

The Awakened Leader: Interview with Reverend Howard Caesar

This month's Awakened Leader Interview is with Reverend Howard Caesar, Senior Minister of the Unity Church of Christianity of Houston, Texas (Unity of Houston). Howard's awakening took a different path than the previous awakened leaders we interviewed. He went through a five-day intense sacred dark room process at Oneness University during which he awakened spontaneously. In the following, we'll explore with Howard what he experienced in this process, the differences he has observed in himself since his awakening, and what that has meant to those in his congregation of 1,000 and his staff.

Unity of Houston's reach extends beyond Howard's regular Sunday services through their live TV ministry that broadcasts into the greater Houston metropolitan area each Sunday and through the previous week's service and other teachings that are recorded and available on Unity of Houston's website.

Don: Howard, thank you for taking the time out of your very busy schedule to do this interview. I know you're getting ready for your pilgrimage to Ireland with a large group, so thank you. To start, how and when were you introduced to Oneness and Oneness University?

Howard: I've been involved in Oneness since it was brought to Houston in early 2007, when I was introduced to it. I had been saying to people for five or six years that I felt that something new was coming to Unity of Houston. We were building a new sanctuary, and a long-time friend had just returned from Oneness University. She talked about her experiences in India and within ten minutes I knew this is what I had been talking about. She gave me a Oneness blessing, and for four days I was in a very blissful state. I went to India a little later in 2007, again in 2008 for the next level course, and then again in 2010 for the first week of the Deepening course.

In early 2012 I was initiated into deeper processes within Oneness, and then was called back to the University in late 2012 to complete the Deepening course. I didn't have time to go for the full 30 days, so I was put into what they call a sacred space—a dark room—for five days where I was to experience awakening.

Don: Let's talk about your awakening. What was your experience of that? Did you know you were awakened? And how did you experience it?

Howard: When I was in the sacred space, they had an altar there and I kept praying at the altar that the shift would be undeniable, unmistakable, that there was no way I would be in doubt. About two or three days into it, somewhere after the second day, I was laying there and all of a sudden I got what was like an electrical jolt that went through just the upper half of my head—like my brain. It was almost like getting hit by an air gun—but there was no pain. It was from the outside and the inside. Just a jolt, like nothing I had ever experienced.

I then sat up and was so happy and grateful. Then I got a second one about 20-30 seconds later. So that was really awesome for me. I then just continued to deepen in the process the remaining two or three days.

I came out with no mind chatter, a quiet mind, free of the sense of self—it had just fallen away. I had no inner conflict, no suffering, that core of fear was gone. The big thing when I came back is that my congregants and staff just saw a big shift in me and that my energy had shifted.

Don: What has been your experience of awakening way over the almost nine or ten months since then, and has that changed in any?

Howard: Not really, it was very profound at the beginning and it has just stayed. You don't notice it as much. It's just there, but you don't think of it. It's just integrated into you as though this is who you always were. At the same time you're just grateful the chatter is gone, you're not as analytical about things, you tend to be less judgmental, and you're more authentic.

The big thing is you're just more present, more authentic, [have a] deeper connection with people, [there's] more compassion in you, a more loving energy, calmness, peacefulness.

Don: How have your administrative staff and your congregants experienced you?

Howard: My congregants just experience me as much deeper. They are taken into a field that is more receptive. I feel [a greater depth], so much of the teachings of Unity have been enriched by my experience of Oneness University. I don't say a lot about Oneness University, but I do say during announcements that if they want to know more they can come Thursday night when I talk about it, but I kind of allow it to be for people who are ready and for people who are drawn to it.

It's hard to differentiate between Oneness teachings and Unity teachings [because they're so similar]. I don't single it out when I'm giving Oneness teachings.

My employees and congregants see me as more present, just there, a calmer energy about myself. I am just an intense guy, [but much calmer now]. They say I'm delivering the best stuff I ever have!

Don: You have about 300 people in your congregation who have become blessing givers, is that correct?

Howard: We have about 200 who are active. We have from 60 to 90 coming on a regular basis every Tuesday and 150 who receive blessings after our service each Sunday. Then when I do a Oneness Meditation (a more intense meditation) on Sunday, about once a month, we will have anywhere from 200-400 stay after the 11:00am service for this.

Don: How do awakened leaders come back and talk to their employees and staff, and how do they incorporate it into their work?

Howard: It's all in how it's introduced. Not everyone has to do it. The big thing I steer away from is saying I'm awakened and others are not. I articulate it in such a way that there's no separation there. I talk about the neurobiological shift and the lack of mind chatter, and some of my other experiences.

I want to be careful of [talking about myself as awakened] because there's separation in that. We're all human beings and we're all in a process of moving into awakening. [Someone who has awakened] has had a neurobiological shift and is still progressing. We're all progressing and [I say to them] here are the benefits that the person has experienced from the shift.

I think there will be a next step when there won't be a singling out of anybody.

Don: Howard, I really appreciate your taking the time to do this. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

Howard: One of the things I wanted to add, because you're focusing on non-profits, is that I have at least three of my board members who are into Oneness and other board members who are not. It is the same with my staff. Those who are into Oneness may ask for a blessing during noon time or after work.

There are a lot of [Unity] ministers around the country who are into Oneness, as well. It's so compatible with Unity teachings. Many of them have asked me how to integrate awakening and Oneness teachings into their services and organizations.

[I tell them] it's like TM [Transcendental Meditation]—first you have to say here are the benefits of that. We're not taking you away from anything. We're not asking you to join a religion. I suggest you just try it and see if you like it, if you see the benefits.

Don: It really jumps out to me, Howard, that how you have brought this back into your ministry and to your staff and congregation can be very instructive for how awakened leaders, in general, can bring their awakening experience into their respective organizations.

Thank you, Howard. It's been a sincere pleasure to speak with you!

Next

The next interview will be with another organizational leader who has been through Oneness University's six-day or other course and who has awakened. We'll talk with her/him about how her/his life—both personal and career—has changed, and what impact awakening has made on these.