

# “Fire Communion”

First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto  
Rev. Shawn Newton  
1 January 2012

## Reflection

When was the last time you felt alive?

When was the last time you felt really, radically alive?

And, how long has it been?

Just how long has it been  
since you've felt your skin tingle or your stomach churn or your heart sink?

How long has it been  
since you've had a lump in your throat or a deep feeling in your gut?

How long has it been  
since the hair on your neck stood on end—  
out of fear or joy, shock or surprise, anger or ecstasy—  
and you knew in an instant, in that very instant, that you were fully alive?

That your body was full of power and passion?

That each fiber of your being pulsed with life?

That every bit of you resounded with the sacred knowledge  
that you are amazingly, miraculously made—  
and, amid all of life's high points and its heartbreaks,  
that you knew that you were made for something?

When was it exactly that you last felt that way?

Maybe it was atop the CN Tower  
or on a roller coaster at Canada's Wonderland last summer.

Maybe it was a first kiss or when you said, “I do.”

Maybe it was when you scored an impossible shot

or sat for an impossible exam.

Maybe it was when someone broke your heart,  
or you fell head over heels in love.

Maybe it was when you held your first grandchild,  
or when you let go of someone you loved with all of your heart.

I don't know when it was, or how long ago it was for you,  
but I hope it's not too distant a memory.

I hope that it is something that happens to you every day,  
as you crawl from your bed, as you brush your teeth,  
as you do your chores,  
as your day unfolds at school, or work, or home.

I hope there are moments along the way, every day,  
when you are intensely aware that you are alive.

I hope this because I know it's so easy to forget.

I hope this for you because there is no greater spiritual practice in this life.

I don't mean that our days on this earth  
should merely be spent thrill-seeking,  
or marked only by the mountain-top moments.

But that all of it—the good, the bad, the bitter and the beautiful—  
may help us to understand what it means to be fully human,  
what it means to be us, in all of our complicated glory.

Because it is when we know that we are alive  
that wondrous things can happen.

The great Howard Thurman once said it all:

“Don't ask yourself what the world needs,  
ask yourself what makes you come alive, and do that.  
Because,” he said, “what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

He's not saying to go off and do whatever we like,

whatever strikes our fancy,  
or even what necessarily makes us happy.

He's saying that what this world most deeply needs  
is people who have figured out who they are  
and what sets their hearts on fire.

This is the ultimate work of being alive,  
and it is the work at the heart of this religion.

Already this morning, we have burned away regrets and hurts and bad habits  
and we've kindled candles of hope for the year ahead.

Now comes the living.  
Now comes the hard part of putting our intentions into practice.

Standing here at the great threshold of 2012,  
none of us can truly know what the year ahead will bring.

We can, though, have some idea of what we will bring to 2012.

May we bring passion and compassion,  
may we bring courage and faith and love.  
May we bring humour and joy and justice.  
May we bring our full and highest selves—  
that we might look back on 2012  
as the year when we fully came alive.

So be it!