A PIECE OF MIKE’S MIND

By Mike Morran

Insight: 1. The capacity to discern the true nature of a situation. 2. The act or outcome of grasping the inward or hidden nature of things or of perceiving in an intuitive manner.

A famous story from the Native American tradition goes like this:

An Elder was teaching her grandchildren about wisdom. She said to them, “All my life there has been a battle going on inside me. It is a terrible fight between two wolves. One wolf is evil --- fear, anger, envy, greed, arrogance, self-pity, resentment. The other is good --- joy, peace, love, hope, sharing, humility, kindness. This same fight is going on inside you, and inside every other person, too.” They thought about it for a minute, and then one child asked his grandmother, “Which wolf will win, Grandmother?”

Please see A Piece of Mike’s Mind on page 2

INSIGHT

By Eric Bliss, Director of Religious Exploration

I invite you to seek out places and moments of deep, meaningful insight in your own life.

“...we incessantly managed to send one another into bursts of laughter, often spewing out chunks of food between the guffaws.”

Mrs. Tu owns Evergreen House Café in Salt Lake City, Utah with her husband Mr. Tu. Evergreen House is an all vegan Asian restaurant that specializes in tasty curries, savory soups, and spicy entrees. It is one of my all-time favorite places to eat, and not because of the amazing food.

One afternoon, I sat chatting at a booth with my good friend Shane, ravenously devouring the #7—“Curry Potato with Soybean”. Between bites, and with both of us engrossed in a conversation that bordered on the ludicrous, we incessantly managed to send one another into bursts of laughter, often spewing out chunks of food between the guffaws.

Please see Insight on page 4
The Elder simply replied, "The one that you feed."

Insight is the Whole Soul Living Theme for July, and has a very particular link to the Unitarian tradition through Transcendentalism. Like many mystics, Unitarian Minister Ralph Waldo Emerson believed that Nature is a far better and more appropriate scripture than any book or collection of words. To Emerson, the Bible may have been the word of God, but Nature was the very work of God. And this made Nature, studying Nature, experiencing Nature, learning from Nature, a more direct pathway to the divine than any written scripture or the structure of any church.

But Emerson didn’t stop there. Emerson believed that human consciousness, the ability to be aware, to be self-aware, to think and reason and feel..., and the ability to reflect on those thoughts and feelings; these were the aspects of our humanity that were most similar to God, and could even be thought of as God, living in and through us.

Reasoning this way, developing insight into the mysteries and depths of the human soul was equivalent to developing insight into the divine. To Emerson, even our bodies and our thoughts are scripture, and knowing God is as easy as breathing, feeling, emoting, thinking, loving..., in awareness. (Many have noted the influence of Buddhism on Emerson’s thought, and the influence of Emerson on modern spirituality.)

We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us receivers of its truth and organ of its activity. When we discern justice, when we discern truth, we do nothing by ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams. ...To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius. ...A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his.

For Emerson, intuition is the truest forms of knowledge, which all of us have access to, and which we ignore at our own peril. Training ourselves to awaken to, listen to (and heed!) the inner voice is one of the central goals of spiritual practice, and through this knowledge and practice, we will create a better, truer, and more divine world.

This is, of course, easier said than done. The discipline of insight takes time, patience, and community, while the world we live in puts all of us under pressure to live in disconnection and superficiality. It is almost like a war going in inside of us. The pressure to conform, shop, lose ourselves in material things or the tribalism of culture, pushes directly against the urge to turn our energy and attention to the development of a more spiritually sustaining inner life. The analogy of the two wolves is poignant. Which one will you feed?

In faith,

[Signature]
During our meal, Mrs. Tu walked over to our booth as she was wont to do. With a smile, she would graciously engage us, and on most occasions, she would ask about my son Hollis, who she adored. This evening, however, Mrs. Tu sat down at the booth opposite me and asked me, “Eric, what is wrong?”

“Wrong?” I thought. Gosh, I’m laughing up a storm and eating like it’s my last meal on earth. What could be wrong?

Well, in fact, something was. I had been preoccupied with a family situation and although, on the surface I was joyous and content, deep beneath, my soul was heavy, concerned.

Without blinking, Mrs Tu said, “Eric, don’t let anyone take away your happy heart.” She smiled, squeezed my hand, and returned to the kitchen. Shane and I looked at each other in utter shock and bewilderment.

At that moment I realized something that I will forever carry with me: even in the middle of chewing teeth and loud shouts of laughter, there is a stillness. Regardless of noise or activity, there is peace. And in that peace, that stillness—there is the clearest view.

In faith,

Eric Bliss, Director of Religious Exploration

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**July RE Calendar**

5th to 7th - Quuest Counselor Training, FUSD

7th to 13th - Quuest Youth Camp, La Foret Camp and Conference Center

7th to 13th - Spirit Quest Middle School Camp, La Foret

21st - ImagineCamp Counselor Training

22nd to 26th - ImagineCamp!
401(a) Update

By Beth-ann Wolfson, Treasurer

As was mentioned by the Finance Council at the Congregational Meeting, the issue of paying into employee’s 401(a) accounts has been brought to our attention from an Executive Summary update that was sent to us from the UUA. We needed to be contributing to retirement plans for a broader group of employees from their date of eligibility. What is known at this point is:

• This UUA umbrella policy provides an avenue for retirement funds to be set aside for anyone employed by a UU institution. This participation agreement was signed in 2001; attempts are being made to obtain a copy of the agreement from the UUA.

• Congregationally funded retirement accounts have been in place for the three current full-time employees. Policy stated that these were supposed to be funded after the person’s one-year anniversary, yet these were funded from day one of employment.

• The Executive Summary also stated that part-time employees that worked 1,000 hours in a given year would be eligible upon his/her one-year anniversary. This has not been occurring for any part-time employees at FUSD.

• Finance Council members and FUSD’s bookkeeper have checked through previous records and have been able to account for everyone that has worked at FUSD since 2001; have been able to determine full-time or part-time employment, whether they did work 1,000 hours in a given year, and if they are eligible for back-pay of retirement funds. (Any full-time employees during this time were enrolled in the 401(a) retirement plan.)

• Current part-time staff that have met (or will meet) the 1,000 hour eligibility have been informed of and enrolled in the retirement program. Congregationally funded accounts are being established at a 9% rate.

• Back-pay for past and current part-time employees is being pursued; this, unfortunately, is not an easy task as fluctuating market rates and various options that these employees may consider.

Since this situation occurred during previous Finance Councils’ terms, the participation agreement is sorely needed. Fortunately, congregant John Collins is assisting with this project during the summer. He has been able to provide historic authorization information and he remembers “who did what” and “when did they do it”. He has been instrumental in helping expedite the process and will be reporting to the Finance Council where we are in the process of getting the 401(a) accounts in order.

When actual numbers are finalized, they will be shared with the congregation. Until then, you may forward questions to the current Treasurer, Beth-ann Wolfson, at imbethann@gmail.com.
Connecting the Whole Soul

By the Connections Ministry

Summer months at First Unitarian mean fewer services, committee meetings and many other activities. But our responsibility to connect to the larger First Unitarian community (not only our good friends) doesn’t take the summer off! The Connections Ministry would like to invite you to take time this month to build and strengthen your connection to our community.

You Need a HUGS!

Summertime is a great time to volunteer for a small task during a Sunday service, which we call HUGS. Host a coffee hour, be an usher or greet visitors at our front door. A small amount of your time on Sunday can help make the service run smoothly. There are plenty of experienced hosts, ushers and greeters to “show you the ropes.” Help make the services a good experience for all – during the time you’re at First Unitarian anyway! Coffee hour volunteers can contact Glenn Barrows (office@fusden.org). Usher volunteers can call Eric Karnes (ektriangle@aol.com). Greeters are organized by Mary Hilken (connectionsministry@fusden.org).

Give Your Time for a Good Cause

Engage the community beyond First Unitarian’s walls and make a difference in July and beyond. The I-Cubed Ministry wishes to bring to action the Unity that makes us One by highlighting and promoting compassion, dignity, encouragement and interdependence in the areas of mental health, addiction and trauma, always moving closer to the goal of peace for all. Contact Tammy Morran (tammorran@gmail.com) to find out how you can participate. Also, Urban Peak continues to prepare meals for Denver’s hungry souls. Join them on July 28th from 3-6pm at FIRST UNITARIAN. Contact James Degregori to help (james.degregori@ucdenver.edu).

Visitors Don’t Take the Summer Off

Seek out and welcome visitors in the sanctuary and during coffee hour. We are all First Unitarian, and that means we’re all responsible for making our congregation a place where new people feel welcome. If you’re not sure whether someone is a new visitor, a frequent visitor or an First Unitarian member, start a conversation by simply asking “have we met?”

“The Connections Ministry would like to invite you to take time this month to build and strengthen your connection to our community.”