



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred in
Our Everyday Spaces



April 2022
Awakening

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The Welcome Mat

What Does it Mean to be a Family of Awakening

Well, there you are! You made it! We're here, together, at the interactive performance of humanity. What's that? Is this a dream? Why yes, yes, it is.

We see that you're the spiritual guide of a young person. Wonderful! That's an automatic all-inclusive pass to the ups, downs, and in-betweens of being human. (It's really the best deal; you miss out on NOTHING if you undertake this adventure with a young one! We recommend that route to all our friends.) You'll need a few things before you wake up to this awesome, amazing, and sometimes terrifying responsibility.

Here, let us help you: you'll need courage, a lot of self-love, quite a bit of perseverance, curiosity, more compassion than you think will fit—we'll just...squeeze in... a little bit...MORE! good; that will get you started—and, finally, your community. They're really what holds all the rest of it together. Oh, you have a few things already? Terrific. Let's add those special characteristics, too.

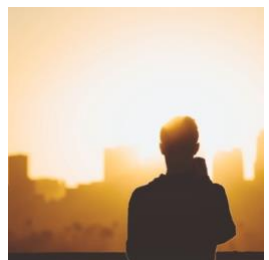
Are you ready? No, not quite? We get it; none of us felt ready when it was our time to guide children into this big, big world, either. But it's kind of a chicken-and-egg deal—you want to know what to prepare for before you say yes, but the saying yes is partly WHAT prepares you for it! You promise to keep waking up and trying again, and that's what unlocks the next adventure.

You're a little nervous? Well, sure. Being awake hurts more than being asleep. But it can feel really, really good, too. Like, better-than-anything good. Plus, your young person is probably already awake to the world. Children usually are. So you can meet them there

You're worried you won't get it right? You're correct; you will probably make mistakes! You'll keep drifting back into distraction, but with commitment, you'll wake up again, and again, and again. In fact, some people practice waking up, so eventually they spend more time awake than asleep. But we'll get to all that in a bit.

Right now, let's get you on your way. Are you ready to wake up and join your younger person in the here-and-now, present moment? Your community's right by you.

Let's do it! One, two, THREE!



At the Table

Exploring Awakening Through Discussions

At the Table questions explore the monthly theme through a discussion for all ages. They are designed for a family gathering - maybe during a Friday night meal, a quiet moment in the living room or before a board game night.

Introducing the Activity

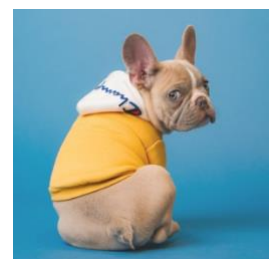
Family members who are readers can alternate who reads the questions. Those who are not readers are invited to share their own impromptu questions. Discussion partners might answer as thoughts come to them or take turns in a circle.

Discussion Questions

1. When is your preferred time to wake up in the morning?
2. Who in the family has the hardest time waking up?
3. What's the best kind of dream? The worst?
4. What's your favorite thing to be able to do when you first wake up in the morning?
5. What is your favorite sound, sight, smell, taste, and feel related to the Earth "waking up" for spring?
6. What have you "woken up to," or realized, about yourself in the past week? (Ex., I learned I like turnip greens, I discovered I can hula hoop, I realized that it has been our dog, Buster, who has been stealing my favorite stuffed animal!)
7. Who in your life helped you wake up signs of climate change around you?
8. What's your biggest hope for your country as together we "wake up" to what social justice for all could really look like?

Return to the Discussion Throughout the Week

Thoughts develop with time. Find opportunities to bring up particularly compelling questions again during the month, maybe on walks, rides home, when tucking your child into bed, etc. If thoughts grew or changed, notice together how we are all evolving beings, opening ourselves to new truths and understandings as we live our lives and connect with others.



Around the Neighborhood

Around the Neighborhood activities engage families with their surroundings through the lens of the theme. It's about perceiving our well-known world in new ways. As you safely move around your neighborhood during this time of Covid, these suggestions help you transform your everyday backs-and-forths into a family adventure!

Treasure Hunt for Scents of Awakening

Have you ever woken up because of a strong smell, maybe coffee brewing or bread toasting? Smell is unique among our senses in that there is an actual molecular connection between our bodies and something else; tiny particles enter our nose, create a chemical reaction that sends a message from our nerves to our brain, and we make meaning—we name the smell, or have a feeling such as nostalgia or disgust, and then we respond. It's quite a special way to wake up to our surroundings, both literally and figuratively.

So this month, we're going on a treasure hunt for smells that awaken something in us. See if you can track down a smell that...

1. Reminds you of an ancestor
2. Occurs only this time of year
3. Piques the interest of your pet or other animals in your neighborhood
4. Is emanating from a neighbor's home
5. Means something isn't quite right
6. Makes you sneezy, or makes your eyes water, or crinkles your nose
7. You can trace to its source through another sense (For example, if you smell smoke, can you spot which neighbor is grilling? If you smell strong exhaust, can you hear someone pulling out of your neighborhood in a loud, rumbly vehicle?)
8. Is one of the smells that makes your home smell like home



From the Mailbox

Our literal mailboxes connect us to the wide world outside, sometimes with messages asking things from us (a donation letter or flyer encouraging us to vote), sometimes with messages offering us gifts (a letter from a friend or a special delivery). Our "From the Mailbox" section applies this metaphor to today's call for families to engage in the work of dismantling white supremacy culture. And so, we open and accept these "invitations" to join those wise leaders and organizations who are co-creating an anti-racist future.

Awakening to New Truths: Black Zen Thoughts

<https://www.blackzen.co/blog/the-top-10-best-pieces-of-advice>

Stacy and Jasmine Johnson created Black Zen because as veteran secular meditation practitioners, they did not see BIPOC communities adequately reflected in wellness and meditation communities online or in person. Their goal was to create resources to change that. One of their offerings is a blog post titled "[The Top 10 Best Pieces of Advice](#)," all of which could be prompts for brilliant self-reflection, before, after, or independent of meditation.

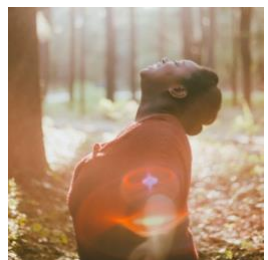
Invitation: Read [the list](#), and choose one piece of advice to work with. You might journal about it, create a digital or paper collage around the ideas, or make one word or a phrase from that piece of advice to be the focus of your meditation for the day. If your church has a writing group, bring one of these as a prompt.

India Arie's Challenge to Wake Up to New Understandings of Racism

Did you see [this interview](#) back in February, from Trevor Noah and India Arie? In it, Arie shares a very powerful and nuanced perspective on what she calls conscious and unconscious racism, how sometimes it's very difficult to tell which one a person is operating from, and how that distinction can change the flavor of what accountability looks like. Arie's love for humanity here is fresh and it's firm; it helps us to awaken to a new way of conceiving and responding to racism that is rooted in compassion, hope, and integrity...

The invitation:

Watch [this 30-minute interview](#), and if you are able, make a contribution to the UU learning program, [Beloved Conversations](#), which aims to help Unitarian Universalists embody racial justice as a spiritual practice. (If you haven't yet been in the program, mark your calendar for June, when it opens again, and make your donation then so you AND another UU can both grow from it!)



At Play

Playing Games with Awakening

At Play activities and questions are a way to joyfully, playfully, and imaginatively experience the theme.

Option A: Playful Wake Up

Does your family have a wake-up routine? How about shaking it up for a week or weekend with one or more of these playful ways to get out of bed and meet the day?

As you enter your child's room in the morning to wake them up, sing a few bars of [Wake Up. Toes](#), [Good Day Sunshine](#), [Good Morning](#), [Good Morning, Mr. Sun](#), or another favorite.

Or, call them into a particularly yummy or silly breakfast, such as one of [these interesting dishes](#), or the classic [fun-face toast](#).

Finally, if you're feeling ambitious, there's always the trail of dominoes leading out of the bedroom; or the automated toy set off right next to the bed, tied to a string, leading to a door, etc.; or even the Rube Goldberg-style mechanism to begin the day with curiosity, intrigue, joy, and anticipation! Have your trail end at a note telling about a special event happening that day, such as going to the park, visiting family or friends, or going for a ride or drive right after breakfast!

Option B: Mandala Making

This activity is adapted from our Soul Matters Crossing Paths program for middle-grades youth. Each month of that curriculum focuses on a different world religion, using play and interaction to first teach about a religion in context, and then to examine its resonance with Unitarian Universalism. The concept of awakening is central to Buddhism. It's what the Buddha himself, Siddhartha Gautama, said was the key to freeing one's self and the world from the cycle of suffering. In Unitarian Universalism, we value mindful presence as a way to embody our place on the interconnected web of all existence.

In Tibetan Buddhism, some monks train many years in the art of [making sand mandalas](#). The forms of these mandalas and the process of creating them have deep spiritual significance, a little of which you can learn about [here](#). When they are made, mandalas are often dedicated to a particular value, such as compassion or healing.

We're going to create family mandalas [from natural materials](#), either inside, such as on a big table, or outside, on a balcony, porch, driveway, or sidewalk. Spend a few days before doing this, gathering materials. Interesting leaves, seedpods, flowers (best picked the day-of), rocks, etc. Let the process unfold with each family member taking part in the way that suits them best.

You might dedicate your mandala to waking up the world to [indigenous wisdom around climate custody](#), or awakening in yourselves a renewed commitment to peace work. Decide together before you begin and restate your intention before caringly sweeping it away again.



On the Message Board

A Monthly Reminder

The On the Message Board section lifts up a theme-related mantra, graphic, quote, or gesture for your family to carry with them throughout the month. Think of these “family sayings” or “family signs” as tools for the journey, reminders that help us refocus and steady ourselves and our kids as we navigate through life’s challenges and opportunities. Each month, write this mantra on your family message board, or on a sticky note to put on your bathroom mirror, or the fridge. Make it part of your routine to share the mantra each morning so that it becomes something you all carry with you throughout the day.

April’s Mantra

Present moment, only moment.

This month’s mantra is abbreviated from the wisdom of Thich Nhat Hanh. The full quote is, “The present moment is the only moment available to us, and it is the door to all other moments,” and [this short video](#) explains his meaning further. The shorthand above helps us quickly recenter to this truth.

The idea of awakening fully to the moment is a central tenet of Buddhism, but it appears in other faiths, too. In Matthew 6:34 of the Christian Bible, the reader is urged not to be anxious about tomorrow, since tomorrow will have its own things to worry about, but rather to focus one’s attention on the day at hand. The field of psychology, too, tells us that living in the present moment can reduce our perception of pain, decrease the ill physiological effects of stress on our bodies, and increase our ability to cope with difficult emotions such as fear, anger, anxiety, and deep sadness.

This message is endlessly applicable for adults. Children may need a bit more help releasing past guilt and grievances, as well as future worries and fears, before they’re ready to dwell in the present. One friendly way to introduce this mantra might be when your child comes to you to say that they have made a mistake. You might listen carefully to their story, and then say, “Do you feel ready to move forward from this? OK, good. Me, too. Present moment, only moment.”



At the Bedside

At The Bedside activities engage the theme through storytelling. This takes place during the dreamy, almost otherworldly hour or so before children or youth drift off to sleep. Through stories and the questions and realizations that they prompt, we come to understand the nature of and our own place in the cosmos. But also, these selections invite you to remember, shape, and share stories from your own past, using thoughtful narratives to help your child weave the tale of who they are and whose they are.

The Earth Awakens: *Demeter and Persephone*

Many Unitarian Universalists observe the changing of the seasons as part of their spiritual year. Earthly signs of spring appear in the weeks before and after the spring equinox, which this year was on March 20. So you might lead into this story by naming some of those: perhaps daffodils are blooming, or just bloomed; perhaps you are seeing different birds or other wildlife in your neighborhood; perhaps new foods are available in your grocery store or farmer's market. Our seasonal story this month comes from Greek mythology, the story of Persephone and Demeter.

Demeter is the Greek goddess of agriculture, and the story of her relationship with her daughter explains the winter season as well as the spring that follows it and the autumn that precedes it.

We have a few different versions of the story to choose from, or you can use a combination to keep this story with you throughout the month:

UU minister Dan Harper's version of the story is told in six parts, and is aimed at a slightly older child, perhaps middle grades. [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), and [Part 4](#).

Here is a [13-minute Claymation video](#) of the myth. It's an older video, and some jokes are dated, but the animation is well done.

There is good retelling in Starhawk's [Circle Round: Raising Children in Goddess Traditions](#); that version is also online [here](#). This version is perhaps best suited to a one-night, multi-age bedtime reading.

Stretching the Story:

- Have you ever been flooded with relief to see someone you were worried about, like Demeter feels when Persephone returns?
- How will you know when you feel ready to leave home and try something on your own?
- Demeter was so sad and angry about Hades kidnapping Persephone that she turned all that emotion outward, causing winter on earth. What do you do when you feel so full up of sadness and anger that you can hardly contain it?
- What questions do you have about the story? (Parents, you might choose this time to prompt for reactions to some of the problematic parts of the story, so you have the opportunity to provide context and a listening ear.)



On the Porch

Raising a Child Awakening Together

On the Porch supports sharing realizations and hopes around the theme with other supportive adults. Perhaps this happens on a literal porch or front stoop, but it could happen wherever parents and their circle of support gather and talk (online or in person) about soulful parenting. The “A Sip of Something New” section invites you to engage a new idea shared by someone else. The “Spiritual Snacks” section stimulates personal storytelling and the sharing of your own wisdom and experience.

A Sip of Something New

Awakening to the Suffering of Others: Sending Love without Having to Like

The esteemed and exquisitely awake American Zen priest Rev. angel Kyodo williams speaks about not liking everyone—in fact, not liking very many people at all—but *loving* them as the core of her practice. Williams says that if we are awake to the suffering around us, then our response must be love; there is no other way through. (williams discusses more about this practice of love in her interview with Krista Tippett on [On Being from September of 2020](#))

Williams reminds us that loving someone doesn't mean you have to like them and doesn't mean you give permission for their bad behavior. One of my spiritual teachers, Joy Fox, teaches that if you're not ready to love another person 100%—say, a dishonest ex-landlord, or a malicious old boss—you can assign them percentages of love based on what you do feel ready for. For example, maybe today, you feel ready to love a terrible current neighbor 10%. That's still love, and more will be available when you're ready to give more.

Bring to mind someone whom you do not like at all, for sound and solid reasons, but whose inherent worth and dignity you may be *beginning* to be ready to affirm. Challenge yourself to send them love. You decide on the percentage. Share the person, the context, and the percentage with your conversation partner, and ask them to do the same. Take a moment of silent meditation together to bolster one another in this sometimes-difficult task.

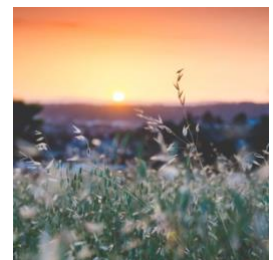


Spiritual Snacks to Share

Bring these questions with you when the time comes to hang out with your co-parent or buddies. Don't treat the questions as a list to go through one by one. Instead pick the one or two that speak to you the most. Treat the questions less as a quiz and more like doorways inviting you into the world of storytelling and memory.

Questions

1. What understanding did you wake up late to in life, a la "I was [today years old](#) when I realized...?"
2. Have you experienced a spiritual awakening, or maybe more than one? Tell your conversation partner what that was like for you.
3. What is one special, waking-up memory that you have as a child, such as waking up to snow for the first time, waking up to the news of a new sibling's arrival, waking up in a grandparent's home, etc.
4. What truth did you wake up to recently that you could not have accepted at any prior point in your life, because you simply weren't ready for it?
5. Wokeness has developed a complicated set of connotations in our culture over the past several years. Where are you with the idea of wokeness? What parts of being woke do you hope to hang onto as an individual, and what parts do you hope our culture can hang on to through challenges ahead? What part no longer fits?
6. Who in your social circle is the first to wake up to new trends, popular opinions, or the general zeitgeist? Can you, yourself, spot and name these phenomena early, do you come to those understandings right around the time everyone else does, or are you late to the party?
7. What was your own sexual awakening like, as a youth or young adult? Whose examples were most helpful for you in identifying a sense of sexuality that felt right for you?



The Extra Mile

The Extra Mile section is for families who want to continue exploring the theme of the month through larger adventures, more complex projects or simply through additional modalities not otherwise included in the packets. The Extra Mile suggestions often surpass what is considered an “everyday moment” in a family, and may involve more preparation, planning, or time to accomplish. A bit more effort, but well worth it!

Overnight Desserts to Wake Up to

Some of the best desserts do double-duty as an evening activity (to prepare) and a next-day delight (to eat!). Plan something special for the eating-time, such as inviting a neighbor over or bringing them a helping or enjoying your treat on a picnic to a nearby place.

The texture of most cakes improves on day 2; this allows the cake’s moisture to distribute evenly throughout. [Pound cake](#) or [applesauce cake](#) comes together simply, in one bowl, and they both travel well and are easy to share.

Many cream and custard-based desserts benefit from several hours in the fridge to set up. (Is it too early in the season for [banana pudding](#)? No, we didn’t think so, either! Vegan/gluten free [here](#).) The pudding-based [Worms-in-Dirt dessert](#) is a classic, and [here’s](#) a dairy-free/gluten-free version.

[Chocolate bark](#) is incredibly simple, and to make it extra special, you can add edible flowers. If you’re confident in identifying wild violet and dandelion flowers, you can sprinkle those on top before the bark sets up in the refrigerator for a colorful spring surprise. (For best results, use dandelion petals only; the whole flowerhead is bitter.)



Blessing of Awakening

Dear bravely Awakened Soul,

Though this month, like every other, will have its challenges, may your commitment to being present to it, to your own precious life, to the becoming of each member of your family, and to and the singular world we share, carry you through. May your open heartedness be met with warmth and wonder. May your sacred witness empower those who most need to be seen and heard. And may your perseverance remind you that this is who you are: one who shows up, wide awake, day after day, to play a part in the story of the human race.

May it be so.



Connect with more Inspiration for your family, and for you!

Parents can Join our Facebook and Instagram pages for
daily inspiration on our themes:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/?ref=settings>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/soul_matters_circle/

Parents and youth will want to check out our [YouTube](#) music playlist on the monthly theme.

Credits

Soulful Home packets are prepared by
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