As I began pondering the subject of "awakening" this month, this story came to mind.

Laura is a well-respected writer and activist whose family spends lots of time in meditation retreats. One day, when she was expressing upset about a household problem, her four-year old daughter stood calmly in the middle of the room, closed her eyes and said "Gonnnngggg!" in a loud voice...imitating the bell used by a spiritual teacher. It was the way she had learned to bring her mind back to the present moment, and she wanted to offer it to her mom. It worked!

We all experience times when we realize we’re not fully "awake" to life: when we need to be brought back to our senses. Sometimes the awakening comes as a dramatic single moment, while at other times it may be more subtle and gradual.

One of our greatest challenges is to stay awake to all that is happening, even if it's not desirable, and choose a creative and life-giving response. Right now, as we are aware of such significant trauma in the world, it can be more difficult than ever to stay awake in the moment. It's also needed now more than ever, lest we contribute more harm.

This month, we invite you to reflect on the many ways you can "awaken" in this world as it is. In addition to inspiring readings from many sources, we offer a few spiritual exercises you might choose to try.

As we come awake to the calling of life, may this be a time of new energy and purpose for us, as a community of faith and as individuals within it.

Love,

Lynn

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Questions to Live With

1. In this bright opening of the earth, in this turning season when new life is beginning to emerge all around us from its winter hibernation, what do you feel called to awaken within yourself?

2. What has prompted “aha’ moments or experiences of more gradual awakening for you? What changes have resulted from that deepened awareness or understanding?

3. What would you like to be more awake to in your life? In your environment? What might shift for you if you become more aware and conscious of these things?

4. If these questions don’t speak to what awakening is asking of you this month, what is your question?

For Inspiration

Awakening is not a thing. It is not a goal, not a concept. It is not something to be attained. It is a metamorphosis. If the caterpillar thinks about the butterfly it is to become, saying ‘And then I shall have wings and antennae,’ there will never be a butterfly. The caterpillar must accept its own disappearance in its transformation. When the marvelous butterfly takes wing, nothing of the caterpillar remains.

- Alejandro Jodorowsky

...spiritual awakening has nothing to do with reaching a divine state. Rather, it is the acknowledgment that every moment is about accepting life’s divinity.

- Steve Leasock

It’s exhilarating to be alive in a time of awakening consciousness; it can also be confusing, disorienting, and painful.

- Adrienne Rich

We have moments of clarity and then we're confused. We're awake and then we're numb. We're buoyant and then we're sinking. Just as we inhale and exhale constantly, our wakefulness ebbs and flows.

- Mark Nepo, The Endless Practice

I will lift up mine eyes. Scarcely knowing it, I hover over all my little aches and pains, my petty annoyances, my little frustrations... Then out of no place comes sometimes a gentle, sometimes startling reminder and I lift up mine eyes...

I will lift up mine eyes to life, that I may read the guideposts along my way and not miss the important turning in the road. I will lift up mine eyes to love, that I may not close the door of my heart to the knocking hand, the tender cry, the anxious reach.

I will lift up mine eyes . . . that I may meet the divine spirit not only in the high place, the great moment, the penetrating call, but also in the byways, the little duties, the stinging irritations and the sad and bottomless renunciations. And for me this is enough.

- Howard Thurman, Meditations of the Heart

"Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes."

- Carl Jung
I have been finding treasures in places I did not want to search. I have been hearing wisdom from tongues I did not want to listen. I have been finding beauty where I did not want to look. And I have learned so much from journeys I did not want to take...I have been closing my ears and eyes for too long. I have learned that miracles are only called miracles because they are often witnessed by only those who can see through all of life’s illusions. I am ready to see what really exists on other side, what exists behind the blinds, and taste all the ugly fruit instead of all that looks right, plump and ripe.

- Suzy Kassem, *Rise Up and Salute the Sun: The Writings of Suzy Kassem*

May we be awake, intimately aware of our place in the universe, and able to see the miracle of life right in front of us, be it a strawberry, or a bowl of soup.

- Rodrigo Solano-Quesnel

To awaken from life, you must know yourself – what you think, what you believe, what you hope to accomplish. It is an unfolding process that involves learning to live deliberately. It involves self-acceptance, acceptance of others, acceptance of pain, and acceptance of failure.

- Randi Fine

. . . we each have a part to play in how the story unfolds, if we are willing to wake up. We listen for what is calling us and...when we hear our name, we answer, rising anew to meet the life that will not stop calling our names.

- Kathleen McTigue

You who have eye for miracles, regard the bud now appearing on the bare branch of the fragile young tree. It's a mere dot, a nothing. But already it's a flower, already a fruit, already its own death and resurrection.

- Diego Valeri

" The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you. Don't go back to sleep. You must ask for what you really want. Don't go back to sleep. People are going back and forth across the doorsill where the two worlds touch. The door is round and open. Don't go back to sleep.

- Rumi

If we had keen vision and feeling for all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heartbeat, and we should die of the roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walks about well waddled in [insensibility].

- George Eliot/Mary Anne Evans

How often are we awake to our surroundings? Are we poking our heads out of our cocoons long enough to actually taste it, experience it, let it shift something in us, let it penetrate our conventional way of looking at things?

- Pema Chödrön - *Waking Up to Your World*

Awakening is a process. You’re never quite done.

- Simmi G.
Optional Spiritual Exercise

Set an alarm to go off a few times per day as a wake-up call to pay attention to your outer surroundings and inner state. Or take a photo of the same place daily and notice how it changes.

Join Us

Join a Journey Group

Journey Groups are a great way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with a small group of people for a couple of hours each month. Groups meet online on Zoom and are scheduled at different times during the month.

For more information, visit our website https://firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/, or look for the link in First Light.

Upcoming Themes

May–Beauty

Upcoming Services

Sundays at 10:30

April 3
“Waking and Dreaming”, Jeanne Van Bronkhorst & Rev. Lynn Harrison

April 10
“Practicing Spirituality Together”, Nicole McKay

April 17
“Wide Awake”, Rev. Lynn Harrison & Rev. Shawn Newton

April 24
“Mother Nature on the Run”, Rev. Shawn Newton

'Tis the mountain high, falling softly, downward toward the sea
'Tis the grand, tall oak with its strong arms stretching outward, toward infinite space
'Tis the ocean that lies upon an earth of universal void
'Tis an hour within a second of time in expansion
'Tis all things that sing within all that is
'Tis the flight of an eagle on a summer’s morn
'Tis the rising of a sun in another land
'Tis the voice of the infinite within our humble hand

Open mine eye to see the glory of life in full flight
Open mine heart to hold the essence of the unfolding flower
Open mine soul to all things that were, are and shall be
For we have journeyed long within the shadows of sorrow
Shielded from the light of truth
The voice of silence beckons our soul
To awaken to the ray of truth,
So all may see
Glory shining all around
- Andy Wilkinson, Voice of Silence