



EXPLORATION

Awakening

Readings

The morning, which is the most memorable season of the day, is the awakening hour.
Henry David Thoreau



1. *The Liberated Self*

by Shefali Tsabary

The path toward the liberated and awakened self is never smooth or straight. It is strewn with potholes, boulders, and landslides. Just as an artist spends months, even years, painting a masterpiece, relying on the creativity within and exercising the discipline required to patiently add stroke upon stroke, so it is with the process of awakening. The liberated self doesn't emerge overnight. It arrives as layer after layer of our ego gets peeled off and replaced with mindfulness and the wisdom that comes with it. Given that we are asked to face all our fears, the price of awakening may seem high. However, if we keep moving forward, one step at a time, the rewards of such an undertaking soon reveal themselves. Our days begin to be permeated with an irrepressible joy and a sense of purpose that engages us with intense present-moment awareness.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28080>

2. *Unlived Lives*

by Robert A. Johnson

“When we find ourselves in a midlife depression, suddenly hate our spouse, our jobs, our lives – we can be sure that the unlived life is seeking our attention. When we feel restless, bored, or empty despite an outer life filled with riches, the unlived life is asking for us to engage. To not do this work will leave us depleted and despondent, with a nagging

sense of ennui or failure. As you may have already discovered, doing or acquiring more does not quell your unease or dissatisfaction. Neither will “meditating on the light” or attempting to rise above the sufferings of earthly existence. Only awareness of your shadow qualities can help you to find an appropriate place for your unredeemed darkness and thereby create a more satisfying experience. To not do this work is to remain trapped in the loneliness, anxiety, and dualistic limits of the ego instead of awakening to your higher calling.”

Source: *Living Your Unlived Life: Coping with Unrealized Dreams and Fulfilling Your Purpose in the Second Half of Life* by Robert A. Johnson and Jerry Ruhl

3. from *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey* by William Wordsworth

And I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply inter-
fused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting
suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of
man,
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all
thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore
am I still

A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we be-
hold

From this green earth; of all the mighty
world

Of eye and ear, both what they half-
create,

And what perceive; well pleased to rec-
ognize

In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the
nurse,

The guide, the guardian of my heart, and
soul

Of all my moral being.

Source: <https://www.owleyes.org/text/lines-composed-few-miles-above-tintern-abbey/read/lines-composed-few#root-219771-5-5>

4. *Direct Experience of Transcendence and Wonder* Rev. Audette Fulbright Fulson

This first source ... refers to something that Huston Smith, that great chronicler of the world's wisdom traditions, calls “religious musicality,” by which he means that in many people there seems to exist the ability and the desire to know God or the divine in some personal, experiential manner. To give an example of what he means, ... consider ... the song “Magic Every Moment.” Dan Fogelberg sings, “On a high and windy island, I was gazing out to sea/when an old forgotten feeling came and took control of me/it was then the clouds burst open, and the sun came pouring through/when it hits those dancing waters in an instant all eternity I knew.” Fogelberg ... describes an experience which is *common* rather than *uncommon*. People all over the world and across time have described similar experiences of a transcendent Oneness. Others just have quickly have argued to explain the experience away..., but people who have had that experience ... hold strongly to it, considering it legitimate and often transformative. ... Unitarian Universalists do not dictate the manner in which a person may come to know God or the Divine or the Ultimately Meaningful. We are not that arrogant. Instead, we affirm that direct experience is one of the ways in which we might determine what is meaningful....

Source: *Our First Source: Direct Experience of Transcendence and Wonder* by Rev. D. Audette Fulbright Fulson



5. *From May Sarton's Well*

by May Sarton

...if one looks long enough at almost anything, looks with absolute attention at a flower, a stone, the bark of a tree, grass, snow, a cloud, something like revelation takes place. Something is “given,” and perhaps that something is always a reality *outside* the self. We are aware of God only when we cease to be aware of ourselves, not in the negative sense of denying the self, but in the sense of losing self in admiration and joy.

Whatever peace I know rests in the natural world, in feeling myself a part of it, even in a small way.

For us who have no religion in the old-fashioned sense, who can say no prayers to a listening God, nature itself—nature and human love—polarize, and we pray by being fully aware of them both.

One thing is certain, and I have always known it—the joys of my life have nothing to do with age. They do not change. Flowers, the morning and evening light, music, poetry, silence, the goldfinches darting about. . .

Source: *May Sarton's Well: writings of May Sarton* by May Sarton, Edith Royce Schade, Papier-Mache Press, 1994

6. *Memories More Wonderful*

by Frederick Buechner

You wake up on a winter morning and pull up the shade, and what lay there the evening before is no longer there--the sodden gray yard, the dog droppings, the tire tracks in the frozen mud, the broken lawn chair you forgot to take in last fall. All this has disappeared overnight, and what you look out on is not the snow of Narnia but the snow of home, which is no less shimmering and white as it falls. The earth is covered with it, and it is falling still in silence so deep that you can hear its silence. It is snow to be shoveled, to make driving even worse than usual, snow to be

joked about and cursed at, but unless the child in you is entirely dead, it is snow, too, that can make the heart beat faster when it catches you by surprise that way, before your defenses are up. It is snow that can awaken memories of things more wonderful than anything you ever knew or dreamed.

Source: *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale* by Frederick Buechner

7. *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* by Rev. Kathryn Bert

I like this fictional dialogue from the play based of course, on the *Essay on Civil Disobedience*. . . Henry and Ellen (a supposed love interest) are out in a boat on Walden Pond, and Ellen asks him to explain to her what transcendentalism is.

So, he asks her to put her hand over the side of the boat and into the water. With great reluctance, she does so. “Can you touch the bottom?” he asks. But she replies that it’s too deep. “For the length of your arm” he says, “not for the length of your mind. Why should your reach stop with your skin? When you transcend the limits of yourself, you can cease merely living—and begin to BE!” But, she doesn’t keep her hand in the water for very long, and pulls it out replying, “I’m a little afraid to just be.” Ellen asks Henry if he is ever afraid, and this is what he says: “I’m afraid that I might “live” right through this moment—and only live. Look at you and only see you. . . what if there’s more and I miss it? What if all that is beautiful, in women, in the world or worlds—what if it is totaled up in this face here, in front of me—and I am empty enough to think I am merely seeing one face?” “That’s transcendentalism?” asks Ellen. “If you like”, says Henry David Thoreau, at least in this fictional account.

Source: *Transcendence*, a sermon by Rev. Kathryn A. Bert

Wisdom Story

Hell & Heaven by Daniel Goleman

A belligerent samurai, an old Japanese tale goes, once challenged a Zen master to explain the concept of heaven and hell. The monk replied with scorn, "You're nothing but a lout - I can't

waste my time with the likes of you!"

His very honor attacked, the samurai flew into a rage and, pulling his sword from its scabbard, yelled "I could kill you for your impertinence."

"That," the monk calmly replied, "is hell."

Startled at seeing the truth in what the master pointed out about the fury that had him in its grip, the samurai calmed down, sheathed his sword, and bowed, thanking the monk for the insight.

"And that," said the monk "is heaven."

The sudden awakening of the samurai to his own agitated state illustrates the crucial difference between being caught up in a feeling and becoming aware that you are being swept away by it. Socrates's injunction "Know thyself" speaks to the keystone of emotional intelligence: awareness of one's own feelings as they occur.

Source: *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* by Daniel Goleman

Snippets

“As you make the effort to let go of your worries and anxieties, please smile. It may be just the beginning of a smile, but keep it there on your lips. It is very much like the Buddha's half-smile. As you learn to walk as the Buddha walked, you can smile as he smiled. Why wait until you are completely transformed, completely awakened? You can start being a part-time Buddha right now! The half-smile is the fruit of your awareness that you are here, alive, walking. At the same time, it nurtures more peace and joy within you. Smiling as you practice walking meditation will keep your steps calm and peaceful, and give you a deep sense of ease. A smile refreshes your whole being and strengthens your practice. Don't be afraid to smile.”

Nguyen Anh-Huong and Thích Nhất Hạnh

“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*

“You live like this, sheltered, in a delicate world, and you believe you are living. Then you read a book... or you take a trip... and you discover that you are not living, that you are hibernating. The symptoms of hibernating are easily detectable: first, restlessness. The second symptom (when hibernating becomes dangerous and might degenerate into death): absence of pleasure. That is all. It appears like an innocuous illness. 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. Some never awaken.” *Anais Nin*

“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*

“The problem that faces us is the problem of awakening. What we lack is not an ideology or doctrine that will save the world. What we lack is mindfulness of what we are, of what our situation really is. We need to wake up in order to rediscover our human sovereignty. We are riding a horse that is running out of control. The way of salvation is a new culture in which human beings are encouraged to rediscover their deepest nature.” *Thích Nhất Hạnh*

“When we are alone on a starlit night; when by chance we see the migrating birds in autumn descending on a grove of junipers to rest and eat; when we see children in a moment when they are really children; when we know love in our own hearts; or when, like the Japanese poet Bashō we hear an old frog land in a quiet pond with a solitary splash—at such times the awakening, the turning inside out of all values, the ‘newness,’ the emptiness and the purity of vision that make themselves evident, provide a glimpse of the cosmic dance.” *Thomas Merton*

“The desire to go home that is a desire to be whole, to know where you are, to be the point of intersection of all the lines drawn through all the stars, to be the constellation-maker and the center of the world, that center called love. 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*

“The beginning of freedom is the realization that you are not ‘the thinker.’ The moment you start watching the thinker, a higher level of consciousness becomes activated. You then begin to realize that there is a vast realm of intelligence beyond thought, that thought is only a tiny aspect of that intelligence. You also realize that all the things that truly matter—beauty, love, creativity, joy, inner peace—arise from beyond the mind. You begin to awaken.” *Eckhart Tolle*

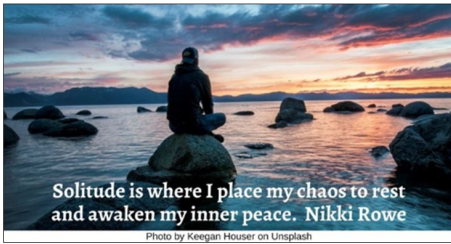
“I don’t know where dreams come from. Sometimes I wonder if they’re genetic memories, or messages from something divine. Warnings perhaps. Maybe we do come with an instruction booklet but we’re too dense to read it, because we’ve dismissed it as the irrational waste product of the ‘rational’ mind. Sometimes I think all the answers we need are buried in our slumbering subconscious, in the dreaming. The booklet right there, and every night when we lay our heads down on the pillow it flips open. The wise read it, heed it. The rest of us try as hard as we can upon awakening to forget any disturbing revelations we might have found there.” *Karen Marie Moning*

“Fortunately, some are born with spiritual immune systems that sooner or later give rejection to the illusory worldview grafted upon them from birth through social conditioning. They begin sensing that something is amiss, and start looking for answers. Inner knowledge and anomalous outer experiences show them a side of reality others are oblivious to, and so begins their journey of awakening. Each step of the journey is made by following the heart instead of following the crowd and by choosing knowledge over the veils of ignorance.” *Henri Bergson*

Questions

Questions for reflection and discussion.

1. In reading #1, Shefali Tsabary explains that “The path toward the liberated and awakened self is never smooth or straight.” Is this true? Why or why not? Has the path of your own life been relatively straight forward or crooked with detours, dead-ends, and more?” Tsabary writes that awakening “arrives as layer after layer of our ego gets peeled off and replaced with mindfulness and the wisdom that comes with it.” As you think of your own life, how has wisdom emerged? She equates the cost of awakening to facing all our fears. How could fear get in the way of awakening? Tsabary concludes that the rewards of awakening include “irrepressible joy and a sense of purpose.” Do you agree? Why or why not? What other rewards might come with awakening?
2. In reading #2, Robert Johnson, as others have suggested, writes that the midlife depression or crisis, despite outward success, is caused by “the un-lived life ... seeking our attention.” Does this make sense? Why or why not? For Johnson, the way forward includes confronting one’s shadow qualities in order to awakening to one’s higher calling. What is difficult about confronting one’s shadow qualities? What is liberating about doing it?
3. In reading #3, William Wordsworth wrote in 1798 about his feelings of



deep connection with nature on a trip near Tintern Abbey, a connection that moved him profoundly. Have you had experiences in nature like that? How did they affect you? Have you ever been awakened in nature? What were the circumstances? How were you affected?

4. In reading #4, Audette Fulbright Fulson writes about our first source, direct experience of transcending mystery and wonder. Have you had direct experiences of transcending mystery that evoked wonder? Which one(s) were most memorable? Why? How can these kinds of experiences lead to awakening? As many have become less connected to nature, especially children, what is the impact of having fewer of these kinds of experiences? The impact on awakening? On life itself?
5. In reading #5, May Sarton focused, in a sense, on the importance of direct experience of transcending mystery, “of losing self in admiration and joy.” Have you ever lost yourself in this way? What was it like? Sarton redefined prayer writing, “we pray by being fully aware of . . . both” nature and human love. Does this make sense to you? How? She concluded, writing, “the joys of my life have nothing to do with age. They do not change.” Has this been true for you? Why or why not? How do timeless joys relate to awakening?
6. In reading #6, Frederick Buechner writes about how snow can transform a drab world. How did you regard this transformation by snow when you were a child? Now? Buechner concludes, “It is snow that can awaken memories of things more wonderful than anything you ever knew or dreamed.” What memories are awakened in you by a blanket of new snow that falls over-

night? What feelings do you associate with this experience?

7. In reading #7, Kathryn Bert shares a fictional dialogue about transcendentalism between Thoreau and Ellen, (a supposed love interest). When Ellen asks him if he is ever afraid, Thoreau responds, “I’m afraid that I might ‘live’ right through this moment—and only live. Look at you and only see you . . . [but] what if there’s more and I miss it?” In a way, Thoreau is talking about seeing below the surface of things, seeing beyond. Have you striven to look below the surface of things? Why? How did doing so help you really “live?” How is this kind of seeing a part of awakening?

The following questions are related to the Snippets

8. Nguyen Anh-Huong and Thích Nhất Hạnh write about walking meditation, suggesting that if you smile, even a half-smile you can begin to awaken because that smile leads to feeling calm and peaceful. Does this make sense? Why or why not? While smiling is usually associated with happiness, some studies suggest that it is a result of engagement. While a smile can be involuntary it can also be voluntary. The writers are suggesting cultivating a voluntary half-smile as “the fruit of your awareness that you are here, alive, walking.” How might you practice smiling as part of your spiritual discipline? How might doing this affect your attitude? How might it lead to awakening? How might it refresh? How might it slowly lead to regeneration?
9. Alejandro Jodorowsky writes that awakening is a metamorphosis. Do you agree? Why or why not? He refers to a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. It is a complete change that cannot be anticipated. Once changed, there is no memory of the former state of being. In humans, unlike the caterpillar, it involves a complete change of character. In this sense, after awakening what is new or different?
10. Anaïs Nin wrote that many people are hibernating rather than living. What are the consequences of hibernating? Have there been times in your life when you were hibernating? What was it like? What awakened you?
11. Suzy Kassem writes that awakening occurs by asking the right questions, seeking answers in unpopular corners, and by rejecting popular opinion that is wrong. How difficult is this? By contrast, do most people just go along to get along? What are the consequences of doing this? In her analysis, awakening requires courage. Do you agree? Why or why not?
12. Thích Nhất Hạnh wrote about the need for a new culture that can only be brought about by our awakening, by our discovery of our deepest nature through mindfulness. Do you agree? Why or why not? How does mindfulness awaken us to “what we are, of what our situation really is?” How would you describe what we are and what our situation really is without the insight and wisdom of mindfulness? In this sense, do you agree that “the way of salvation is a new culture?” Why? How?
13. In a way, Thomas Merton’s definitions for awakening included “the turning inside out of all values, the ‘newness,’ the emptiness, and . . . purity of vision . . .” Do any of these resonate with you? Which? Why? For him, the context for awakening may be in nature, but it could also be “when we see children in a moment when they are really children.” How might our witness of children being children elicit awakening? When and where in nature have you experienced moments of awakening?
14. Rebecca Solnit suggests that some experiences of awakening could be “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.” Do any of these resonate with you? Which? Why? She also relates awakening to going home, wholeness and love. What experiences and/or



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images do you associate with awakening? Why?

15. Eckhart Tolle links awakening with “the realization that you are not ‘the thinker.’” How can thinking get in the way of awakening? He suggests that a “vast realm of intelligence” exists beyond thought. Does this make sense? Why or why not? He also suggests “that all the things that truly matter—beauty, love, creativity, joy, inner peace—arise from beyond the mind.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
16. Karen Marie Moning writes about dreams and suggests that it may be that “all the answers we need are buried in our slumbering subconscious, in the dreaming.” What do you think about dreaming? Why? Could our dreams hold important answers, perhaps some wisdom? Why or why not? In this sense, how could sleeping contribute to awakening? Through dreaming? Through clarity that emerges about something after “sleeping on it?”
17. Henri Bergson writes that “some are born with spiritual immune systems that sooner or later give rejection to the illusory worldview grafted upon them from birth through social conditioning.” Do you agree? Why or why not? If you became a Unitarian Universalist as an adult, did a spiritual immune system contribute to that evolution? Why or why not? If yes, how? He states that their journey of awakening is prompted by “Inner knowledge and anomalous outer experiences show them a side of reality others are

oblivious to....” Has your inner knowledge been a guide for you? If yes, how? Have you had “anomalous outer experiences” that have awakened you to “a side of reality others are oblivious to...?” If yes, how did those affect you? How did they awaken you?