

THE JOURNEY: A Guide for Reflection

Calling

(September 2022 | Volume 2, Issue 1)

I recently concluded a four-year term on the Ministerial Fellowship Committee, the body tasked with determining if and when a person is ready to be “fellowshipped” as a Unitarian Universalist minister. This committee required a great deal of work. For every round of interviews, we had to read roughly 150 pages of material about each candidate before we met with them. Much of this material was trying to get at whether the person that would soon be before us had a genuine call to ministry—whether they could articulate a narrative of their passion and commitment to the work, whether they could demonstrate the needed temperament for the role, whether they had shown they had gained the skills and knowledge to be effective in our learned ministry, and, not insignificantly, whether those around them had also experienced evidence of their call. The combination of inclination and aptitude would often be revealed in pages (and pages) of essays, letters of reference, university transcripts, police checks, and psychological assessments. Sometimes the call was unmistakable. Sometimes it took some searching to find it. And, sadly, on rare occasion, it didn’t seem to exist at all. All of this is to say that a call can take time and energy to discern. And it may require testing to be sure that it’s real, and truly ours.

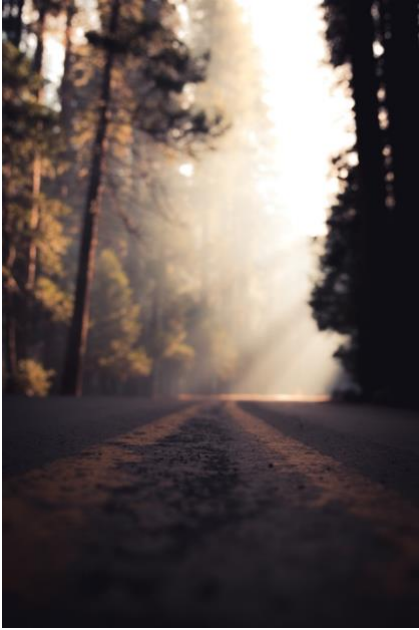
The great writer and theologian Frederick Buechner, who recently died at the age of 96, famously described one’s calling in the language of vocation (from the Latin *vocare*, meaning “to call”): “Your vocation in life is where your greatest joy meets the world’s greatest need.”

Thought of this way, a calling certainly isn’t restricted to those who hear a startling call to take up holy orders. A calling is, instead, something to be found by everyone, at any point in one’s life. (One’s calling, of course, may have nothing to do with what one does or did for work.)

This month we encourage you to reflect on what “calling” has meant in your life, and what it means today. To reflect on that place where your great joy meets the world’s great need. In the words of one of our beloved hymns, may we, in the weeks ahead (and in conversation with our Journey Groups), “mingle [our] calling[s] with all who will share; work toward a planet transformed by our care.”

In faith and love,
Shawn

Questions to Live With



1. Have you experienced a clear calling in your life? And, if so, have you heard a call more than once?
2. How do you “listen” for calls?
3. How have you learned to know whether a “call” is real?
4. Is a new calling emerging for you?
5. Have you ever followed a call and then found it led you in the wrong direction, or at least a difficult one?
6. If the notion of a calling doesn’t resonate for you, how do you think about what it means for someone to find a meaningful purpose for their lives, or even a vocation?
7. If not one of the above, what is your question about intention this month?

For Inspiration

At every moment in every person’s life there is work to be done, always work to be done, some of it small, some of it Great. The Great Work, in a sense, always has to do with healing the world, changing the world, and, as a necessary predicate to that, understanding the world. You rise every morning aware that you are called to this work. You won’t live to see it finished. But if you can’t hear it calling, you aren’t listening hard enough. It’s always calling, sometimes in a big voice, sometimes in a quiet voice.

- Tony Kushner

If you ask me what I came to do in this world, I, an artist, will answer you: I am here to live out loud.

- Émile Zola



Who is She? She is your power, your Feminine source. Big Mama. The Goddess. The Great Mystery. The web-weaver. The life force. The first time, the twentieth time you may not recognize her. Or pretend not to hear. As she fills your body with ripples of terror and delight.

But when she calls you will know you’ve been called. Then it is up to you to decide if you will answer.

- Lucy H. Pearce, *Burning Woman*

Some of us are drawn to mountains the way the moon draws the tide. Both the great forests and the mountains live in my bones. They have taught me, humbled me, purified me and changed me.

- Roshi Joan Halifax

Most people simply tune out the callings and longings they feel rather than confront and act on them, trading authenticity for security and settling for less.

- Gregg Levoy - *Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life*



“Calling” – John Fuller

There, don't you hear it too?
Something is calling, although
The day is blank and gray.

The eye fastened on nothing,
The ear undistracted
And we with nothing to say.

But still that sense of calling,
Of something seeking attention
Beyond our consciousness.

That voice in voiceless things
When they cease to be themselves,
Losing their choice and purpose.

Joining the indiscriminate
Otherness which surrounds us
At our own times of withdrawal.

It is then that the world calls us
As if to reinterpret
Or to reconfigure.

Whose is this voice? A god's?
Surely not. It seems
To be the voice of duty

That speaks of origins
And of relationships
Between things grown apart.

And I remember the muezzin
Singing every morning
Raptly, as if for himself.

Singing in the dark hour
At a distance, over all,
And yet outside our door.

His practised lilt spoke more
Of the puzzles of night than of
The determinations of morning.

As though the light had still
To be charmed into being
And each day a reward.

The voice is much like his,
A commanding meditation
Rising from the blankness.

Of a sleeping senselessness,
Thoughtful, improbable,
But stirring us to beauty.

And like his, the voice
Links us for a while
In its reiterations

Then ends abruptly, as if
Distracted by something else
Of no great importance.

“Callings” – Nancy Shaffer

When you heard that voice and
knew finally it called for you
and what it was saying—where
were you? Were you in the shower,
wet and soapy, or chopping cabbage
late for dinner? Were you planting radish
seeds or seeking one lost sock?
Maybe wiping handprints off a window
or coaxing words into a sentence.
Or coming upon a hyacinth or one last No.

Where were you when you heard that ancient
voice, and did Yes get born right then
and did you weep? Had it called you since
before you even were, and when you
knew that, did your joy escape all holding?
Where were you when you heard that
calling voice, and how, in that moment,
did you mark it? How, ever after,
are you changed?

Tell us, please, all you can about that voice.
Teach us how to listen, how to hear.
Teach us all you can of saying Yes.

“Wooden Boats” – Judy Brown

I have a brother who builds wooden boats,
Who knows precisely how a board
Can bend or turn, steamed just exactly
Soft enough so he, with help of friends,
Can shape it to the hull.

The knowledge lies as much
Within his sure hands on the plane
As in his head;
It lies in love of wood and grain,
A rough hand resting on the satin
Of the finished deck.

Is there within us each
Such artistry forgotten
In the cruder tasks
The world requires of us,
The faster modern work
That we have
Turned our life to do?

Could we return to more of craft
Within our lives,
And feel the way the grain of wood runs true,
By letting our hands linger
On the product of our artistry?
Could we recall what we have known
But have forgotten,
The gifts within ourselves,
Each other too,
And thus transform a world
As he and friends do,
Shaping steaming oak boards
Upon the hulls of wooden boats?

“Problem” - George Bilgere

Jerry is at his usual table this morning
with his cup of coffee and his laptop,
working on his science fiction/fantasy novel.

In every café in America
men and women are hard at work
on their science fiction/fantasy novels.
Perhaps you are one of them. If so,
I salute you; it's a very competitive field.

Forty years, says Jerry, I sold life insurance.
Now I can do what I really want to do.

The planet where his story takes place
has three suns, and the problem he's working
on
is how do the aliens there tell time.

I suggest having everyone wear three watches,
which Jerry doesn't think is funny.
This is a serious novel, he's taking it seriously,
and he wants to get everything just right.

Forty years I sold life insurance, he says.
Now I can do what I really want to do.



I believe in all that has never yet been spoken.
I want to free what waits within me
so that what no one has dared to wish for

may for once spring clear
without my contriving.

If this is arrogant, God, forgive me,
but this is what I need to say.
May what I do flow from me like a river,
no forcing and no holding back,
the way it is with children.

Then in these swelling and ebbing currents,
these deepening tides moving out, returning,
I will sing to you as no one ever has,

streaming through widening channels
into the open sea.
- Rainer Maria Rilke

“You Were Made For This” - Clarissa Pinkola
Estes

One of the most calming and powerful actions
you can do
to intervene in a stormy world
is to stand up and show your soul.
Soul on deck shines like gold in dark times.
The light of the soul throws sparks, can send up
flares,
builds signal fires, causes proper matters to
catch fire.
To display the lantern of soul in shadowy times
like these,
to be fierce and to show mercy toward others;
both are acts of immense bravery and greatest
necessity.
Struggling souls catch light from other souls
who are fully lit and willing to show it.

Optional Spiritual Exercise



Søren Kierkegaard said that we live our lives forward but understand them

backwards. For this month's spiritual exercise, we invite you to play with the notion of a "call" by examining a particular "call" you may have received at some point in your life. (You may have received multiple calls and may wish to repeat this exercise for each one!)

Formulate a voice mail message for yourself that captures the message of the call you once received. Who (or what) placed the call? Were you called by name? What was the message left behind? Were there clear instructions? Did you understand them, then and there, or did it take time?

After reflecting on the message, itself, reflect on what you make of this call at this point in your life?

Join Us

Join a Journey Group

Journey Groups are a great way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with 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 firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/ or look for the link in *First Light*.

Upcoming Themes

October – Abundance | November – Impermanence | December – Healing | January – Grounding
February – Love | March – Anger | April – Welcome | May - Freedom

Upcoming Services

Sundays at 10:30

Sep 4 - "All Prayer for Ukraine"
Catherine Kentridge

Sep 11 - Water Communion held at 473 Oakwood
"Dipping our Toes in the Water"
Rev. Shawn Newton

Sep 18 - "Our Real Work"
Rev. Shawn Newton

Sep 25 - "The Path to Reconciliation"
Rev. Shawn Newton and the Reconciliation Working Group

Newsletter Editorial Team

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