

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Vero Beach
Covenant Groups
Awakening
April, 2022

Chalice lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,
but connected, in mystery and miracle,
to the universe, to this community, and to each other.

Check-in: What is most on your mind today?

Opening Reading:

Anne (Sullivan) took Helen (Keller) to the water pump outside and placed Helen's hand under the spout. As the water flowed over one hand, Anne spelled into the other hand the word "w-a-t-e-r", first slowly, then rapidly. The signals now had meaning. As Helen described it: "I knew then that 'w-a-t-e-r' meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free." On that amazing day, Helen quickly touched the earth and demanded its name. By nightfall she had learned 30 words. Soon she had mastered the alphabet and learned to read and write.

By Gabe Pressman (2012) <https://www.nbcnewyork.com>

Topic Exploration:

There are many types of awakening, as the dictionary tells us and as we know ourselves. Every sleep is followed by an awakening – until we go into that final sleep of death. Perhaps, possibly, even probably, there will be an awakening of some kind following the sleep of death. Philosophers and religious thinkers argue about this, but what matters more is whether we are asleep or awoken right now in the only time we ever have – this present moment.

So, if it is only sleep that bars us from that world, why don't we wake up? Why do we prefer to sleep when Eden is right here and now for us if we but awaken to it? Fr. Anthony De Mello says we don't wake up because waking is painful. For all its problems we are comfortably adjusted to our dream world and we are afraid of what we could lose if we open our eyes and awaken. We know this dream world and it's frightening to move into the unknown. What might we lose or have to give up? Those of us who are troubled by thoughts and feelings of anger, hatred, despair, self-loathing, etc. know, if we are honest with ourselves, that we get something in return for harboring and maintaining these, that there is a certain comfort in recognizing ourselves in these thoughts and feelings. Perhaps our personal sense of identity is based on fundamental facts of our dream – that I am a victim, that I am not good enough or that I am better than others, that I am a failure or perhaps a conqueror. Who and what would I be if I woke up from my dream?

Questions/Sharing:

1. What do you experience upon waking from a night's sleep? What have you experienced in those moments of moving between sleep to wakefulness?
2. What kinds of awakening have you experienced? For instance, awakening to unfairness in life, awakening to one's position on the socioeconomic scale, to adulthood, to sexuality, to the reality of hard experiences (addiction, mental or emotional illness, disability), to spirituality. If you are willing, share the experience of one such awakening.
3. Have you ever awakened, perhaps after falling asleep unintentionally, to a momentary loss of connection with where you are, what you were doing, what time or even day it is? Did you really even know who you were in that moment before it all came rushing back? How did you feel in that moment? What does that experience tell us, if anything?
4. Is awakening a cumulative process, with little awakenings leading to others and building upon each other or is it an instantaneous flash that changes everything? Could it be both? Is it a lasting change or one that needs repeating when we fall asleep again sometimes?
5. Is there something to awaken to or is "awakening" just another "New Age" pursuit for those who are constantly reading self-help books?

Closing Reading:

"WE ALREADY HAVE everything we need. There is no need for self-improvement. All these trips that we lay on ourselves—the heavy-duty fearing that we're bad and hoping that we're good, the identities that we so dearly cling to, the rage, the jealousy and the addictions of all kinds—never touch our basic wealth. They are like clouds that temporarily block the sun. But all the time 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, **Start Where You Are: A Guide to Compassionate Living**

Checkout and reflections on today's session: Please take a moment to express your closing thoughts on the content or process of today's session.

Extinguish the Chalice

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.

Housekeeping