

Soul Matters, April 2014

What Does it Mean to Be a Person of Awakening?

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Spring is a natural time to think about awakening. The earth is awakening to new life. The ancient rites of spring celebrate the awakening of plants and animals and freshets of water. The holiday of Passover celebrates the awakening of the Jewish people to a new life in freedom. The holiday of Easter celebrates the awakening of Jesus to new life, and from that the awakening of Christians into new faith.

And right now, High Plains Church is awakening to the idea of new life. You may not know the form that this will take for your church yet, but you are thinking about new ways of being together as people of covenant, new ways of organizing your teams and small groups, new forms of spiritual practice and of worship, new ways of relating to the world around you.

More than opening your eyes, or even your mind, I believe that awakening requires opening your heart. It is so easy to box ourselves into comfortable ways of being. When we know what we believe, who we want to associate with, what we like to eat, where we like to go, etc... we close ourselves off to awakening to new possibilities. By opening our hearts to new experiences, new ideas, new life in all its manifestations, we become people of awakening.

In March I attended a UU Minister Association continuing education retreat in Loveland, Colorado. The topic was "Preaching by Heart: The Art of Preaching Without a Script." I was quite sure that I was not interested in learning how to preach without a manuscript – I have been preaching for 25 years and have found a style that I am comfortable with. But out of respect for my colleagues, I listened and paid attention... and awakened to a new possibility. In fact, I discovered that preaching without a manuscript may be the next logical step for me in preaching from my heart.

Lest you think I am speaking purely metaphorically, I will remind you that the heart contains about 40,000 neurons, comparable to a subset of the brain, and receives, processes, and transmits information independently of the brain.

You will see the results of my awakening during Sunday services this month. Rather than judging them from the box of your comfort zone, I invite you to open your hearts to this new experience. So this month, I challenge you to open your hearts, and awaken to all that awaits you.

With love and appreciation from
Beatrice

Our Spiritual Exercise: What Can You Find By Getting Lost?

Last month I went on a walk... and got lost. I was staying at Sunrise Ranch near Loveland, CO, for a ministers' retreat. There was a map available at the front desk of the property and various walking trails. So I set out, during some free time in the afternoon, to take the long way around to a nearby lake. I started up the dirt road on a hill behind the ranch. I saw the two water tanks that were marked on the map, and then came to a three-way fork in the road that was not clearly marked. Knowing that I would have to head to the south to get to the lake, I took the southernmost fork. The trail continued for a way, getting slimmer and slimmer, and then it disappeared.

The first thing that awoke in me was my spirit of adventure. Rather than retracing my steps, I elected to find my own way to the lake. I knew it was somewhere below me, so I headed down. Through the bushes and brambles, over boulders, until I came to a little stream. Water usually takes the path of least resistance, so I elected to follow it in hopes it would flow into the lake. Of course, the vegetation is most dense alongside water, so I was really bushwhacking.

Eventually I came to a barbed wire fence, below which I could see a swiftly flowing canal. The fence was marked on my map, as was the canal. According to the map, the canal ended somewhere to my right, near the trail I had meant to take. So I set out walking along the fence, looking for a way under, over, or through it. After a while I saw a nice bridge crossing the canal. No idea why the bridge was there – there was no road or trail on my side of it, just the barbed-wire fence. So I walked back a ways to a spot that had looked somewhat promising, and wriggled under the fence.

After that it was over the bridge, and having used up most of our break time, back along its bordering road to Sunshine Ranch.

This little episode re-awakened in me a real sense of confidence in my ability to find my way in the world – literally as well as figuratively. It lifted my spirits in unexpected ways.

Tina and Jen wrote, “Getting lost suspends time, allows the ordinary demands of life to be put on ‘pause’ while your heart and soul delve deep into a singular experience. When we allow ourselves to get lost, serendipitous insights arise, we meet unexpected people and we discover unanticipated things about ourselves and our relationships and our world.”

Think about a time when you have been lost – literally or metaphorically. What did you discover? How did it change you? Did it “change” you? Or enrich you? Or heal you? Or something else entirely? Did you discover something that felt like “grace?” Or feel like you accomplished something or earned something? Did your discovery – in getting lost – feel like an awakening? And if so, to what did you awaken? How wide awake are you now?

Come to your group with your story and insights, and any souvenirs you might have from your adventure.

Questions To Wrestle With:

Be sure to engage these questions in advance of your group and treat them like a spiritual discipline throughout the month. The idea is simple. Just read over these questions and find the one that “hooks” you most. Then let it take you on a ride. Don’t wait until the last minute. Look them over early and live with them during the entire month. Tape the one that hooks you to your bathroom mirror. Or carry it in your wallet or purse. Maybe even post it on your refrigerator door. One way or another, allow it to break into--and break open--your ordinary thoughts. And then come to your Soul Matters meeting prepared to share that journey with your group.

1. What were you taught as a child or young adult about “awakening”?

The word “awakening” most likely wasn’t the one used. But surely, some adult in your life talked about “keeping your eyes open,” “not becoming blind,” “wisdom” or “epiphanies.” What sources of awakening and wisdom were trusted? Which ones were you told were deceptive or might “lead you astray”? When you felt “lost,” did the adults in your life encourage you to “go to the woods”? “Talk to a friend”? “Read the Good Book”? Does any of your childhood learning about “awakening” still apply to your life?

2. What happens with your body when you have an experience of awakening?

For many of us, awakening is an experience of the mind. It is experienced as a mental insight, an intellectual “ah-ha”! But that’s not the case for everyone. For some of us, it’s primarily a bodily experience, or at least something that starts in the body and only then slowly makes its way to our head. Indeed, can any of us say that awakening doesn’t happen in at least some small way in our bodies? What’s your body’s story? What part does it play in awakening?

3. What was your biggest moment of awakening?

The question needs no teasing out. What was your big “ah-ha moment”? How did it alter your life?

4. Are you living a “life of awakening”?

For some of us this means keeping our eyes open to “what’s been there all along.” The joy of our kids. The support of friends. The healing grace of nature. For others a life of awakening means being open to new ideas and new experiences. What does it mean to you? Maybe more importantly, how would you answer the question, “Are you awake?”

5. How does “a life of awakening” relate to your current personal struggle to nurture, inspire, act?

Our UU faith takes our personal struggle with spiritual disconnection seriously. Some spiritual traditions frame the primary religious struggle in terms of spiritual impurity or imperfection. Ours is more focused on helping us reconnect with our deepest self, life’s gifts and needs greater than our own. So which of these three spiritual challenges is most prominent in your life right now? Is your “work” right now about listening more fully to your deepest self? Opening more trustfully to life’s gifts? Or serving and responding to needs greater than your own? Where is your spiritual energy going right now? And how might the “call of awakening” be related to that? How might it help reframe your struggle? Your work?

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Recommended Resources:

As always, this is not “required reading.” We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started--and maybe to open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to “live a life of awakening.”

Wise Words:

A religious awakening which does not awaken the sleeper to love has roused him in vain.

~Jessamyn West

However, anyone to whom this happens should not leave his room upon awakening, should speak to no-one, but remain alone and sober until everything comes back to him, and he recalls the dream.

~Paracelsus

I got in trouble with the police, and that was a rude awakening. That was it. I'd seen the bottom of the pit, and it was time to scrape myself out of it.

~Bryan Adams

I look at tens of thousands of church leaders who still do need a bit of an awakening.

~Bill Hybels

If every day is an awakening, you will never grow old. You will just keep growing.

~Gail Sheehy

It's exhilarating to be alive in a time of awakening consciousness; it can also be confusing, disorienting, and painful.

~Adrienne Rich

Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens.

~Carl Jung

Realize how good you really are.

~Og Mandino

What is [the role of money] in the search for meaning? Is our relationship to it one of the chief factors that keeps us in our prison, or could it also be a tool for breaking out, for awakening to a life filled with intensity of purpose?

~Jacob Needleman

The great awareness comes slowly, piece by piece. The path of spiritual growth is a path of lifelong learning. The experience of spiritual power is basically a joyful one.

~M. Scott Peck

The universe is full of magical things, patiently waiting for our wits to grow sharper.

~Eden Philpotts

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.

~Marcel Proust

Where did we get the impression that THIS shouldn't be happening?

~Michael Jeffreys

Silence is telling you everything you need to be happy... but you keep interrupting her!

~Michael Jeffreys

The truth you believe and cling to makes you unavailable to hear anything new.

-Pema Chodrun

It's not what you are seeing... it's WHERE you are seeing from.

-Michael Jeffreys

Things to Think About:

Think in ways you've never thought before.
If the phone rings, think of it as carrying a message
Larger than anything you've ever heard,
Vaster than a hundred lines of Yeats.

Think that someone may bring a bear to your door,
Maybe wounded and deranged; or think that a moose
Has risen out of the lake, and he's carrying on his antlers
A child of your own whom you've never seen.

When someone knocks on the door,
Think that he's about
To give you something large: tell you you're forgiven,
Or that it's not necessary to work all the time,
Or that it's been decided that if you lie down no one will die.

~ Robert Bly ~

My boat struck something deep.
Nothing happened.
Sound, silence, waves.
Nothing happened?
Or perhaps, everything happened
And I'm sitting in the middle of my new life.
- Juan Ramon Jimenez -

Love Dogs -Rumi
One night a man was crying Allah!
Allah!
His lips grew sweet with praising,
until a cynic said, "So!
I've heard you calling out, but have you ever
gotten any response?"
The man had no answer to that.
He quit praying and fell into a confused sleep.

He dreamed he saw Khidr, the guide of souls,
in a thick, green foliage.
"Why did you stop praising?" "Because I've never heard anything back."
"This longing you express is the return message."
The grief you cry out from draws you toward union.
Your pure sadness that wants help is the secret cup.
Listen to the moan of a dog for its master.
That whining is the connection.
There are love dogs no one knows the names of.
Give your life to be one of them.

"We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. There are some things in our social system to which we ought to be maladjusted. Hatred and bitterness can never cure the disease of fear, only love can do that. We must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love. Before it is too late, we must narrow the gaping chasm between our proclamations of peace and our lowly deeds which precipitate and perpetuate war. One day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek but a means by which we arrive at that goal. We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means. We shall hew out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope."
-- "A Network of Mutuality" by Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Moments of High Resolve Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman

Despite the dullness and barrenness of the days that pass,
if I search with due diligence, I can always find a deposit left by some former radiance,
But I had forgotten.
At the time it was full-orbed, glorious, and resplendent.
I was sure that I would never forget.

In the moment of its fullness,
I was sure it would illumine my path for all the rest of my journey.
I had forgotten how easy it is to forget.
There was no intent to betray what seemed so sure at the time.
My response was whole, clean, authentic.
But little by little, there crept into my life the dust and grit of the journey.
Details, lower-level demands,
all kinds of cross currents-- nothing momentous, nothing overwhelming, nothing flagrant--- just wear and tear.

In the quietness of this place,
surrounded by the all-pervading Presence of God, my heart whispers:
Keep fresh before me the moments of my High Resolve,
that in fair weather or foul, in good times or in tempests,
in the days when the darkness and the foe are nameless or familiar,
I may not forget that to which my life is committed.

Keep fresh before me the moments of high resolve.

“On Tuesdays when I make lunch for my girls, I focus on this: the sandwiches are sacraments. And each motion is a sacrament, this holding of plastic bags, knife, of bread, of cutting board, this pushing of the chair, this spreading of mustard on bread, this trimming of liverwurst, of ham. All sacraments, as putting the lunches into a zippered book bag is, and going down my six ramps to my car is. I drive on the highway, to the girls’ town, to their school, and this is not simply a transition; it is my love moving by car from a place where my girls are not to a place where they are; even if I do not feel or acknowledge it, this is a sacrament. If I remember it, then I feel it too. Feeling it does not always mean that I am a happy man driving in traffic; it simply means that I know what I am doing in the presence of God.”
--Andre Dubus,

Movies

Everything is Illuminated

<http://www.imdb.com/video/screenplay/vi3936682265/>