collage or artwork in your Wonder Year Book to gather bits of your imaginings in one place?

Celebrate Autumn Equinox in your own delightful way



How would you like to celebrate the Autumn Equinox and step intentionally into the fall season? I invite you to do a little brainstorming about what feels inspiring to you. You don't have to be of any particular spiritual tradition to take part. Just make whatever you decide to do inspiring and true to you.

Think about the various themes and connections with the autumn equinox I mentioned in this field guide and those in your own memories. What resonates the most for you? What feels the most relevant for what's happening in your life? Start there and see where it takes you.

As with all aspects of my own spiritual practice, I tend to take a simple and informal approach these days as to how I celebrate the holidays, including the autumn equinox. The specifics each year vary, and I tailor my approach to what's happening in my own life and the world around me.

Here are some ideas and prompts to spark your creative spirit (and heavens no, I wouldn't suggest trying to do a bunch of these on the same day; just see if any of them resonate or spark other ideas for you):

- Honor your local for the day: How about eating meals that day made from solely local or regional sources? That's a lovely way to connect with the landscape, the harvest, and the season right where you are. See what's coming in from the fields and orchards where you live, plan your meals around just those local in-season ingredients, and celebrate the blessings of the bounty of this time and place.
- Create your own Harvest Home party. You can keep this small and intimate (just you alone or a few select special others) or you can go all out and invite a circle of friends, family, and neighbors. You get to decide what sounds fabulous (and do-able to you). If you're inviting others, make it a potluck! That keeps it easier on you as the hostess, letting you enjoy your company and the celebration. Having everyone focus on foods from the local fall harvest and regional dishes from your area gives it all an extra sparkle of fall magic.
- Hold your own version of a Feast of Avalon and incorporate several apple dishes and drinks into the meal.
- Journal about what you're harvesting in your own life this season. What blessings and lessons have you received this year? What seeds have you planted? Which are coming to fruition? Which need a bit more nurturing to bear fruit? What do you want to complete during the fall season?
- Meditate on the concept of balance in your life, relationships, and work. This isn't about trying to attain a perfect balance of your time and energy you spend in each aspect of your life. This is more about having a healthy ebb and flow among the areas of your life that mean the most to you. Are you giving your time and attention to the people and things that truly matter most? Is there some rebalancing you'd like to do to bring things back in harmony this season? How about with your personal practices and routines (like I talked about in the September Field Guide "Stepping into Fall")?



- Spend the day welcoming fall into your life and home. Pack away your summer clothes and linens and pull out the ones you'll want for the colder months ahead. How about adorning your mantle, altar, and table with some autumn colors, squash, Indian corn, and gourds? Open the doors and windows to air out the house and clear it of any stale energy with smudging (or your preferred energy-clearing method). Reset the energy with your intentions and desires for the fall season ahead.
- Leave off the electric lights for the whole day and just use candles where needed. The idea here is to fully notice how the amount of daylight is equal to the hours of night and to honor that balance for the day. And spend some time outdoors today, too. Take a walk along a leaf-strewn path or through your neighborhood and notice changes the new season is bringing.
- Do a tarot or oracle card reading for the coming season and journal about the meaning the cards you drew have for you and the focus of your inquiry. Here's a lovely one with a "balance" theme you can try from Alexis at Worts & Cunning (I adore her Wheel of the Year spreads):
<http://www.wortsandcunning.com/blog/balancing-autum-equinox-spread>
- Set up an autumn altar with tiny gourds, pumpkins, and little ears of dried corn and any symbolic representations of what fall means to you. Include things that represent what you're inviting in and what you're releasing for the coming season. Is there any healing or closure on an issue you desire this season? Also, a lovely addition would be offerings of gratitude for the blessings and abundance you've received in your life this year. You can light a candle on your altar, write out your intentions for the season, read them aloud and then give thanks for the blessings and abundance in your life. Put out the candle when it feels complete and leave your written intention on your altar where you'll see it each day. If you'd rather not leave it out in the open for others to see, you can simply place something on your altar that represents your intention. All that matters is that it serves as a meaningful reminder to you.



- Stock up! Have a fall cooking extravaganza to celebrate the abundance of fresh veggies and fruit flooding into the farmer's markets and stores. Cook up some yummy stock, broth, soup and/or stews and perhaps a casserole or fruit pie or two and freeze back a bunch of meals and treats for the colder months ahead. Check your pantry to see if there are any dry goods or spices you're running low on that you tend to use in the colder months. This is a great time to stock up on some fall essentials. It's also a wonderful time to make or stock up on healthy remedies for colds and flus. Yep, it's that time again. (And no, you don't have to do all of this on the day of the autumn equinox, but it's a great day to start. ;)
- Spend a few hours diving into a hobby or project you've been thinking about this month (hint: see the video "The Wonders of Gleaning" from September 8th). Bonus if it is fall-themed! ;) Then find every opportunity you can in the coming weeks and months this fall to steal away and play in your hobby again and again. There's a magic in the momentum and joy that builds with each session (and progress, too). The equinox is a wonderful day to begin something new to set the energy for what you want to weave into your fall days.

Resources

(should you want to dive down a rabbit hole or two)

Here are some resources to explore should your nose be twitching for a little rabbit-hole diving...

Autumn Equinox & Mabon

Danu Forest has an interesting looking ebook available in Kindle format on Amazon called [*The Magic of The Autumn Equinox: Seasonal Celebrations to Honour Nature's Ever-Turning Wheel*](#). I don't have it and am not sure if the content is different than the section on the Autumn Equinox in her print book I have called [*The Magical Year: Seasonal Celebrations to Honour Nature's Ever-Turning Wheel*](#) (a lovely book that I highly recommend). Given the similarities in the titles, I suspect the former is just an



excerpt of the latter. I thought I'd bring your attention to it in case you're interested but don't want to get the whole book.

[*Mabon: Rituals, Recipes & Lore for the Autumn Equinox*](#) by Diana Rajchel. This isn't one I own, but it looks like the most recent of Llewellyn's books on this magical holiday and has good reviews.

[*Autumn Equinox: The Enchantment of Mabon*](#) by Ellen Dugan. Unfortunately, this one is out of print in hard copy. But you can still find occasional used copies and there's an inexpensive Kindle version available through Amazon.

I've mentioned this book before but would be remiss for not including it in this list: Ellen Dugan's [*Seasons of Witchery*](#). She has a charming section in the book about the Autumn Equinox.

If you want to hear a completely brilliant retelling of the Persephone and Demeter saga and how this archetypal story illuminates the creative cycle, check out Clarissa Pinkola-Estes' audio [*The Creative Fire*](#). She covers a lot of other ground about the creative cycle in this audio program, but this particular part is worth the price of admission all on its own.

Apple Tales & Tunes

[*The Cats of Tanglewood Forest*](#) written by Charles de Lint and masterfully illustrated by Charles Vess. The Apple Tree Man in this story completely captured my heart.

[*Wild Apples*](#) by Henry David Thoreau. One of Thoreau's best essays in my opinion. Deft, insightful, and a delight to read.

["Apple Tree Man,"](#) sung by Charles de Lint. Love this sweet little two-minute video of CdL caught on video by his wife.

The Avalon Connection

Non-fiction

[*Crossing to Avalon: A Woman's Midlife Quest for the Sacred Feminine*](#) by Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D. I **love** this book. I first read it about 10 years ago and will never forget how



affirming and inspiring it was to me at the time. I love all of her books, but this one remains my favorite.

[*Avalon Within: A Sacred Journey of Myth, Mystery, and Inner Wisdom*](#) by Jhenah Telyndru. A fascinating introduction to a modern Avalonian spiritual tradition.

[*Arthurian Magic: A Practical Guide to the Wisdom of Camelot*](#) by Caitlin and John Matthews. This is a massive tome of a book that is gloriously comprehensive and rich with sparkling insights and wisdom from two of the most devoted scholars (and practitioners) of the Arthurian cycle and mysticism.

Notable Oracle and Tarot Card Decks

[*The Wisdom of Avalon Oracle Cards*](#) by Colette Baron Reid. If I'm not mistaken, this was the first oracle card deck Colette created. It's a lighter touch and simpler than her later decks, but still full of wisdom and insight.

[*The Complete Arthurian Tarot*](#) by Caitlin and John Matthews. This is an updated version of the Matthews' classic deck for lovers of the Arthurian tradition.

There are other decks related to Avalon and King Arthur out there, but these are the two I'm familiar with and feel good about recommending.

Fiction

[*The Mists of Avalon*](#) by Marion Zimmer Bradley. The classic retelling of the Arthurian legend through women's eyes. Brilliant and deeply inspirational for all lovers of the Arthurian Cycle and the sacred feminine.

[*The Crystal Cave*](#) (Book 1 of the Arthurian Cycle trilogy, first published in 1970) by Mary Stewart. This book and those following it in the series launched my love of the Arthurian cycle back when I was a teenager. The series is still a beloved favorite.

There are LOADS of novels and non-fiction books relating to the Arthurian cycle, Merlin, and Avalon. These are simply some of my favs.



*“A woman’s seventh sense is wonder. The wonder **It All**.
Life—why we’re here. Not the wonder of how we’ve lasted this
long. (Although that thought does inspire a pause.)
Introducing a sense of rhythm into your daily round—a regular
pattern of sleep, work, exercise, rest, and play—is the first step to
restoring your wonder years.*

*Rhythm, reverence, reflection, repose. Say those words aloud
slowly. Even their cadence brings relief. Because when you’ve got
rhythm, sweetie, you’ve got **your** life. And you won’t want or
need to ask for anything more.”*

Sarah Ban Breathnach, Romancing the Ordinary

