



THE JOURNEY: A Guide for Reflection

Power

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What do we do in profoundly unsettling times when we're reeling from the speed and force with which power is used to dominate, manipulate, or exploit individuals, institutions, ecosystems, and nation-states? When tactics designed to overwhelm and disorient threaten lives, deny essential freedoms, and undermine entire fields of knowledge, how can we respond?

One way to maintain our equilibrium is to look to the past, recognize the faithful actions happening around us now, and encourage each other to lean into a vision of promise and potential for the future.

We can counter the use of power *over* with alternatives such as power *to*, power *with*, and power *within*. By embracing our power to make a difference, our ability to act together, and our capacity to raise aspirations toward change, we can keep moving forward.

From the past, we find encouragement in the social change and liberation movements driven by persistent action among people who seemingly had no status or standing. Women, Black and Indigenous peoples, 2SGLBTQ+ communities, and others living under oppressive regimes, have employed a range of strategies—from agitation, lobbying, and civil disobedience to nonviolent resistance and even clever publicity stunts—to gain visibility and push back against oppression.

In the present, we take heart knowing that it's not "all on us." Many people of conscience and goodwill are working to protect basic rights and speaking truth to power (literally, as Episcopalian Bishop Mariann Budde has done). Like each of us, they are doing their best to reach out and care for one another. As Irish-Indian poet Nikita Gill writes, "Everything is on fire, but everyone I love is doing beautiful things and trying to make life worth living. I know I don't have to believe in everything, but I believe in that."

As we explore this month's theme, let's encourage each other to lean into a vision of hope for the future—one in which we stay connected, rest when we're tired, and keep our hearts open to joy. Joy, after all, may be the greatest act of resistance we can choose.

In faith and love,

Angela

Questions to Live With



Photo by Gary Walker Jones, courtesy of Unsplash

1. What springs to mind when you hear the word 'power'?
2. Is power a good or bad thing?
3. What power do you have? Where did your power come from?
4. In what areas do you want to increase your power?
5. How and for whom have you used your power?
6. When have you felt the most powerful in your life? Why might that be?
7. If these questions don't address how you need to explore power this month, what is your question?

For Inspiration

The only power you have on this planet is the power of your decisions.

- Paulo Coelho, Lyricist and Novelist

I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept.

- Angela Davis, Political activist, Philosopher, Academic and Author

The power to question is the basis of all human progress.

- Indira Gandhi, Politician and Stateswoman

Technology gives us an awesome power, a power to have the world in our pocket and to carry with us the attention of hundreds of fellow travelers on life's way. But even as it satisfies so great a desire in us so that we cannot imagine life without it, that is not the whole story, for from time to time, we get a hint that something is missing. First, even though everything is always available to us, we remain strangely distant from the things around us and we register that fact dimly, as something on the verge of being remembered.

- Chad Engelland, Philosopher and Professor

When someone ignores you, it's an intentional display of power. They're essentially acting like you don't exist, and they do it because they can. They believe that nothing will happen to them. Ignoring silences people. It intentionally avoids resolution or compromise. It ignites your worst fears of unworthiness because it makes you feel that you deserve to be ignored. Inevitably, being ignored puts you in the position of having to choose between making a fuss or accepting the silent treatment. If you stand up to the ignorer and get in their face, you break the norms of polite behavior and end up feeling worse, diminished, demeaned.

- Judith Heumann, Disability Rights Activist

All the forces in the world are not so powerful as an idea whose time has come.

- Victor Hugo, Author, Poet, and Politician

The less effort, the faster and more powerful you will be.

- Bruce Lee, Martial artist, Actor, and Movie Director

We are powerful because we have survived.

- Audre Lorde, American Writer, Professor, Poet, Activist

The most regretful people on earth are those who felt the call to creative work, who felt their own creative power restive and uprising, and gave to it neither power nor time.

- Mary Oliver, Poet

To feel powerful, touch a thottavaadi [a pink flowering plant whose sensitive leaves fold inward if touched], watch it shrivel and collapse at your finger's brush. To know the limits of power, walk by it again in twenty minutes, when it is revived, standing as tall as if you were never born.

- Sarah Thankam Mathews, Novelist



Photo by Rahul Saraf, courtesy of Unsplash

True power and true happiness are when you use your success to make others around you feel even more significant.

- Hrithik Roshan, Actor

This life is yours. Take the power to choose what you want to do and do it well. Take the power to love what you want in life and love it honestly. Take the power to walk in the forest and be a part of nature. Take the power to control your own life. No one else can do it for you.

- Susan Polis Schutz, American Poet, Filmmaker, and Businesswoman

My Inuktitut name is Ningiukudluk, and Prime Minister, it means bossy little old lady.

- Governor General Mary Simon during her installation speech on July 26, 2021

Behold, my brothers, the spring has come. The earth has received the embraces of the sun and we shall soon see the result of that love! Every seed is awakened and so has all animal life. It is through this mysterious power that we too have our being and we therefore yield to our neighbors, even our animal neighbors, the same right as ourselves to inhabit this land. My love of our native soil is wholly mystical.

- Chief Sitting Bull (Tatanka Iyotaka), Hunkpapa Sioux (1831-1890)

Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power.

- Lao Tzu, Philosopher

The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any.

- Alice Walker, Poet, Novelist, Short Story Writer, Social Activist

Know the depth of your power and use it with lightness and give it to kindness and make of it love

- Brianna Wiest, Author

Just knowing your rights (or your worth or value) will never be enough if you are powerless to force someone else to respect them.

- Alice Wong, Disabilities Activist, Writer, Editor, and Community Organizer

We are learning to distinguish love from fear within ourselves and to choose love no matter what happens outside. This is authentic power.

- Gary Zukav, Author

Almost every successful person begins with two beliefs: the future can be better than the present, and I have the power to make it so.

- David Brooks, Author, Political and Cultural Commentator

Optional Spiritual Exercise

1. The Power of Small Gestures

Author and speaker Leo Buscaglia reminds us that "Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around."

This month, as you go about your daily life, your assignment is to note how often you naturally offer the following small gestures to people you know and to people you don't know:

- a smile;
- a kind word;
- a listening ear;
- an honest compliment; and
- some other small act of caring.

If desired, come to your group prepared to share your experience.

2. The Power of our Attachments

The instructions for this exercise come from the spiritual teacher, Ram Dass. In his book, *Paths to God: Living The Bhagavad Gita*, he writes:

“If you want to play a little bit with a renunciation practice, pick some desire that you encounter every day. You decide which one: the desire to eat something or other, the desire for a cigarette, whatever it is you want to play with. Pick something that you usually give in to every day — like, let’s say, a cup of coffee in the morning — and for one day, don’t do it. Then the next day, do it much more than you usually would — have two cups of coffee. Start to study your reactions. Notice the difference in your feelings toward the desire on the first day and on the second day.

If you’re keeping a journal, write about it in your journal. Start to relate to your desires as something you can scrutinize rather than as things that totally suck you in all the time, things that consume you.

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 firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/.

Upcoming Themes

April – Emotional Intelligence | May – Activism

The Journey Team

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