

**Awakened Hearts**  
Rev. Ken Read-Brown  
First Parish in Hingham (Old Ship Church)  
Unitarian Universalist  
May 3, 2020  
*(text from live-streamed worship)*

**Opening Song**    Gathered Here *(by Philip A. Porter)*

Gathered here in the mystery of the hour.  
Gathered here in one strong body.  
Gathered here in the struggle and the power.  
Spirit, draw near.

**Call to Worship and Lighting of the Flaming Chalice**

We have gathered for worship, whether far or near, truly gathered for this time.

May our time together offer comfort, peace, inspiration, love... in whatever measure each of us needs. May we all feel during this time embraced by the love which embraces all, God of many names and beyond all names.

And may the flame of our chalice - flame of truth, of freedom, of community, of love – symbol of our Unitarian Universalist faith, remind us of all that we share, wherever we may be on this one blue-green earth.

**Story** – from the Taoist tradition

Once upon a time, I, Zhuangzi, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware that I was Zhuangzi. Soon I awakened, and there I was, veritably myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man...

*translated by Lin Yutang*

**Meditation and Prayer**

May we pause, slow down, breathe into this moment, become more fully awake to this moment we share in spirit...

Just breathe... whatever else is going on around us... breathe into this moment, present...

And from deeper presence in the moment, presence for one another, our hearts' yearnings arise, prayers to the God of our hearts, God of all blessings...

...as every week during these days... for all in need of help and healing for whatever reason, for the ill, for the hungry, for those facing financial hardship... and prayers of gratitude for all the helpers and leaders guiding us through these times...

## Readings

*from Buddhist tradition, honoring Buddha's birthday, celebrated this month in many Buddhist cultures*

The Metta Sutta (*sutra on compassion*)

Let us cultivate boundless goodwill.  
Let none deceive another, or despise any being in any state.  
Let none in anger or ill-will wish another harm.  
Even as a mother watches over her child,  
so with boundless mind should one cherish all living beings.  
Radiating friendliness over the whole world.  
Above, below, and all around, without limit.

*from Ethics for the New Millennium, by the Dalai Lama*

May I become at all times, both now and forever  
A protector for those without protection  
A guide for those who have lost their way  
A ship for those with oceans to cross  
A bridge for those with rivers to cross  
A sanctuary for those in danger  
A lamp for those without light  
A place of refuge for those who lack shelter  
And a servant to all in need.

### Message – “Awakened Hearts”

Many years ago, my mother, then in her 90s and living with Alzheimer's, had broken her hip one evening. I rode with the ambulance from Sunrise Assisted Living to South Shore Hospital. In the emergency room they made my mother as comfortable as possible, sedated her, and we waited the long night for surgery the next morning. My focus to begin with was of course almost entirely on my mother, though once she slept, I probably dozed off and on for those hours.

At about 6 or 7 the next morning, the hospital, which of course never sleeps entirely, began to wake up more fully. Change of shifts, housekeeping coming through. With my mother still sleeping, my attention could widen to the full range of activity – other patients in the E.R., doctors and nurses and aides and housekeepers coming and going. So I found myself becoming more aware not only of others who were suffering, patients and worried family members, tired nurses at the end of shifts... but aware too that I was surrounded not only by suffering, but by love. And I thought to myself, this is a house of love – that's what a hospital is, a house of love.

How else could it be? Even the word “hospital” – same root as “hospitality” which is about welcome, about caring, about kindness to the stranger.

In retrospect, I realize I had experienced a glimpse of what Buddhists call “bodhicitta” – a Sanskrit word which simply means “awakened heart.”

Contemporary American Buddhist teacher Pema Chodron quotes the 16<sup>th</sup> Gyalwa Karmapa, a Tibetan Buddhist leader, who said: “You take it all in. You let the pain of the world touch your heart and you turn it into compassion.”

Pema Chodron went on to write that the awakened heart “is felt as kinship with all beings.”

In the hospital that morning I felt a deep kinship with everyone else there – patients, medical workers, housekeeping, administrators – all whose hearts had been touched by a portion of the world’s pain and who were moved to serve others with compassion. Awakened hearts.

Needless to say, we are seeing this before us writ large every day during the pandemic.

But it goes on all the time. The “it” of being touched by pain awakening us to kinship with all beings, and so compassion flowing as naturally as streams running downhill.

Too much of the time we may be asleep to this kinship, caught up (understandably enough) in the needs of our daily lives and immediate responsibilities, which may mean that too much of the time we experience ourselves as separate from others, ultimately alone – and just wanting to be happy, not to suffer (after all, who doesn’t want to be happy, and who wants to suffer?).

But Buddhism teaches – and life teaches – that we cannot avoid suffering... or only can for awhile. Yes, there is pleasure, there is happiness – all true – but/and there is also suffering. And denying the reality of suffering, believing we can somehow avoid sorrow... actually separates us from one another and denies us the possibility of deeper joy and more vibrant aliveness.

The Lebanese poet Kahlil Gibran wrote that: “The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.”

William Blake wrote that “Joy and woe are woven fine, clothing for the soul divine...” and “it is right it should be so: we were made for joy and woe; and when this we rightly know, safely through the world we go.”

I think all these voices are in the same spiritual territory.

It’s not that we should seek suffering and grief in order to wake up fully to life. No need. Suffering and grief come.

But maybe we shouldn’t be frenetically seeking happiness and joy either. They, too, will come.

If we pay attention.

This, too, is a universal spiritual message – for these times as much as for any times: Pay attention to what is right in front of us – the blend of everything – with the promise that if we do, if we allow it all, our hearts will awaken, we will awaken – at least a little bit more – awaken to one another, to life, awaken to the beauty before us and behind us and above us, as the Navaho put it, awaken to the universal house of love in which we live and move and have our being.

Just as I awakened to both the suffering and the love in the hospital that night many years ago, so might we all – humanity I mean – be awakening to both suffering and love in these days of pandemic. We see this awakening, don't we? Not perfect, nothing is, but so many responding to the suffering with helping and healing in so many ways, including as simply as staying home and keeping our physical distance.

All of which gives me reason to hope that we might emerge from the pandemic not into utopia – nothing perfect – but into greater cooperation and understanding around the planet as we face so many shared challenges.

Yes, a few more, maybe many more, maybe millions more, hearts awakened in this world of joy and sorrow, awakened to the universal house of love.

So may it long be.

**Song – Love Will Guide Us** (*words by Sally Rogers*)

Love will guide us, peace has tried is,  
Hope inside us will lead the way.  
On the road from greed to giving,  
Love will guide us through the hard night.

If you cannot speak like angels,  
If you cannot speak before thousands,  
You can give from deep within you.  
You can change the world with your love.

**Closing Words and Benediction**

None of the means employed to acquire religious merit... has a sixteenth part of the value of loving-kindness. Loving-kindness, which is freedom of heart, absorbs them all; it glows, it shines, it blazes forth.

*adapted from the Itivuttaka  
from "Teachings of the Buddha" edited by Jack Kornfield*

In the spirit of lovingkindness:

Be well. Be safe.

Take care of one another.

May it always be so. Blessed be. Amen.