

## A Spiritual Awakening

I grew up in an agnostic, leaning-toward-atheist family. Religious, spiritual and reverent discussions weren't part of our familial culture. As I grew up, I began to believe that religion was the opiate of the masses, used to justify all kinds of nefarious behaviors. Yet I also believed that there was some spirit force that coordinated the energies of life and that when we died our spirits joined with that power in the cosmos.

As I've spoken of previously, the past three years have found me on a spiritual path that has led to a rebirth. I'd never choose to call what I've been experiencing enlightenment; in my mind, that word is reserved for the likes of the Buddha, Sartre and Thoreau, deep thinkers who were much smarter than I'll ever be. But I am very comfortable referring to the shifting of my self-awareness and sense of my place in the world as an awakening.

I didn't set out to find spiritual salvation, but I was stuck in an unhappy rut and found a program that helped me get my life in order. My life began to straighten out as I utilized the various aspects of the program. It was strongly suggested that I develop a personal concept of the divine to sustain the positive changes I was experiencing. Surely, I thought, there must be a rational way to preserve all that was new and good in my life, so I tried to ignore this component of the program. But because this was an essential element and everything else that was suggested seemed to make a difference for me, I decided to suspend my strong prejudice and give it a try.

I committed to praying at least twice a day and meditating daily to connect with something greater than myself. Even though I was communing with a being I didn't really believe existed I had the briefest moments of relief, feeling that a heavy burden was lifted from my shoulders. Those moments, though fleeting, felt so freeing that I continued to skeptically test the possibility that there was some force that could lighten my load. Gradually the moments came more frequently, then they began to last a little longer, until I started to accept that by developing faith in something beyond myself, I had tapped into a previously unimagined resource.

As this faith strengthened, I have moved from living in my head to spending a lot more time centered in my body, specifically in the area around my heart. And as I continue to walk on this path, I've let go of my prejudices around religion-based deities and have come to believe that I am guided by a force I now call God.

Previously the hair on the back of my neck stood up when anyone referred to God as their spiritual guide because I assumed an unthinking zeal directed by biblical dogma. In truth, deciding to call my guiding force God reveals a certain laziness on my part. I settled with an accepted word and then crafted my understanding of that word to mean a benevolent power.

To be sure, I can slip right back into that scoffing, doubting quasi-intellectual and think myself right out of my God-led mindset. But living with faith is proving to make my life work so much

better. I've lost my paralyzing fear of public speaking. The insomnia I've been plagued with since my early teens is lifted. My relationship with my husband of 26 years is better than ever before. I've been able to keep off the 70 pounds I lost a few years ago. These are just a few things I believe have come about as a result of my newfound faith.

It is clear to me that my faith does not preclude me from sliding back into judgment, jealousy, frustration, fear, resentment, impatience or selfishness in the blink of an eye. My lesser self is always waiting in the wings to take center stage. But I don't wallow in these states for nearly as long as I used to.

I must admit that revealing this facet of my life to this group brings up a fair amount of my insecurities. This isn't a typical Unitarian topic. But what I've experienced as a result of this spiritual shift has been transforming and I ultimately decided that I wanted to share what has become a vital aspect of my life. I choose to continue living with my faith lighting the way for me, ready to discover what awaits me with an awakened mind and an open heart.