

The Path

Introduction From Soul Matters

You live like this, sheltered, in a delicate world, and you believe you are living. Then you read a book (Lady Chatterley, for instance), or you take a trip, or you talk with [someone], and you discover that you are not living, that you are hibernating... Monotony, boredom, death. Millions live like this (or die like this) without knowing it. They work in offices. They drive a car. They picnic with their families. They raise children. And then some shock treatment takes place, a person, a book, a song, and it awakens them and saves them from death. - [Anaïs Nin](#)

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.

Don't go back to sleep. - [Rumi](#)

We all know what it was like. The world was alive once. When we were little. The trees whispered words. Animals spoke to us with their eyes. Playgrounds could become castles. The stars somehow told us we were special. Life could speak.

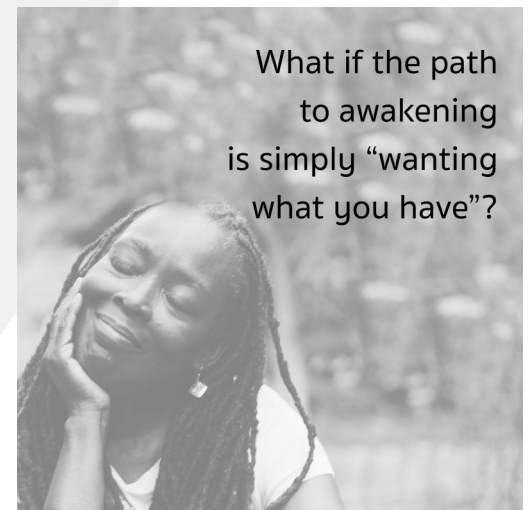
The magic wasn't imprisoned in childhood. We've all had adult moments when we've "come alive." Wonderfully lost in our work, our creativity or a kiss. Time both stopped and was set on fire.

It happened as well in moments of alignment. When our inner life and outer life fell into step. We were finally "us." Everything was clear, and enough.

There it was in the flower too. Actually in so many simple things: freshly baked bread, blackberries, a deer standing still staring at us without blinking, our children laughing. For those fleeting moments, we lacked nothing. We felt gifted beyond comprehension. We knew what "rich" really means.

And it's not that these moments of awakening don't still happen.

Awakening



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There's just something about how we've got things organized that places a fog between them and us. As Anaïs Nin says, we believe we are living, but really aren't. It's surprising actually - how easily we let dullness sink in, how often we allow life to be muted.

But there are always those memories. That whispering tree. That magic kiss. That moment of being true to ourselves. That priceless taste of blackberry juice on our tongue. They can be brought back. Yes, we forget what it feels like to be fully awake and for life to be fully alive. But forgetting means we can remember. It means we can help each other remember. And remembering opens a door for us to find our way back.

So maybe the message this month isn't simply, "Awaken!" but also, "Remind!" We need to tell our stories so others remember theirs. We need to take each other back in time, so we can fully inhabit our present. It's no small thing. On our own, we are so easily convinced being wide awake was a delusion, so easily fooled into thinking that life never really felt that good or seemed so clear. But with help, we wake up. We remember what it is like for life to shimmer. And for us to shimmer, too.

2021/2022 Themes

September – Embracing Possibility

October – Cultivating Relationship

November – Holding History

December – Opening to Joy

January – Living With Intention

February – Widening the Circle

March – Renewing Faith

April – Awakening

May – Nurturing Beauty

June – Celebrating Blessings

Self-Care for the Spiritual Journey

When we go deeper into spiritual exploration together and individually, we may encounter tender spots in our own spirits and stories. It is important, in doing spiritual work, to have trusted companions and adequate support on your journey. We hope you will care for yourself and your spirit along the way, engaging in the theme to the level that's comfortable for you.

Likewise, please know that your congregation is here to offer support if you find yourself struggling with something surfaced by the monthly theme. If you would like to be in touch with the trained caring volunteers on the Pastoral Care Associates team, feel free to email Rev. Patricia Hart, Developmental Senior Minister, at revtricia@uusociety.org.

Option A: Awaken to the World Around You... Right Around You!

[Alastair Humphreys](#) is an adventurer. A serious one. He's cycled around the world, rowed the Atlantic, walked across southern India, just to name a few. But lately he's gone from big to small, from global and grand to local and familiar. In short, he ordered a 12-mile square map of the area where he lives, and he spent a year exploring each half-mile square on that map. The result? The world around him came alive again. He tells the story of this local adventure [here](#). You can find a video of his explorations [here](#). And read his reflections of what he discovered [here](#). It all boiled down to this: the familiar world around him came alive again!

So how might you do a bit of the same this month? You don't have a year, so exploring every inch of the 20 some miles around you is not an option, but it wouldn't be hard to find a few half-mile square spots to explore anew. Or maybe you lay out the map, close your eyes and randomly place your finger on a square. Maybe you look for a road you've not traveled on, and this time don't drive it, but take it in more slowly by walking or biking it. Maybe you revisit one of the well-known and well-loved spots in your neighborhood and simply sit yourself down near it and soak it in for a few hours, or as long as it takes to notice it anew. Or how about taking a couple weeks and capturing pictures of your neighborhood, pictures that capture it from a new perspective or place it in a new frame. Or go on a treasure hunt to document as many of the unique sounds of your local world. And what about drawing or painting it?

Whatever approach you use, the goal is not only to awaken to the world around you, but also - by your attention - to enable that nearby world to come alive!

Option B: Awaken to Enough

Often, we're encouraged to awaken to our larger dreams and hidden hunger "for more." But sometimes what we really need is simply to awaken to what already is, to allow in and awaken to "I'm enough." So this month, take a morning or an evening to explore your relationship to "enough."

Specifically, you are invited to meditate on the following two reflections:

- A Poem: "Who You Are, Right Now" by John Welwood
lotusheartmindfulness.com/lotus-heart-blog/2019/5/28/forget-about-enlightenment
- A Song: *The Slowdown* by Michael Shynes
youtube.com/watch?v=BNvE7d-AKRI

Take them in one at a time, reflecting on each by journaling, jotting notes or drawing what comes up for you.

You can leave it there if you want. But if you want to go deeper, you could do the same exercise for multiple days in a row and see how your reflection changes. Another way to dig deeper is to do the exercise with a friend or family member, reading the poem and listening to the song together and then discussing what comes up for each of you.

Option C: Awaken the Children... and Ourselves

This exercise invites you to embody your ability and responsibility to awaken others. There is a heaviness to our days. Covid, racial trauma, political division, looming climate catastrophe cast a shadow of grief and fear even on our most happy of days. Describing it as a “glass half empty” feeling doesn’t even begin to describe what many of us are wrestling with.

And so the work of reawakening hope becomes the job of all of us.

In her powerful poem, “[What to Tell the Children](#),” Rachel Kann asks us to focus our hope-inspiring efforts on those younger ones who we are handing our world to. In doing so, Kann also challenges us to awaken ourselves. Awaken to what we’ve done - or not done - with our time here. Awaken to what we’ve learned, for better or worse. Awaken to the new way of being and loving and living that must be built.

But how exactly will the poem awaken you? Each person’s response to this powerful poem will be unique. Each of us will receive a different message of comfort or challenge. Each person’s insight will be their own.

Figuring out that unique message is the goal. That’s all this exercise is. It’s that simple, and that big.

So, carve out a morning or evening to soak in Rachel Kann’s poem in video form. Maybe take it in more than once. Make it a meditation. Reflect on it using whatever discernment practice feels best to you: journaling, jotting down thoughts, drawing images, creating a poem or painting of your own in response.

Here’s the link to the poem: youtube.com/watch?v=BG2ZrHqISZ0&t=19s

Option D: Dig into Death; Awaken to Life

It’s one of our most powerful paradoxes: Acknowledging death, awakens us to life. Here are a number of resources to help guide you through reflecting on death, one of the oldest awakening practices there is:

- Reasons to Remember Death youtube.com/watch?v=-A7VrTxuZIE
- How to use the thought of Death youtube.com/watch?v=yg6i7nppkAw
- Life & Death youtube.com/watch?v=Ge9O76N015o
- What will your verse be? youtube.com/watch?v=-7OE6bDfM2M
- A 97-Year-Old Philosopher Faces His Own Death youtube.com/watch?v=qX6NztnPU-4
- Other People spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/28262/other-people
- After Life youtube.com/watch?v=d067BKBAxTA
- Memento Mori theschooloflife.com/thebookoflife/memento-mori/

Option E: Which Quote Is Yours? And Theirs?

In the Resources section in the following pages, there are many quotes about the practice and experience of awakening. Engaging these quotes and finding *the one* that especially speaks to you is a spiritual practice in and of itself.

So, as your spiritual exercise for this month, set aside an hour (our day!) to reflect on the quotes until you find the one that strikes you the most, the one that most deepens your understanding of awakening or most powerfully offers you an insight or challenge.

But don't stop there! If you are up for it, invite a friend to do it, too. Ask them to look over the list and find which one is "theirs" - i.e. which one most powerfully offers them an insight or challenge. And then take them out to coffee or lunch and have a discussion with them about the quotes that grabbed each of you.

And if you want to take it even further, consider writing out your quote on a small piece of paper and carrying it with you or pinning it up so you can continue to reflect on it throughout the weeks leading up to your group meeting.

Come to your group ready to share where the journey led you.

There is no need for self-improvement.
All these trips that we lay on ourselves...
never touch our basic wealth...
Our warmth and brilliance are right here.
This is who we really are.
We are one blink of an eye away
from being fully awake.

Pema Chödrön



Don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every single one. Instead, make time to meditate on the list and then pick the one question that speaks to you most. The goal is to figure out which question is "yours." Which question captures the call of your inner voice? Which one contains "your work"? What is that question trying to get you to notice or acknowledge? Often it helps to read the list to a friend or loved one and ask them which question they think is the question you need to wrestle with!

1. Are you the type that believes awakening most often arises slowly from discipline and dedication or the type that believes it is something that sneaks up on us and hits us like a ton of bricks?
2. When did you first awaken to the truth that the world's rules, judgements and strivings did not have to be your own?
3. Have you ever read a book or watched a movie that "woke you up"?
4. Have you ever tried to "wake up" someone?
5. Have you ever "heard" life say, "[Sing me awake!](#)"?
6. Are awakenings easier when you are younger or older?
7. What might it take for you to be able to say, "I am playing a significant part in our social awakening"?
8. What if your life is *already* what you are looking for and *already* offering you what you need?
9. Could it be that the fear you're fleeing is imaginary?
10. Has pain or loss ever led you to the door of awakening?
11. [They say](#) what irritates us about others is actually something we don't acknowledge about ourselves. So, what annoying friend or family member is trying to awaken you to something you are struggling to admit about yourself?
12. Is it possible to have an awakening and your exterior life remain the same as it was?
13. Could it be that your ambitions are an impediment to your awakening?
14. What if the path to awakening is simply "[wanting what you have](#)"?
15. What are you willing to do to ensure that those around you don't forget the awakening that Covid brought them?

What's your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to find it.

Word Roots & Definitions

Awakening

From Old English *awæcnan* which means to “spring into being, arise, originate,” also, less often, “to wake up.”

Also from Middle English *Waken* which means “to remain awake on watch especially over a corpse.”

Wise Words

“The world is [theirs] who can see through its pretension... See it to be a lie, and you have already dealt it its mortal blow.” - *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

“Awakening is not the creation of a new state of affairs but the recognition of what already is.” - *Alan Watts*

“All suffering, stress and addiction comes from not realizing you already are what you are looking for.”
- *Jon Kabat-Zinn*

“The path of awakening is not about becoming who you are. Rather it is about unbecoming who you are not.”
- *Albert Schweitzer*

“Waking up to who you are requires letting go of who you imagine yourself to be.” - *Alan Watts*

“Enlightenment is ego’s ultimate disappointment.”
- *Chögyam Trungpa*

“The dark night of the soul comes just before revelation.” - *Joseph Campbell*

“Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.” - *Carl Jung*

The tiger chasing me is not real.
The fear I am fleeing so well is imaginary...
The palace I strain for so nobly is not real.
My ambitions are a distraction.
There is no treasure there...
- [Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes](#)

This is the time
For you to compute the impossibility
That there is anything
But Grace.

Now is the season to know
That everything you do
Is Sacred.

- [Hafiz](#)

“Moments of hearing for the first time; you never know what may cause them. The sight of the Atlantic Ocean can do it, or a piece of music, or a face you’ve never seen before. A pair of somebody’s old shoes can do it. You can never be sure. But of this you can be sure. Whenever you find tears in your eyes, especially unexpected tears, it is well to pay the closest attention. They are not only telling you something about the secret of who you are, but more often than not God is speaking to you through them of the mystery of where you have come from and is summoning you to where you should go next.” - *Frederick Buechner*

“Everything Is Waiting for You” - *David Whyte*

Full poem: onbeing.org/poetry/everything-is-waiting-for-you/

Your great mistake is to act the drama
as if you were alone...
To feel abandoned is to deny
the intimacy of your surroundings...
Put down the weight of your aloneness and ease into
the conversation. The kettle is singing
even as it pours you a drink...

“I believe God is everything, say Shug. Everything that is or ever was or ever will be... She say, my first step away from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. And I laughed and I cried and I run all around the house. I knew just what it was. In fact, when it happen, you can’t miss it.” - *Alice Walker*

“Woke(ness)... is an encouragement for people to wake up and question dogmatic social norms. It requires an active process of deprogramming social conditionings, focusing on consistent efforts to challenge the universal infractions we are all subjected to... In order for one to stay woke, one must first, be woke... Those who are

(Continued on page 8)

Resources

woke must engage themselves in ways that actively challenge the world we live in.” - *Raven Cras*

“You make an actual vow to hear the cries of the world, to step into the experience of awakening to the suffering of the world, and the desire to bring an end to that suffering.” - [Rev. angel Kyodo williams](#), *on what it means to be on the path of enlightenment*

You are not meant for crawling, so don't.
You have wings.
Learn to use them and fly.
- [Rumi](#)

“Who You Are, Right Now” - *John Welwood*
Full poem: lotusheartmindfulness.com/lotus-heart-blog/2019/5/28/forget-about-enlightenment

Forget about enlightenment.
Sit down wherever you are
And listen to the wind singing in your veins...
Open your heart to who you are, right now...
Not the saint you are striving to become...

You tell me to live each day
as if it were my last...
But why the last? I ask. Why not
live each day as if it were the first—
all raw astonishment, Eve rubbing
her eyes awake that first morning.
- [Linda Pastan](#)

Videos & Podcasts

Awakened by Music
youtube.com/watch?v=fyZQf0p73QM

The Slowdown - *Michael Shynes*
youtube.com/watch?v=BNvE7d-AKRI

This is what was bequeathed us - *Gregory Orr*
youtube.com/watch?v=BrvMpAavaAw

9 Attitudes of Mindfulness - *Jon Kabat Zinn*
youtube.com/watch?v=2n7FOBFMvXg

What Does It Mean to Be 'Woke?'
youtube.com/watch?v=zwlTMhD-HQY

Can YOU Fix Climate Change?

youtube.com/watch?v=yiw6_JakZFc

On waking up to the real challenge of the climate crisis.

Books

Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness - [Jon Kabat-Zinn](#)

On the connection between awakening, embodiment and healing...

Assembly - Natasha Brown

Review: nytimes.com/2021/09/13/books/review/assembly-natasha-brown.html

Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation - Rev. angel Kyodo Williams

Explores racial injustice as a barrier to collective awakening.

Our Political Nature: The Evolutionary Origins of What Divides Us - Avi Tuschman

On awakening to what divides us politically.

Related video: youtube.com/watch?v=5vkIJkvJUzE

Movies

[The Truman Show](#)

[Departures](#)

[Something, Anything](#)

[Get Out](#)

[Spirited Away](#)

[I Am](#)

Music

Here's our playlist for this month. It's organized as a journey of sorts, so consider listening from beginning to end and using the playlist as a musical meditation.

Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on Awakening.

Click [here](#) for all the [YouTube playlists](#).



Soul Matters
SHARING CIRCLE

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