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New Horizons – January 2020

Theme Based Ministry Newsletter of the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto
Vol 9, Issue 1

Broken and Whole

*“There is in all visible things...a hidden wholeness.
This mysterious unity and integrity is wisdom,
the mother of all.”*
- Thomas Merton (adapted)

Could it be true? That beneath the surface of our material lives, there exists a “hidden wholeness” of unity and integrity, to which we are all deeply connected?

So often it seems just the opposite. Looking around us, we may identify more with Bob Dylan, who wrote a song called *Everything is Broken!* When so much appears to be falling apart, it can seem difficult to imagine any underlying unity.

Yet we find this comforting message in many paths of spiritual insight. Some traditions speak of the embrace of God, while others may speak of the Dharma as an underlying order. In our Unitarian Universalist tradition, we affirm that we’re part of the interdependent web of all existence—a wholeness that contains us. We also affirm that, despite the many ways we may feel broken, each of us is wholly and inherently worthy.

Some teachers go so far as to say that brokenness itself provides an entryway for love. The invitation to vulnerability can be a welcome message for anyone who has tried to hold it all

Upcoming Services

Sun, January 5, 10:30AM
Fire Communion Service
Rev. Lynn Harrison and Rev. Shawn Newton

Sun, January 12, 10:30AM
Lives Lived: Those We Lost in 2019
Rev. Lynn Harrison and Rev. Shawn Newton

Sun, January 19, 10:30AM-
My Year of Living Spiritually
Anne Bokma

Sun, January 26, 10:30AM
Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered
Rev. Dr. Peter Hughes

together, to never break down. In times when “the cracks in everything” seem to let in precious little light, it may help to see the broken and the whole as inseparable.

As we explore this month’s theme of *Broken and Whole*, we’ll try, together, to find the wisdom we seek. As each of us brings our fragments of insight, may we create a conversation that is whole and healing.

With you on the journey,
Lynn

Questions to Live With

As has become our practice, be sure to engage these questions in advance of your group meeting and find the one that “hooks” you most. Then let it take you on an adventure. Live with it for the entire month. Allow it to break into—and break open—your ordinary thoughts.

And then come to your Journey Group meeting prepared to share that experience with your group.



1. Rumi writes, “The wound is the place where the Light enters you.” Have your broken places allowed light to enter you?
2. Who has helped you recognize your wholeness and worthiness?
3. Have you ever avoided feeling vulnerable or broken, and instead worked hard to hold it together? What, if anything, helped you move out of that guardedness?
4. Talk about a time a broken place in you became a place of new strength.
5. We affirm we are connected to the great, interdependent web of existence, the greater whole of which we are a part. How do you experience that connection?

For Inspiration

As always, the following texts are not “required reading”. We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our groups. They are simply meant to spark your reflections—and maybe open you to new ways of thinking about this month’s theme.

I prefer to be true to myself, even at the hazard of incurring the ridicule of others, rather than to be false, and to incur my own abhorrence.
— Frederick Douglass

Wholeness is not achieved by cutting off a portion of one’s being, but by integration of the contraries.
— Carl Gustav Jung

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.

— CS Lewis

Owning our story can be hard but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it. Embracing our vulnerabilities is risky but not nearly as dangerous as giving up on love and belonging and joy—the experiences that make us the most vulnerable. Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light.

— Brené Brown

You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, who had ever been alive.

— James Baldwin

We all are so deeply interconnected; we have no option but to love all. Be kind and do good for any one and that will be reflected. The ripples of the kind heart are the highest blessings of the Universe.

— Amit Ray

The world is so exquisite with so much love and moral depth, that there is no reason to deceive ourselves with pretty stories for which there's little good evidence. Far better it seems to me, in our vulnerability, is to look death in the eye and to be grateful every day for the brief but magnificent opportunity that life provides.

— Carl Sagan

How can love be worthy of its name if one selects solely the pretty things and leaves out the hardships? It is easy to enjoy the good and dislike the bad. Anybody can do that. The real challenge is to love the good and the bad together, not because you need to take the rough with the smooth but because you need to go beyond such descriptions and accept love in its entirety.

— Elif Shafak



Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.

-- Leonard Coen

We do not believe in ourselves until someone reveals that deep inside us something is valuable, worth listening to, worthy of our trust, sacred to our touch. Once we believe in ourselves we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight or any experience that reveals the human spirit.

— E.E. Cummings

Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy. That is not our business and, in fact, it is nobody's business. What we are asked to do is to love, and this love itself will render both ourselves and our neighbors worthy.

— Thomas Merton

Forgiving and being reconciled to our enemies or our loved ones are not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not about patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the hurt, the truth. It could even

sometimes make things worse. It is a risky undertaking but in the end it is worthwhile, because in the end only an honest confrontation with reality can bring real healing. Superficial reconciliation can bring only superficial healing.

— Desmond Tutu

...even in the most broken places, there is room for love. --Becky Brooks

A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feeling as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

— Albert Einstein

Everybody has a secret world inside of them. I mean everybody. All of the people in the whole world, I mean everybody — no matter how dull and boring they are on the outside. Inside them they've all got unimaginable, magnificent, wonderful, stupid, amazing worlds... Not just one world. Hundreds of them. Thousands, maybe.

— Neil Gaiman



We Are Whole

By Beth Lefever

We are whole, even in the broken places, even where it hurts.

We are whole, even in the broken places, the places where fear impedes our full engagement with life; where self-doubt corrupts our self-love; where shame makes our faces hot and our souls cold.

We are whole, even in those places where perfectionism blunts the joy of full immersion into person, place, activity; where "good enough" does not reside except in our silent longings; where our gaps must be fast-filled with substance, accomplishment, or frenzied activity lest they gape open and disgust.

We are whole where we would doubt our own goodness, richness, fullness and depth, where we would doubt our own significance, our own profoundness.

We are whole, even in our fragility; even where we feel fragmented, alone, insubstantial, insufficient.

We are whole, even as we are in process, even as we stumble, even as we pick ourselves up again, for we are whole. We are whole.

An Honour to Be Alive

by Patrick Murfin

This happenstance assemblage of atoms,
This collection of random stardust
echoing an explosive moment of creation,
this unlikely bag of seawater, carbon, and
stone,
oddly and inexplicably ambulatory,
miraculously sees and recognizes you,

the very you seeing and recognizing.

It is an honor to be alive.

Meditation on Broken Hearts

By Thomas Rhodes

...And how is it with your heart?

Does your heart feel whole, shielded by intellect,
cocooned by reason, closed to feeling?

Or is it broken, fragile to the touch, brimming with
the pain of loss? Or has your heart been broken and
healed so many times
that it now lies open to the world,
knowing that true growth comes not without pain,
that tears may wear down barriers,
that we may carry the hearts of others
even when our own is too heavy for us to bear.
None of us has an unblemished heart, not one.
For such perfection can be found only in death,
and we who are alive still have much to heal.

So let us give thanks for the broken places in our
hearts,
and in our lives.

For it is only through such brokenness that we may
truly touch one another
and only through touching one another that the
world may be healed.
Let us give then thanks for the brokenness that we
share.



What happens when people
open their hearts?"
"They get better."
— Haruki Murakami

Trembling with Joy

by Inuit Shaman Uvavnuuk

The great sea has set me in motion,
set me adrift,
moving me like a weed in a river

The sky and the strong wind
have moved the spirit inside me
till I am carried away
trembling with joy.

Because true belonging only happens when we
present our authentic, imperfect selves to the
world, our sense of belonging can never be greater
than our level of self-acceptance.
— Brené Brown

Join a Journey Group!

Journey Groups are the best way to go deeper
with our monthly theme by sharing with small
gatherings of people for a couple of hours each
month.

Groups meet at First and in people's homes
and are scheduled at different times
throughout the month.

For more information about joining a group,
please visit our website, look for the link in
First Light, or visit the Engage & Connect
Table on Sundays.

Upcoming Themes

Radical Inclusion (February), Owing Our
Story (March), Our Whole Lives (April + May).

Exploring Further

Resilience, Growth & Kintsukuroi In Japan there is an art form called *kintsukuroi* which means “to repair with gold” ...

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/luminous-things/201510/resilience-growth-kintsukuroi>

The power of Vulnerability, Brené Brown (2011) 21 mins.

Powerful and funny TED talk

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzIF7o>

The following are long documentaries videos from Kanopy at the Toronto Public Library. They each show a long path towards wholeness in men, Indigenous people, and transgender men and women.

The Mask You Live in. (2015) 92 mins.

Follows boys and young men as they struggle to stay true to themselves while negotiating America's narrow definition of masculinity. Gender stereotypes interconnect with race, class, and circumstance, creating a maze of identity issues boys and young men must navigate to become "real" men.

<https://torontopl.kanopy.com/video/mask-you-live>

Colonization Road: The path of reconciliation is long and winding. CBC Docs POV (2017) 44 mins.

Anishinaabe comedian Ryan McMahon travels across Ontario learning about Colonization Road, speaking with Indigenous and Settler lawyers, historians, researchers and policy makers who provide history, context and solutions for colonization roads and their impact.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u03qLJ50bf4>

My Transgender Life: Seven Members of the Transgender Community Share their Stories. (2016) 48 mins.

There is a powerful move to wholeness at the heart of Trans people becoming fully who they are. This is less about healing a brokenness and more about allowing their full humanity room to breathe.

<https://torontopl.kanopy.com/video/my-transgender-life>

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Seek • Connect • Serve

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