## **Preparation for Awakening** (April theme)

Each morning as we awaken, we rouse from sleep and come into awareness of the new day. Sometimes we awaken gradually as a new day dawns and light slowly filters through a window. Other times we wake up suddenly. In the same way, we can also experience either a gradual or a sudden spiritual awakening. As we awaken, our attention becomes less focused on the little details of life and we become more mindful of the entirety of our being. We may experience a transcendent connection between our inner being and the world.

Many religions embrace the idea of spiritual awakening. It is a key concept in Eastern religions. The Tao Te Ching describes awakening as "from wonder into wonder existence opens" (trans. Witter Bynner). Buddhists view enlightenment as awakening from our ignorance. In Christianity, awakening comes through the Holy Spirit. For Muslims, awakening involves living lives fully conscious of Allah through the beauty and eloquence of the noble Quran. Many Native American religions describe awakening as becoming in harmony with the earth. Black Elk of the Ogala Sioux people observed, "peace … comes within the souls of men when they realize their relationship, their oneness, with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize that at the center of the universe dwells Wakan Tanka, and that this center is really everywhere, it is within each of us."

While some of us experience awakening in a religious sense, others of us experience it in our day-to-day lives. We become aware of our connections to others, to nature, and to the universe. Art and music can spark the feeling of awakening. Being in nature elicits deep awareness for many of us. Meditation and prayer as well as the practice of mindfulness are other paths to awareness. Regrettably, we also have to live in this world and deal with mundane matters such as taxes, broken pipes, and dirty laundry. Finding a balance between dealing with such concerns and finding opportunities for moments of transcendence can be a challenge.

Awakening can also happen on a societal level. Many social justice movements begin as people become aware of wrongs being done to groups of people. The more people become conscious that these wrongs are not isolated incidents but are woven throughout the culture, the more effectively they can make meaningful changes. And the greater the number of people who are awakened to the need for change, the greater the energy they can bring to the process of change.

Although the state of awakening may be difficult to summon and even harder to describe, such experiences add a deep and meaningful dimension to our lives. In the words of the East Indian classical musician Ravi Shankar, "Whether you are aware of them or not, whether you recognize them as spiritual or not, you probably have had the experiences of silence, or transcendence, or the Divine – a few seconds, a few minutes that seem out of time; a moment when the ordinary looks beautiful, glowing; a deep sense of being at peace, feeling happy for no reason. When these experiences come … believe in them. They reflect your true nature."

*Here are some ideas to consider as you think about the topic of awakening.*

The power of poetry is to awaken us to what matters most in life. *Marty Rubin*

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*

It's the job of the soul to stretch out across the body of the desert and touch, without skin or fingers or nerves, the hidden creek that wets our knowledge of who we are. *Laurie Perez*

We can smile, breathe, walk, and eat our meals in a way that allows us to be in touch with the abundance of happiness that is available. We are very good at preparing to live, but not very good at living. We know how to sacrifice ten years for a diploma, and we are willing to work very hard to get a job, a car, a house, and so on. But we have difficulty remembering that we are alive in the present moment, the only moment there is for us to be alive. Every breath we take, every step we make, can be filled with peace, joy, and serenity. We need only to be awake, alive in the present moment. *Thich Nhat Hanh*

When we pay attention to nature's music, we find that everything on the earth contributes to its harmony. *Hazrat Inayat Khan*

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*

I understood at a very early age that in nature, I felt everything I should feel in church but never did. Walking in the woods, I felt in touch with the universe and with the spirit of the universe. *Alice Walker*

## Questions to Ponder

1. Some people look back at a childhood sense of the world as a mystical or magical place. If you had such experiences, what were they like?

2. Consider moments of awakening, both big and small, that you have encountered as an adult. In what contexts did they happen? What did they feel like?

3. In what ways, if any, have moments of awakening brought you new senses of meaning or altered the way you approach life?

4. What gets in the way of your being more open to experiences of transcendence? What practices might you include in your life to invite these experiences?

5. Think of social justice movements that have occurred in your lifetime. How did you as an individual awaken to injustices in society? In what ways would you like to see society awakened now?

## Words of the Day

Before coming to the Gathering, reflect on awakening in your life. The Words of the Day sentence is "For me, a moment of awakening feels …"