

A Maladjusted Piece of Mike's Mind... by Rev. Mike Morran

My column this month is the conclusion of the sermon from June 18th.

Krishnamurti famously said, "It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society." Which is another way of saying that being maladjusted is about the sanest, most spiritually mature thing we could do.

I think of Thoreau who wrote in Walden, "*Beware of all enterprises that require new clothes.*" "*If I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior. What demon possessed me that I behaved so well?*"

And, it needs to be said, out loud, that being maladjusted is really hard. Not only is it socially costly, as in, you might lose some friends, and your neighbors and families might think you've gone off the deep end, but it's spiritually difficult too.

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Celebrating 150 Years

Ploughshare

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Between Too Much and Not Enough by Erin Kenworthy, DRE

We are navigating our way back toward one another. The staff and church leadership are plotting a course toward reopening, relying on the best scientific data, current research, denominational recommendations, and our best instincts. In many of these conversations, I've been reminded of explorers and adventurers relying on the stars, their best equipment and knowledge to set out into the unknown with the hopes of safe passage and arrival at a new destination.

Some of us are still wary of large gatherings, some of us are beyond ready to reclaim the feelings of normalcy and comfort of being together. Some of us are somewhere in between, depends on the moment and particulars of the day whether we feel ready, or not. It is a feeling after all, each of us with a different barometer of what we need in order to feel relatively safe enough to risk emerging from our pandemic boundaries. You can read all the articles, the science, the singular stories, and still have a feeling.

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There's an old parable about A man who found an eagle's egg and put it in a nest of a barnyard hen. The eaglet hatched with the brood of chicks and grew up with them, all his life the eagle did what the barnyard chicks did, thinking he was a barnyard chicken. He scratched the earth for worms and insects. He clucked and cackled. And he would thrash his wings and jump a little.

One day he saw a magnificent bird above him in the cloudless sky. It was gliding in graceful majesty among the currents of the wind with scarcely a beat of its strong, beautiful wings.

The old eagle looked up in awe. "Who's that?" he asked his chicken friend. "That's the eagle, the king of the birds. He belongs to the sky. We belong to the earth-- we're chickens." So the eagle lived and died a chicken, for that's what he thought he was.

The moral is clear. Culture and socialization are powerful. The beliefs we've been taught about how the world works and where we fit into that world are nearly seamless. Or at least that's how they appear from our inculturated, socialized point of view. And of course, it's ninety percent bullpucky. We are eagles who've been taught to be chickens. There are truths in our bodies and our souls that we don't even know about, can hardly conceive of, wings of freedom and fun, and silliness, and hope and good trouble we've never been given permission to explore, or test out, or play with.

There is justice work to be done, demanded, that we've been convinced is for someone else to do, as if we have too much to lose by giving ourselves over to it, as if... as if we haven't already sacrificed so much vision, imagination, humor, connection, and power to a system deeply invested in keeping is thinking we're chickens.

Bullpucky!

My message today, for you, whoever you are, and for you, the whole community slash congregation of First Unitarian Denver, you have nothing to lose, except perhaps a few things that aren't worth keeping anyway.

And that's the way it is.

See you soon,

Mike

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I'm here today to say this, return physically when you are ready. Listen to the wisdom of your body. We'll be here whenever you are ready to return in person. We'll be available online as well. Engage in ways that honor your feelings and your needs.

In the weeks to come, we'll be rolling out changes in how we present worship online. I realized yesterday that we've arrived at what may be our last zoom worship service for the foreseeable future. Later today I'll complete what might be my last pre-recorded Time for all ages. The following Sunday will be a live and in person outside service at Barnum Park. Following that, we'll have live steaming equipment in our sanctuary and the staff will meet on Sunday mornings to livestream a service without the congregation present. Some time after that, a limited congregation will be present in the sanctuary. These are all small steps toward our new way of experiencing being together. I have feelings about each step along the way.

There will be comfort and discomfort, sure footing and awkward steps. There will be moments of too much effort, or not enough as we try to find the path back to each other. We'll progress and we'll stumble, all part of our journey together. When you feel it's too much, pause and listen. When the journey feels like not enough, pause and listen. We are finding our way back to one another between too much and not enough together as a community. Not individually, but collectively. We are resilient, and able to do difficult and joyful things together moving from here to there in love.

With grace and compassion for our entire crew, let us journey together as traveling companions toward wholeness.

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Think Like A Monk by Joe Verrengia, President, First Unitarian Board of Trustees

I lied to you.

I don't always read fiction as I claimed in my previous Ploughshares essay.

Recently I went rogue and read the wildly popular self-help book "Think Like a Monk."

In a single week, two friends said they devoured it and were applying its lessons diligently, if not successfully.

Receiving the same advice from two people who don't know each other is a wild coincidence – just wild enough that I went looking for the book myself. It was sold out in the first few stores I tried.

I wasn't entirely comfortable. When my friends asked if I had started it, I tried to deflect them with sarcastic questions.

Would I need to shave my head?

Wear a saffron robe?

Give away my worldly possessions - especially my matching martini glasses owned (and apparently well-used) by author John Steinbeck?

You're not thinking like a monk, they said. Read it and you might learn something. You might change.

So, I broke my fiction rule.

Unlike my friends, I didn't devour it. I nibbled on it. It is written in concise chapters with numerous anecdotes and little exercises. That gave me opportunities to put it aside, give it a think, fall asleep, and even think about quitting.

If you read this book, consider these ground rules:

- Don't read the book jacket. Effusive celebrity endorsements from Oprah, Ellen, and Will Smith obviously were concocted. Hying author Jay Shetty as Monk-to-the-Kardashians created such an instant crisis of credibility that I almost left the book at the cash register.
- Don't look at Shetty's huge cover photo. Have you ever seen a monk with such white teeth and luscious hair? Me neither.
- And resist him on social media, at least initially. Wisdom doesn't have to be obscure but going viral does turn his message into a commodity. You might want to reflect on the book before becoming one of his 40 million online followers.

Shetty's method and message are rooted in the ancient lessons and practices he absorbed, first in occasional retreats while pursuing a corporate career and later after entering an ashram in India.

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And herein lies his first lesson. While he might be a rock star podcaster, Shetty was a lousy monk.

After three years of meditating eight hours a day and devoting his life to helping others, his teachers “encouraged” him to leave the ashram. He was sick and struggling. They told him he would do better to share his learnings with the outside world than to remain on the inside.

Shetty had to move back in with his parents. He was broke. He seemed more lost than ever.

I mean, who gets fired from being a monk? How is that even possible?

Shetty found peace, clarity, and purpose only after life really humbled him.

Knowing this, I got past his diamond smile and famous friends. We had more in common than I thought. I became more open to what he was offering. (I know... quite literally don't judge a book by its cover.)

Shetty isn't a lyrical writer. His prose reads like a friendly podcast transcript. But it's clear and concise. His path to a more meaningful life seems reachable in small, progressive steps. There is plenty of room for second, third and fourth chances.

To me, the books of Viktor E. Frankl offer a similar but more powerful message formed in the crucible of Nazi concentration camps.

But I got a lot from Think Like a Monk, and you might, too. Here are some of my take-aways:

Breathing makes everything better. Deeply inhale while you count to four, hold it for four, and exhale for four. Do it ten times. See? Better.

Don't go online until you breathe, stretch, read, eat breakfast, and personally connect with your loved ones. (I'm trying!) Looking at your phone at 5:30 AM is like hitting yourself in the face with a hammer. Don't be the hammer's nail.

Trade ego for confidence. Ego makes us afraid to fail and so we don't try. If we don't try, we don't find.

Only you can cure your pain. Quit lying to yourself or expecting others to cure it for you. That's not what relationships are for.

Do more for others. Service is the direct path to a meaningful life. Happiness is the byproduct.

Beginning this month, I succeed Mary Sullivan as president of the FUSD board of trustees for the next year. We have several new board members as well. We will be getting acquainted and learning our jobs even while we help FUSD emerge from the pandemic.

I'm going to try to remember what I've learned from Mary and what I've learned from author Jay Shetty.

If you're unhappy with me for some reason, just say “Hey Joe, think like a monk.” I'll get the message.

Whole Souul Living

Our Whole Souul Living Theme for July is Mercy, surely a precious and scarce commodity in 2021. For years, maybe since the beginning, politics and the news is dominated by quick judgement, false certainty, and the drumbeat of fearing strangers. Still, wisdom from the ages is clear; “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” (Jesus) “The willingness to forgive is a sign of spiritual and emotional maturity.” (Gordon Hinkley) “An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.” (Gandhi) And, “Do not judge yourself harshly. Without mercy for ourselves we cannot love the world.” (Gautama Buddha)

Some questions for individual and communal reflection:

- How can the capacity for mercy be increased?
- In politics, will mercy always be defeated by malice?
- From what person or institution could you use some mercy right now? What would that look like? What would change?
- Who in your life is needing mercy from you at this moment?
- What do you need to forgive yourself for, in order to better love the world?



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