



Touchstones Project

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Awakening

Wisdom Story



Introduction to the Theme

So, here's the deal. You are born. You take your first breath, gasping like a fish out of water, which, in a sense, you are. Everything sounds strange now because noise travels through air instead of the amniotic fluid of the womb. They lay you down in your mother's arms, and you look up. The problem is that the lights are blinding, your eyes don't focus, and your brain can't make sense out of anything your eyes see. Welcome. Your journey has begun.

If you could speak, which you can't, you would probably say, "Whoa, let's just slow everything down. Slow. Real slow." The only constant that you will experience is change. And you will experience so much before you even have

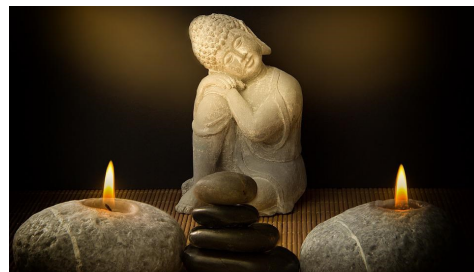
language to describe what is happening to you. The journey has begun, and you are a stranger in a strange land.

"We wake," writes Annie Dillard, "if we ever wake at all, to mystery, rumors of death, beauty, violence.... 'Seem like we're just set down here,' a woman said to me recently, 'and don't nobody know why.'" As the Buddha suggested, just being born is no guarantee of actually ever being awake. Welcome to the world and it's amazing, wonderful, and terrifying creatures, including your parents. This is your first awakening, but hopefully not your last.

The idea of awakening has been powerful in religious traditions. In some cases, it was a rite of passage involving crossing a threshold to spiritual maturity. In others, it involved an ongoing spiritual process to explore self and life more deeply.

For the followers of Jesus, awakening involved understanding that the *Kingdom of God* was within people. In Dave Ferguson's Christian framework,

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The Life of the Buddha, adapted

The founder of Buddhism was Siddhartha Gautama born in 566 BCE, the son of King Suddodana and Queen Maya, rulers of Kapilavastu, India, in the foothills of the Himalayas. At the birth, a wise man predicted, "If the prince remains in the palace, he will become a great king. But if he leaves, he will find Truth and become a great holy man." The King did not want him to be a holy man, so he surrounded Siddhartha with everything he could possibly want.

Sadly, the queen died a week after birth. Her sister came to raise the baby. Days passed quickly, and Siddhartha grew. At age 16, he married a cousin, Princess Yasodhara. The king hoped this would keep the prince at home.

One day, when he was 29, Siddhartha asked his friend and charioteer, Channa, to take him for a ride outside the palace grounds. They encountered an old man. Siddhartha asked what was wrong with him. "Nothing is wrong," replied Channa. "He is old. We will all be old one day." Siddhartha was disturbed and asked to be taken home. He wondered, "What good is youth if you will get old?"

The next day, he and Channa went out and encountered a man who trou-

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Awakening & Regeneration

The past few years have been extremely challenging because of a pandemic, Putin's war, the US Supreme Court, and more. Consequently, we need regeneration, which is important because it can give birth to hope, nurture the spirit, renew compassion, cultivate wisdom, and return us to life stronger. Regeneration puts life at the center of every decision and action, but regeneration is difficult if we are not awake. This awakening is first to ourselves, and it is often prompted by the question, "Why?" Why is my life like this? Why are things like this? We must also awaken to those around us. Finally, we must awaken to the world. Awakening is not a single event, rather it is an ongoing process that challenges and changes us.

A Theme-Based Ministry Project

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Regeneration

The Middle Way

(Continued from page 1) **Life of Buddha**

bled him. He asked Channa about it. Channa said, "That man is very sick. We are all vulnerable to sickness." Siddhartha was troubled, wondering, "What good is health if you will eventually get sick?"

On the third day, they went out again. Siddhartha witnessed a body being carried through the streets. Channa said, "That man is dead. Death comes to all men, even princes." Now even more troubled, Siddhartha asked, "What good is life if you will someday die?"

The next day, Channa and Siddhartha rode out again. They saw a holy man in saffron-colored robes. The prince asked, "Who are you?" The man replied, "I am a monk, a seeker of Truth, of life over death. To find it, I have given up everything on this earth." Siddhartha decided he must do the same.

That night, Siddhartha crept out of the palace, regretfully leaving his father, his wife, and newborn son. For a while, he traveled with monks. But he did not feel any closer to the Truth.

He spent the next 6 years living as an ascetic, people who denied themselves food and comfort, in order to search for Truth. Yet, Siddhartha felt no closer to the Truth. He decided that Truth was not to be found by denying the body, but through the mind and the heart. From that day, he chose to follow a middle path of moderation.

After another 6 years of seeking, Siddhartha came to a bodhi tree and sat down beneath it, vowing not to leave until he knew the Truth of how to conquer suffering and death. While meditating, he came to understand how he was connected to all life. He had become the Buddha—the awakened one. He expressed what he had learned in the *Four Noble Truths*: 1. Life is suffering. 2. The cause of suffering is desire. 3. The end of desire will end suffering. 4. The way to end desire is through the *Eightfold Path*.

The Buddha shared his insights with many people. At 80, he lay down and entered into Nirvana, the state of eternal peace without rebirth or death.

Called to Awaken

Why?

Rev. Kathy Fuson Hurt

It starts out quite simply, as complex things can do.

We rise one morning, at the usual time. We dress, eat breakfast, and set out for the office, in the usual way. We do our usual job, then return home as usual. And so it usually goes, Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday world without end—

but not this time. Today, something is different. In the middle of our work, for no particular reason, we wonder, "Why?" and everything changes.



"Why am I doing this?"

"Why should I worry about his opinion?"

"Why am I not eager to get back home in the evening?"

"Why are there nuclear arms?"

"Why are the north side neighborhoods so poor?"

"Why do I have to die?"

The universe shifts when we ask, "Why?" Things do not look the same after the question, "Why?" Although we may go on with our usual routine, it will not feel usual anymore because that "Why?" has intruded.

Wondering why, reflecting on the meaning of what we do, indicates that our lives are about to move in a new direction. When the old, familiar patterns have been outgrown, when the time comes for crossing a threshold and entering a new existence, the question "Why?" appears. Having once asked "Why?" it is difficult to keep on with our accustomed ways, because that "Why" hints at possibilities of something more than the usual. Like a siren, the "Why?" calls us to an adventure.

Source: *Quest* by Kathy Fuson Hurt

No Religion... Until

A Gradual Awakening

D.H. Lawrence

The following is from a December 3, 1907 letter that Lawrence wrote to Rev. Robert Reid, his childhood minister. Lawrence was 22 years old at the time, and was a full-time student at the University College of Nottingham where he was pursuing a teaching certificate.

I have been brought up to believe in the absolute necessity for a sudden spiritual conversion; I believed for many years that the Holy Ghost descended and took conscious possession of the "elect"—the converted one; I thought all conversions were, to a greater or less degree, like that of Paul's [then known as Saul on the road to Damascus]. Naturally I yearned for the same, something the same. ... Through all that time I was constantly making appeals we are urged to make, constantly bewildering myself as to what I should surrender—"Give yourself" you say. ... I have watched for the coming of something from without;—it has never come.

...I believe that one is first converted when first one hears the low, vast murmur of life, of human life, troubling one's hitherto unconscious self. I believe one is born first unto oneself—for the happy developing of oneself, while the world is still a nursery, and the pretty things are to be snatched for, and the pleasant things tasted. Some people seem to exist thus right to the end. But most are born again on entering into maturity; then they are born to humanity, to a consciousness of all the laughing, and the never-ceasing murmur of pain and sorrow, that comes from the multitude of humanity. Then, it appears to me, one gradually formulates one's religion, be it what it may. A person has no religion who has not slowly and painfully gathered one together, adding to it, shaping it; and one's religion is never complete and final, it seems, but must always be undergoing modification.

Source: *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Volume 1, edited by James T. Boulton, 2002

Readings from the Common Bowl

Day 1: "Ah, September! You are the doorway to the season that awakens my soul...."

Peggy Toney Horton



Day 2: "I am not a teacher, but an awakener." Robert Frost

Day 3: "For a seed to achieve its greatest expression, it must come completely undone. The shell cracks, its insides come out and everything changes. To someone who doesn't understand growth, it would look like complete destruction." Cynthia Occelli

Day 4: "Love is not to be found in someone else, but in ourselves; we simply awaken it." Paulo Coelho

Day 5: "Today, many will awaken with a fresh sense of inspiration. Why not you?" Steve Maraboli

Day 6: "If you want to find the trail, if you want to find yourself, you must explore your dreams alone. You must grow at a slow pace in a dark cocoon of loneliness so you can fly like wind, like wings, when you awaken." Francesca Lia Block

Day 7: "No single event can awaken within us a stranger whose existence we had never suspected. To live is to be slowly born." Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Day 8: "Gratitude therefore takes nothing for granted, is never unresponsive, is constantly awakening to new wonder...." Thomas Merton

Day 9: "To awaken from sleep, to rest from awakening, to tame the animal, to let the soul go wild, to shelter in darkness and blaze with light, to cease to speak and be perfectly understood." Rebecca Solnit

Day 10: "...Awakening, or enlightenment is not the property of Buddhism, any more than Truth is the property of Christianity. Neither the Buddha nor the Christ belongs exclusively to the communities that were founded in their names. They belong to all people of goodwill...." Jean-Yves Leloup

Day 11: "It's extraordinary how we go through life with eyes half shut, with dull ears, with dormant thoughts. Nevertheless, ...few [have] known one of these rare

moments of awakening when we see, hear, understand ever so much — everything—in a flash...." Joseph Conrad

Day 12: "When you are so full of sorrow that you can't walk, can't cry anymore, think about the green foliage that sparkles after the rain. When the daylight exhausts you, when you hope a final night will cover the world, think about the awakening of a young child." Omar Khayyám

Day 13: "Times are difficult globally; awakening is no longer a luxury or an ideal. It's becoming critical. We don't need to add more depression, more discouragement, or more anger to what's already here." Pema Chödrön

Day 14: "You can use a challenge to awaken you, or you can allow it to pull you into even deeper sleep. The dream of ordinary unconsciousness then turns into a nightmare." Eckhart Tolle

Day 15: "It is often during the worst of times that we see the best of humanity — awakening within the most ordinary of us that which is most sublime. ...It is in the darkest skies that stars are best seen." Richard Paul Evans

Day 16: "Awakening is possible only for those who seek it and want it, for those who are ready to struggle with themselves and work on themselves for a very long time and very persistently in order to attain it." G.I. Gurdjieff

Day 17: "Men dislike being awakened from their death in life." T.S. Eliot

Day 18: "All that is necessary to awaken to yourself ...is ...to turn your attention inward to the awake silence that you are." Adyashanti

Day 19: "If you want to awaken all of humanity, then awaken all of yourself." Lao Tzu

Day 20: "I believe there's a calling for all of us. I know that every human being has value and purpose. The real work of our lives is to become aware. And awakened. To answer the call." Oprah Winfrey

Day 21: "The good qualities in our soul

are most successfully and forcefully awakened by the power of art. Just as science is the intellect of the world, art is its soul."

Maxim Gorky

Day 22: "The ghostly winter silence had given way to the great spring murmur of awakening life." Jack London

Day 23: "Each of us should strive to awaken. Awaken! Take heed, do not squander your life." Dōgen

Day 24: "It is time to awaken to the fact that conformity to a sick society is to be sick." Richard J. Foster



Day 25: "Watching the wonder of a dewdrop clinging on a tree leaf in the early morning sunlight can give us an ethereal thrill and at one time awaken the elapsed

compass of our inner child."

Erik Pevernagie

Day 26: "True happiness comes ...when we see our problems as a potential source of awakening, opportunities to practice, and to learn." Richard Carlson

Day 27: "If you awaken from this illusion and you understand that black implies white, self implies other, life implies death..., you ...can begin to feel your own existence as absolutely fundamental." Alan Watts

Day 28: "When you read to a child, when you put a book in a child's hands, you are bringing that child news of the infinitely varied nature of life. You are an awakener." Paula Fox

Day 29: All memorable events, I should say, transpire in morning time and in a morning atmosphere. The Vedas say, "All intelligences awake with the morning." Henry David Thoreau

Day 30: "Only in the reality of the present can we love, can we awaken, can we find peace and understanding and connection with ourselves and the world." Jack Kornfield

Day 31: "Despair is the result of each earnest attempt to go through life with virtue, justice and understanding, and to fulfill their requirements. Children live on one side of despair, the awakened on the other side." Hermann Hesse



Faith and Theology

Awakening the Sense of Injustice

Awakening the sense of injustice in those not bearing the brunt of injustice is difficult. It is easier to rationalize injustice, to minimize one's privilege, power, and capacity for action, and to avert one's eyes and heart. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., grieved these responses, lamenting that he did not have more white allies. His *I Have a Dream* speech delivered during the *March on Washington*, August 28, 1963, echoes still, as does his dream for children. Still, his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* may have been more important then and now.

King and Ralph Abernathy were jailed on Good Friday, August 12, 1963 for demonstrating despite an injunction obtained by Bull Connor. The same day, eight white clergymen published a letter in the *Birmingham News*. Though largely sympathetic to ending segregation, they thought the protests were unwise, believing the issues should be pursued gradually and civilly through the courts.

King wrote his letter on scraps of paper smuggled out of jail. Addressed to the clergymen, it was made public on April 16, 1963. Fourteen pages long, it was more a manifesto against injustice, more a moral indictment, than a letter.

Accused as an "outside agitator," he wrote, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Asked to take a gradual approach, he responded, "For years now I have heard the word 'Wait!' It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.' We must come to see ...that 'justice too long delayed is justice denied.' We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God given rights." He reached back like the *1619 Project*.

King recites a long and chilling litany of horrific injustices against Blacks, writing, "when you are forever fighting a

understand why we find it difficult to wait."

He challenges rationalizations writing, "I submit that an individual who

breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust ...is in reality expressing the highest respect for law."

King then takes to task the white moderate as "the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom," the white moderate "who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice, ... who constantly says: 'I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action,' who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom, who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a 'more convenient season.'" King concludes, "Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection." ...King goes deeper, "I suppose I should have realized that few members of the oppressor race can understand the deep groans and passionate yearnings of the oppressed race, and still fewer have the vision to see that injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent, and determined action." Despite this, he spoke with gratitude for the white allies, though few, that he had in the South.

He asserts that "time itself is neutral; it can be used either destructively or constructively. ...The people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good will." And we find ourselves facing that reality again.

King then laments, "We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people." Give me not stones, but the bread of allies awakened by injustice.

Accused of agitation, King replies, "I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, [yet] as I continued to think about the matter, I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label. Was not Jesus an extremist for love? ...Amos an extremist for justice: 'Let justice roll down like waters and righteous-

(Continued on page 7)

Sit, Be Still, Notice

The Way of Awakening

Rev. James Ishmael Ford

The project of Zen is awakening. It is experiencing the reality of the play of the universe without a veneer of self-deception.

...Jane Hirshfield describes it deliciously, and without any extras: "Zen pretty much comes down to three things—everything changes; everything is connected; pay attention."

Of course, this awakening isn't something that Zen, or Buddhism, or religion



owns. This Zen path just has seen the issue a bit more clearly than most.... Mary Oliver sings the heart of the way to us. "To live in this world / you must be able / to do three things / to love what is mortal; / to hold it / against your bones knowing / your own life depends on it; / and, when the time comes to let it go, / to let it go."

...The awakened life is one of care and attention. It is meeting the moment fully. And it is letting go of the next thing. At least until the next thing arises.

And so, in Zen the great exemplar is the bodhisattva, the one who sees the hurts of the world, the one who hears the cries of the world. And then in that seeing, with that hearing, reaches out.

...The way of awakening is a response to the call of loving hearts. It is seeing this burning world, and not turning away. It is finding the hurt and looking to help. Sit, be still, notice. And then in that noticing, get up, and help out.

Our awakening is an invitation to a great feast, where no one is turned away.

Source: <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/monkeymind/2017/09/awakened-life-zen-meditation.html>

Awakening the Child

Alison Gopnik

If you think about it from an evolutionary perspective, one of the great psychological mysteries is why we have childhood at all ...when human beings are completely helpless and immature and where we have to put so much energy into taking care of them?

The evolutionary story seems to be that we need that protective period of immaturity to learn all the things that we need to about the world around us. So, ...that ...means that babies and young children should be equipped with powerful learning mechanisms....

...Babies and young children have a ...different way of interacting with the world. They're much worse at focusing on just one thing and better at paying attention to new or unexpected things [which] gives them an advantage when it comes to creativity and discovery.

...Maybe ...there's just something about children's minds and brains that ...makes them ...better at learning, and it would be really interesting to find out what it is about the way their minds work that makes them so smart.

...The first thing is that kids are much, much smarter than you think. They're figuring out everything that is going on around them.

The second thing is that ...[though] babies and young children are incredibly smart, ...the way that their intelligence expresses itself is through their everyday exploration and interactions..., not through being in structured classes or having explicit pedagogical kinds of teaching.

The third thing... is that ...children age 0 to 5 ...are learning more in that time than they ever will again.

Source: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2011/01/child>

The Awakened Child

Elizabeth Williams

Children see the world in amazement, ... their minds are free from prejudice, their emotions are their language, and they aren't afraid to shine with love and joy.... [and share] ...their spiritual abundance while learning about the world....

1. **Help your children understand and accept their emotions:** Emotions are truth—they are the most natural form of expression we humans have. ...Helping your child understand their emotions and reactions means teaching them to express their feelings in a healthy way.

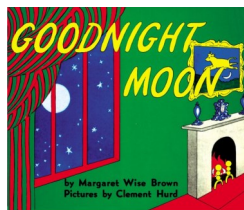
2. **Remove programmed and stereotypical behavior:** Never allow yourself to put your child in a frame, in a stereotype they need to follow. The worst stereotype you can assign to your child is the 'good/bad child' stereotype. ...There are only good and bad deeds, ...stop with the categorization there.

3. **Learn your child's language:** ... Possessing unique capabilities of perception, children have a touch of deeper wisdom in their thoughts. ...pay close attention to what they really mean....

4. **Understand your child's world:** ... Learn to be as curious as they are about every littlest thing. Becoming a part of their world is a humbling experience which will tear down ...walls that keep you from seeing.... ...Children are fascinating in so many ways. ...While we teach them facts, they teach you the truth that doesn't need words and labels.

Source: <https://curiousmindmagazine.com/4-important-factors-raising-spiritually-awakened-children/>

Family Activity: Good Night Moon / Good Morning Sun



Read the book *Good Night Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown & Clement Hurd. Or see

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uU1sX_Yg3IU

(2:53) Then have a conversation about sleeping, about going to bed, and about waking up. What is sleep? Why is it good? What do you like about it? Is it easy or hard to fall asleep? Why? Do you dream? What kind of dreams? Are some funny? Scary? What/who wakes you up in the morning? How do you feel when you wake? Happy? Grouchy? Refreshed? Still tired? Some say that Rip Van Winkle slept for 20 years, waking up old. What would that be like? What would we miss?

How to Wakeup

In his book, *Small Comforts*, the humor writer, Tom Bodett, tells a story of a week-end visit to friends with his wife and young son. Early on the morning that they will depart, Bodett awakes and listens to the sleeping sounds of his wife and son. He broods about how little time is left of the trip and all that must be done when they return home. His brooding becomes misery.

He writes, "As I was lying there brooding, I heard my child stir. He rolled over—I assumed he opened his eyes—and said 'wow.' Suddenly I felt like a heel. ...This little boy who knows nothing of optimism saw he had a new day, and gave it his grandest praise."

Bodett continued, "The more we learn about this world, the more anxious we get. There is trouble afoot. There are heartbreaks, failures, tragedies, and an endless list of selfish desires that are never realized. Sooner or later, we come to resent our own existence. I'm sure our innocent child will eventually eat this forbidden apple, and wake up, as most of us do, to say only "ugh."



I wish I knew what I could do to never let this happen. I wish he could teach me the way he sees things now so that I could help him hold onto it—and so I could remember how it's done. That truly would be a 'most important thing'—if this tiniest of guides can show me from his crib how to open my eyes in the morning, see that I am alive in Paradise, and say 'wow.'"

Source: Touchstones

An Infinite Expectation of the Dawn

(Continued from page 1) **Introduction**

awakening consists of: 1. **Awakening to Longing:** ...“there’s got to be more” to life. 2. **Awakening to Regret:** the desire to rise above past mistakes and failings. 3. **Awakening to Help:** the realization that awakening cannot be done alone. 4. **Awakening to Love:** the belief that we are loved and accepted just as we are. 5. **Awakening to Life:** the joy that we have “life ...to the full.”

In North America, various native peoples used a coming-of-age ritual referred to as a vision quest, a term coined in the 1800s by anthropologists. In Canada, the Cree and Intuit have revived the practice of the vision quest, which had been discouraged through federal policies aimed to eliminate First Nations culture in favor of assimilation into Euro-Canadian society. The United States also used barbaric assimilation strategies. The Siksika (aka Blackfoot) and the Anishinaabe (including the Ojibwe), who are located in both Canada and the United States, also revived the vision quest. It is also practiced by a number of other tribes. This ritual for young males varies among tribes as does its name, which includes translations like “dream visions” or “dream fasts.” The purpose is to spur an awakening among teenage males so that they can discern their purpose in life and take their place as adults in the tribe.

A person prepares for a vision quest through a purification ritual which, depending on his tribe, can involve time in a sweat lodge, fasting, or other customs. Following this, he goes to an isolated place in the wilderness or near the graves of elders. During this period of isolation, it is typical for the individual to forgo food, and, sometimes, sleep, as a means of preparing the mind. In response to these deprivations, the person will often experience dreams, visions, or hallucinations. These are considered to be sacred, a gift that comes from the Creator and the ancestors. Tribes also had/have coming-of-age rituals for teenage females. For the Navajo, the ceremony is called a *Kinaaldá*. For the Apache, teenage girls participate in a ceremony over four days called the *Sunrise Ceremony*, or *Na’ii’ees*. For teenage males and females, these rituals involve the

transition to becoming an adult. Awakening to adulthood can be momentous.

The *Bar Mitzvah* and *Bat Mitzvah* in Judaism, as well as the Unitarian Universalist Coming-of-Age program, involves crossing the threshold to spiritual maturity. Both traditions encourage awakening. The writing of a credo in the Coming-of-Age program, typically for 8th grade youth, is an invitation to articulate one’s beliefs. Various aspects of the program are intended to prepare for this, and some of these can result in an awakening.

In the book, *Awakening to the Tao*, Liu I-ming (b. 1737) (Thomas Cleary, translator) wrote, “Awakening is important for the Way. If you do not awaken, how can you set out? First you should find out the source of essence on your own, then seek a teacher to be certain about life.”

Buddhism is the world religion that places the most emphasis on awakening. Huston Smith, author of *The World’s Religions*, wrote, “Buddhism begins with a man. In his later years, when India was afire with his message and kings themselves were bowing before him, people came to him [with questions] ... ‘Are you a god?’ they asked. ‘No.’ ‘An angel?’ ‘No.’ ‘A saint?’ ‘No.’ ‘Then what are you?’ Buddha answered, ‘I am awake.’

“His answer became his title, for this is what Buddha means. The Sanskrit root *budh* denotes both to wake up and to know. Buddha, then, means the ‘Enlightened One’ or the ‘Awakened One.’ While the rest of the world was wrapped in the womb of sleep, dreaming a dream known as the waking state of human life, one of their number roused himself. Buddhism begins with a man who shook off the daze, the doze, the dream-like vagaries of ordinary awareness. It begins with the man who woke up.”

In Buddhism, the *Seven Factors of Awakening* are 1. **Mindfulness** (*sati*) in order to maintain awareness of reality, including the teachings of the Buddha; 2. **Investigation** (*dhamma vicaya*) into the nature of reality in order to clearly distinguish the

details of that which one is mindful; 3. **Energy** (*viriya*) (aka determination or effort) in order to exercise discipline in applying oneself to the task at hand; 4. **Joy** (*pīti*) (aka rapture, happiness) is an outcome of the first three, one that provides motivation to continue to seek awakening; 5. **Tranquility** (*passaddhi*) (aka relaxation, calm) of both body and mind emerges as joy softens, balancing life’s difficulties and any desire that may arise through them; 6. **Equanimity** (*upekkha*) allows acceptance of reality as-it-is without craving or aversion by quelling emotional reactivity; and 7. **Concentration** (*samādhi*) is necessary to achieve and maintain a calm, single-pointed focus to move through distractions.

In Buddhist thought, awakening and enlightenment are often used in English as synonyms, however, as Robert Cohen notes, the term “enlightenment” is event-oriented, whereas the term “awakening”

is process-oriented. In this distinction, awakening may lead to enlightenment.

While awakening may be the result of undertaking a spiritual practice like meditation, it may also be the result of events like a life-threatening illness, an

accident, divorce, or the loss of a loved-one, as well as a midlife or mental health crisis, or other threatening or destabilizing experiences. Positive experiences like becoming a parent can also produce awakenings, as can a process of formation facilitated by a spiritual director.

Awakening can be nurtured by a connection with nature like Thoreau at Walden Pond, Aldo Leopold reacting to shooting a wolf, Annie Dillard at Tinker Creek, and poet Mary Oliver’s epiphanies of nature. For children, as Whitman wrote, “There was a child went forth every day....” and became what she saw.

Awakening, involves an experience in which a person’s identity goes beyond a finite sense of self to encompass a more expansive sense of truth, reality, wonder, mystery, possibility, or being. It can change who we are and how we act.



Resist, Persist, Love

(Continued from page 4) **Faith & Theology**

ness like an ever-flowing stream.’ ... Abraham Lincoln: ‘This nation cannot survive half slave and half free.’ And Thomas Jefferson: ‘We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal....’ The question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice. ...[We] are in dire need of creative extremists.” Given the societal and environmental issues now, we desperately need creative extremists who will work tirelessly for justice.

The clergy commended law enforcement officials “on the calm manner in which these demonstrations have been handled.” Ironical, since this included arch-segregationist Bull Connor who had King jailed. King noted that Connor “used the moral means of nonviolence to maintain the immoral end of racial injustice.” If the clergy were to commend someone, King suggested “the Negro sit inners and demonstrators of Birmingham for their sublime courage, their willingness to suffer and their amazing discipline in the midst of great provocation,” as well James Meredith, Rosa Parks, and all the heroes of the Civil Rights movement in the South.

King concluded, “Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear drenched communities, and ...[that someday] the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty.”

Under his leadership, the 1964 Voting Rights Act and the 1965 Civil Rights Act passed, finally offering Blacks freedom 100 years after the Civil War. Yet these rights and so many more are being trampled, and the “moral minority” is just beginning. May we be awakened to the injustice of hatred rolling down and drowning the majority, people who believed it could not happen to them, and yet it has or it will. Weep. Scream. March. Protest. Vote. Resist and persist. Love!

Source: Touchstones

A Chilling Litany

The Third Coming

In the 1730s and 1740s in Great Britain and its English colonies, a revival movement called the First Great Awakening was led by evangelicals including John Wesley in Great Britain, George Whitfield in Great Britain and America, and Jonathan Edwards in America. Revivals used emotional preaching to elicit intense, physical and emotional reactions including screaming, convulsions, weeping, and fainting to bring about a conversion, which was considered a “new birth.” This Great Awakening was in stark contrast to Enlightenment thought, which emphasized reason over superstition and science over blind faith. According to Howard John Smith, author of *The First Great Awakening: Redefining Religion in British America, 1725–1775* (2015), Evangelicals blamed Enlightenment rationalism for low church membership that had failed to keep up with population growth because so many people had turned to atheism, Deism, Unitarianism, and Universalism. The Great Awakening aggravated existing conflicts and lead to schisms between the revivalists, who called themselves “New Lights,” and their opponents, the traditionalists, who they derogatorily referred to as “Old Lights.”

Many liberal ministers rejected revivalism because of its excesses.

Among these was the Rev. Dr. Charles Chauncy, a theological forerunner of American Unitarianism and Universalism. He was the minister of First Church in Boston where he served for 60 years. His commitment to logic and reason in theology prompted him to write several pamphlets critical of revivalism, as well as the book, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* (1743). Chauncy argued that people should be encouraged to practice right conduct through persuasion rather than compulsion. He warned of the danger of elevating emotion over reason in religious matters. Chauncy saw conversion as a gradu-

al process (see D.H. Lawrence’s thoughts on page 2) rather than an instantaneous experience driven by raw emotion.

Although the First Great Awakening led to an increase in members in evangelical churches, its primary focus was on renewing the commitment of existing church members. By contrast, the Second Great Awakening, 1795 to 1835, which also gained traction in Nova Scotia and spread across the Maritimes, dramatically increased church membership. These revival and cultural movements by evangelicals continued with a Third Great Awakening in 1855–1930 and, then, a Fourth Great Awakening in 1960–1980.

Since the last Great Awakening, religious affiliation has been in sharp decline in the United States. The same has been true in Canada and Western Europe. In 1976, a supermajority of Americans, more than 80%, identified as White Christians. In 2020, that number had declined to 44%. Further, the ongoing decrease in the non-Hispanic white population from 63.7% of the population in 2010 to 58% in

2020 was exacerbated by the fact that the non-Hispanic white population actually declined by 5.1 million people over that decade due to more deaths than births. This was in the face of the looming milestone of the United States becoming a “majority minority” country by 2044

when non-Hispanic whites will make up less than 50% of the population. On a hopeful note, 61% of Americans view this as being neither good nor bad for society. Unfortunately, 22% overall view it as bad, as do 38% of conservatives.

There is a chilling litany: The rise of white nationalism, a culture of white supremacy openly seeking to maintain white power, the rise of domestic terrorism, the increase in hate crimes against minorities, the gospel of Replacement Theory, the cudgel of evoking fear about critical race theory, the loathing behind *Don’t Say Gay*, the attacks on the 1619



(Continued on page 8)

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion Awakening

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “Awakening is not a thing. It is not a goal, not a concept. It is not something to be attained. It is a metamorphosis. If the caterpillar thinks about the butterfly, it is to become, saying ‘And then I shall have wings and antennae,’ there will never be a butterfly. The caterpillar must accept its own disappearance in its transformation. When the marvelous butterfly takes wing, nothing of the caterpillar remains.” *Alejandro Jodorowsky*

Chalice Lighting: (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page one.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “We awaken by asking the right questions. We awaken when we see knowledge being spread that goes against our own personal experiences. We awaken when we see popular

opinion being wrong but accepted as being right, and what is right being pushed as being wrong. We awaken by seeking answers in corners that are not popular. And we awaken by turning on the light inside when everything outside feels dark.”

Suzy Kassem

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. Have you had an awakening experience? What were the circumstances? How did it affect you?
2. Is there a famous person who exemplifies awakening for you? What lessons do you take from their experience?
3. Is there a group of people who you think need to awaken? Who? Why? How would this contribute to the common good?
4. Is there sometimes a price that comes with awakening? Have you paid a price? Have others who you know paid a price? Was it worth it? Why or why not?
5. Are there issues in society to which people need to awaken? What? Why? What difference could it make?
6. What gets in the way of awakening?
7. What skills or characteristics do you associate with awakening? Why?
8. What can our congregations do to support people in awakening in our congregations? In the community?
9. Does “being woke” involve awakening? How?
10. Should people be chastised for not being awake? Why or why not?

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice: (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Closing Words: Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*



The Handmaid's Tale

(Continued from page 7) **The Third Coming**

Project, the increase in banning books involving race and sexual identity recalling the dystopian future in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, the ascendancy of a conservative majority on the US Supreme Court and its attack on constitutional rights including overturning *Roe v. Wade* and the Red States chilling *Handmaid's Tale* response, the Republican Party's rejection of democratic norms, the



cultural authoritarianism of an evangelical minority seeking to impose its morality on the majority, as well as theocratic and autocratic political actions that threaten democracy like the attempted coup on January 6th—America, to its peril, may already be in the Fifth Great Awakening in which a minority is seeking to amass and consolidate disproportionate power. Unfortunately, the nature of awakening is not always positive.

Perhaps this is not the Fifth Great Awakening, but the *Third Coming*. In 1919, in the aftermath of World War I, Irish poet W. B. Yeats, wrote the poem, *The Second Coming*: “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, / The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere / The ceremony of innocence is drowned; / The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity. / ...And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?” If this is true, a counter-awakening is required of people of good will to bend the moral arc of the universe back toward justice. Source: Touchstones

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