

THE JOURNEY: A Guide for Reflection Healing

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As children, my brothers and I would occasionally play church. (*Didn't everyone do this?!*) Inspired by what we saw on 1970's television, we would mimic the many evangelists we saw—especially the faith healers who were seemingly able to heal whatever physical ailments were presented to them by the people who came in faith and hope that someone could help them. With a prayer and the touch of hands on some ailing part of the body, the one of us playing the televangelist would “heal” the others. What we most enjoyed was imitating the experience of being “slain in the spirit.” For the uninitiated, that's what you may have seen when someone has been so overwhelmed by the healing act they fall backwards and, if lucky, are caught by someone who helps guide them gently to the floor.

As someone who now studies religious experiences, I look back on those days with wonder. What were we really up to? Was it just the physical play that drew us to mirror what we saw on television or when visiting my grandparents' church? Were we carrying out these rituals with some belief that, if done right, we could, at least theoretically, bring healing? Or was it an expression of skepticism that bordered on mockery? I'm not quite sure. I would venture that, over time, all of these motivations were somehow involved.

For whatever reason, I do have deep faith in healing today. Not the version I saw on television, but the kind that comes with bodies that mend, with hearts restored to wholeness, and with relationships repaired through hard work. Sometimes this type of healing happens against all the obvious odds. Sometimes it comes after a terribly long wait. And sometimes it seems to come about with the help of something beyond ourselves. In my work, I am fortunate to witness people healing all the time. And, that said, healing isn't always possible; at least not in the sense of someone being cured. I've learned that healing can have a lot of different meanings. And I've learned that our definitions can change, depending on our circumstances.

This month, we invite you to reflect on the meaning of healing in your life—to consider where you've experienced it, and where you might long for it. The hope in this is that we all might find some greater wholeness in the process.

Wishing you well in this journey!

In faith and love,
Shawn

Questions to Live With



1. What has life taught you about healing?
2. How have you experienced healing in some part of your life? How did it come about? How long did it take? What did you find helpful to the healing process?
3. How do you live with aspects of your life that are difficult to heal?
4. Is there some part of your life where you're currently seeking healing? If so, what "work" is yours in this process?
5. Does time heal everything? Why or why not?
6. If not one of the above, what is your question about healing this month?

Wiradjuri carved tree, Grave of Yuranigh. c. 1850. Photo by Adell Hyslop

For Inspiration

In community I find the wounds I brought.
This is one of the purposes of community.

- Nick Gordon

I realize that patriotism is not enough. I must
have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone.

- Edith Cavell, Nurse and Humanitarian

There is something beautiful about all scars
of whatever nature. A scar means the hurt is
over, the wound is closed and healed, done
with.

- Harry Crews

I imagine one of the reasons people cling to
their hates so stubbornly is because they
sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced
to deal with pain.

- James Baldwin

There's a way not to be broken that takes
brokenness to find it.

- Naomi Shihab Nye

My feeling is that there is nothing in life but
refraining from hurting others, and
comforting those who are sad.

- Olive Schreiner

Unfocused anger has self-destructive
properties. Destruction may purge and even
on some levels purify, but I'm no longer
convinced it facilitates healing – perhaps
even the opposite. Our answers somehow lie
in building and creating, moving forward and
beyond, allowing wounds to heal and scars
to fade gracefully. Not to forget or deny pain,
but to embrace it and move on.

- Renee M. Martinez

“Your Body Is Welcome Here” - Sean Neil-Barron

Your body is welcome here, all of it.
Yes, even that part. And that part. And yes,
even that part.
The parts you love, and the parts you don't.
For in this place we come with all that we are
All that we have been,
And all that we are going to be.
Our bodies are constantly changing, cells die
and cells are reborn
We respond to infections and disease
Sometimes we can divorce them from our
bodies,
and other times they become a permanently
part of us.
Your body and all that is within it, both wanted
and not wanted has a place here.
Our bodies join in a web of co-creation, created
and creating.
Constantly changing, constantly changing us
Scarred and tattooed, tense and relaxed
Diseased and cured, unfamiliar and intimate
Formed in infinite diversity of creation
Your body is welcome here, all of it.
So take a moment and welcome it
Take a moment to feel in it.
Take a moment, to be in it.



Photo by Glen Hodson on Unsplash

“The News” - Emilie Lygren

Each morning we listen for what is breaking—
the sound of a thousand tragedies fills the air,
shattering that never stops,
headlines, a fleet of anchors tangled at our feet.

We watch, worried
if we turn away even for an instant,
it will all crumble the rest of the way.
Forget with me for a moment.
Take an unguarded breath.

Do it now, the world needs your attention here,
too,
on the rise and fall of your shoulders,
the rustle of leaves outside the window,
the warm space between your gaze and mine.

“Watching My Friend Pretend Her Heart Isn't
Breaking” - Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

On Earth, just a teaspoon of neutron star
would weigh six billion tons. Six billion tons
equals the collective weight of every animal
on earth. Including the insects. Times three.

Six billion tons sounds impossible
until I consider how it is to swallow grief—
just a teaspoon and one might as well have
consumed
a neutron star. How dense it is,
how it carries inside it the memory of collapse.
How difficult it is to move then.
How impossible to believe that anything
could lift that weight.

There are many reasons to treat each other
with great tenderness. One is
the sheer miracle that we are here together
on a planet surrounded by dying stars.
One is that we cannot see what
anyone else has swallowed.

“Self-Compassion” - James Crews

My friend and I snickered the first time we heard the meditation teacher, a grown man, call himself honey, with a hand placed over his heart to illustrate how we too might become more gentle with ourselves and our runaway minds. It’s been years since we sat with legs twisted on cushions, holding back our laughter, and today I found myself crouched on the floor again, not meditating exactly, just agreeing to be still, saying honey to myself each time I thought about my husband splayed on the couch with aching joints and fever from a tick bite—what if he never gets better?— or considered the mess of the next election, or remembered in just a few more minutes, I’d have to climb down into the cellar and empty the bucket I left beneath a leaky pipe that can’t be fixed until next week. How long do any of us really have before the body begins to break down and empty its mysteries into the air? Oh honey, I said—for once without a trace of irony or blush of shame—the touch of my own hand on my chest like that of a stranger, oddly comforting in spite of the facts.



Kintsugi repair work on Mishima ware tea bowl

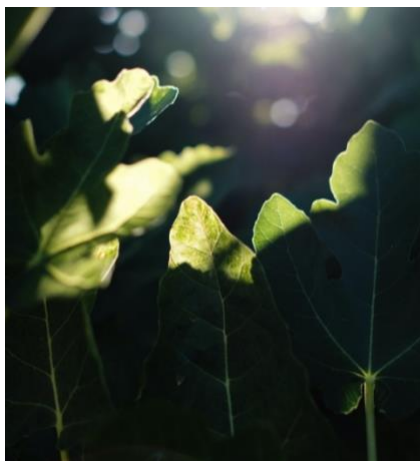
“The Unbroken” - Rashani Réa

There is a brokenness
out of which comes the unbroken,
a shatteredness
out of which blooms the unshatterable.
There is a sorrow
beyond all grief which leads to joy
and a fragility
out of whose depths emerges strength.
There is a hollow space
too vast for words
through which we pass with each loss,
out of whose darkness
we are sanctioned into being.
There is a cry deeper than all sound
whose serrated edges cut the heart
as we break open to the place inside
which is unbreakable and whole,
while learning to sing.

“The Way it Is” - Lynn Ungar

One morning you might wake up
to realize that the knot in your stomach
had loosened itself and slipped away,
and that the pit of unfulfilled longing in your
heart
had gradually, and without your really noticing,
been filled in—patched like a pothole, not quite
the same as it was, but good enough.
And in that moment it might occur to you
that your life, though not the way
you planned it, and maybe not even entirely
the way you wanted it, is nonetheless—
persistently, abundantly, miraculously—
exactly the way it is.

Optional Spiritual Exercise



This month's spiritual exercise is an invitation to become an agent of healing in the world. In your comings and goings, be on the lookout for the world's hurts, its aches and pains and broken bits. And then consider if there's something you might offer to be of help—whether through outward action, or inward prayer, or simply bearing witness to another's suffering and recognizing their humanity (and your own). Tikkun olam, the Jewish concept of “the healing of the world,” reminds us that while we're not responsible healing everything, we can play our part through acts of kindness, compassion, and reconciliation.

Photo of a fig tree by Mark Kassnios on Unsplash

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

January – Grounding | February – Love | March – Anger | April – Welcome | May – Freedom

Upcoming Services | Sundays at 10:30

December 4th | “The Size of Our Souls”
Rev. Shawn Newton

December 18th | “Don't Save Yourself”
Rev. Shawn Newton

December 20th | “In the Dark”
Solstice Vespers, 7pm (online only)
Rev. Shawn Newton

December 24th | “Behold the Glory of It All”
Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, 7pm & 9pm
with the Neighbourhood UU Congregation
at Eastminster United Church at 310 Danforth Ave.
Rev. Shawn Newton & Rev. Lynn Harrison

December 25th | There will be no service on Christmas Day.

January 1st | “Hearts Ablaze” | Fire Communion
Rev. Shawn Newton

The Journey Team

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