

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

By request, my column this month is portions of the TREES sermon from August 1st.

Elif Shafak, the brilliant Turkish/British author, in a perspective-taking experiment wrote: *Humans do not see trees. They walk by us every day. They sit and sleep, smoke and picnic and secretly kiss in our shade.*

They pluck our leaves and gorge on our fruits. They break our branches or carve their lover's name on our trunks with their blades and vow eternal love. They weave necklaces out of our needles and paint our flowers into art. They split us into logs to heat their homes, and sometimes they chop us down just because they think we obstruct their view.

Please see **Forested** on page 2



Spiritual Practice Makes ... by Erin Kenworthy, DRE

Let's try an experiment. Keep your eyes open. Extend the index finger on each hand and hold your fingers parallel to the horizon, elbows pointed out to the sides. Bring the fingers up to eyelevel, adjust your focus, and then bring the index fingers together until your fingertips touch. Refocus. Practice. Do it a few times. Maybe adjust your arm position to be more comfortable. Relax your shoulders. Try again. Great job!!! Relax! Put your arms by your side and take a deep breath. Feeling good? Great. Now, get ready to repeat the action, but close your eyes this time. Concentrate!

If you are reading this, your eyes are open. Did you try the exercise with your eyes closed? I wonder, did you find connection on the first try? Did it take a couple of tries? Did you give up?

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They make cradles, wine corks, chewing gum, rustic furniture and produce the most beautiful music out of us. And they turn us into books in which they bury themselves on cold winter nights. They use our wood to manufacture coffins in which they end their lives. And they even compose the most romantic poems for us, claiming we're the link between earth and sky. And yet, they do not see us.

...Here's why we're talking about trees today. I have come to believe that trees, learning about trees, learning from trees, letting the spirit of trees into our own spirits, bodies, and souls, understanding trees, communing with trees, protecting trees, is a relatively accessible and a beautiful way to decolonize our minds. Trees, are an accessible and a beautiful way for human beings who care, people like you and me, to start to reposition ourselves, change and expand our consciousness, reexamine our assumptions about where we stand in relation to the non-human world, where we stand in relation to each other, where we stand in relation to God, and what any god worth worshipping actually wants from us. It's not colonization. I think if there's a God, God would want us to see trees. Really see them.

You know, the bible was written by humans from human perspective. The garden of Eden, go forth and multiply, subdue the earth, and all that destructive nonsense. I've been wondering, what would that same story sound like if it were told from the perspective of the trees in the Garden of Eden? The Tree of Life, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil?

How would trees write that story?

In my imagination, the tree of Life, the mother of all trees, which always wants to grow and evolve, starts feeling that things are too static in the garden, so it sets some things in motion. She arranges, conspires with the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and with the sunlight and water and nutrients in the soil to grow some beautiful fruit, pleasing to the eye. She arranges with the soil and the other local plants to have things around that the snake would like, so the snake starts hanging around. Very patiently, slowly, inexorably, she works things out with God so that the woman and the snake and the fruit all converge, a genesis of conditions that results in knowledge being shared. And knowledge, having been shared, must be spread, as the Tree of Life knew all along.

In this version of the story, it was the trees all along, quietly using all the resources in the environment, including the clueless humans, to make it so knowledge can escape the static garden, go out and create a whole new world.

In deep green faith,

Mike

Spiritual from page 1

Our theme this month is spirit. In my experience, spirit is usually an unseen, abstract concept. As a child, I heard about a “holy spirit”, and typically envisioned an elongated floating vapor form. I also heard about a “holy ghost” and figured it was basically the same thing, but maybe friendlier, like that Casper fellow from cartoons and movies. I know that some folks felt moved by “the spirit”, tried to communicate with “spirits”, and often frowned at “spirited” kids.

As a middle school cheerleader, my teammates and I had “the spirit” and tried to rally that in our classmates, even though none of us were really able to put a finger on exactly what that meant. Yelling? Pride? Sportsmanship?

Over time, I’ve come to understand spirit as the divine presence in myself and other living beings, a link between that which gives life and the experience of living. It’s not an external noun, but an internal phenomenon. Some folks conflate “spirit” and “soul”, and to be honest, the particulars of that philosophical and theological conversation, while interesting, contain more content than appropriate for a ploughshare article. I contemplated, questioned, and arrived at a personal understanding of spirit that resonates for this particular living being. You can be informed by the work and thoughts of others, but I do encourage you to make some space for your thoughts, questions, and wisdom. Personally, my efforts yielded an understanding that gives a whole new meaning to those “spirit sprinkles” I used to deliver through a wave of my cheerful pre-adolescent fingers at a pep rally. Namaste.

Spiritual practice allows us to access that connection. Anything that allows you to practice, deepen, shift or understand that connection counts. It’s not called spiritual perfect for a reason. There should be occasional stretching or redefining the modes and methods used. Meditation and yoga? Great! Singing? Wonderful! Playing basketball, swimming, creating art, caring for others, cutting your toenails, considering lilies, counting to three, laughing, roasting marshmallows, watching a flame, taking your medication, attending worship or hugging a tree. You will encounter obstacles involving time, resources, internal gunk, or the opinions of others. These missing or extra puzzle pieces can be frustrating, and they assist you in honing your practice, by showing you places where your connection needs attention. Consistency in practice helps, but even if you take a break, you can find your way back with intention, concentration, and focus. The path you take to the connection does not need to be the same every time. Spirit, your unique experience of connecting your life to life source, is there if you’ll lift a finger or two to find it.

Try the exercise from the beginning of the article again. Don’t put your arms down between opening and closing your eyes. Do a few repetitions with your eyes open, and then just close your eyes and try again. Did you experience any obstacles? What were they? Did you find connection? What spiritual practice would you like to explore or try again? Can you imagine bringing more of that feeling into your daily life? What would it be like to share that feeling with another being? If you are wondering, you can start by sharing this article with someone. Talk through the questions. Connect. Practice.

I’m ready to face the obstacles with you, as we navigate our way back to each other. May the summer bring you plenty of joyful, spirited connections, inside and out.

The Ritual of Food by Robyn Rissman,
Vice President, First Unitarian Board of Trustees

Summer is at its peak and there is much to be grateful for, even if it's far too easy to let the omnipresent worries of the world invade our waking hours. But there's produce in the garden, long and lazy (I hope!) summer nights, and the prospect of once again gathering together in our beautiful building on August 15th. It's time to celebrate the bounties of the season and the small rhythms and rituals that give summer its own special place in the calendar. For me, it's the jars of sun tea, warm cherry tomatoes straight from the vine, picking berries from my berry patch, and making (and eating!!) homemade fudgesicles (apparently, my summer—and the rest of my year?—revolves around food! These small rituals tie me to my childhood and summers long gone by, and they remind me of the value of making time for things that could so easily be shunted aside for “more important” things.

I hope that your summer has been filled with these little pleasures—and I'd love to know what they are, because I'm always on the hunt for new ways to enjoy this fleeting season. The idea of getting to hear them in person soon is what I most look forward to!

So, without further ado, here's my recipe for the fudgesicles. If you don't have a popsicle mold (which is a darn cheap source of joy), you can pinch hit with paper cups!

2 c. milk, cream or canned coconut milk for a dairy-free option

2 T cocoa

2 T sugar

1 c chocolate chips

½ t vanilla

Dash of salt

Heat the milk on low/medium heat, stir in the cocoa and sugar, add chips and stir until melted. Let cool slightly and pour into molds. Freeze for 6 hours! I recommend making them in the morning so you can enjoy them late in the day!

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Spirit is our Whole Souul Living Theme for August. The word spiritual comes from the Latin *spirare*, the breath. Later this became spiritus, meaning, "the animating or vital principle in man and animals: soul, courage, breath, or vigor." Many consider the spiritual to be supernatural or otherworldly, but with the definition above there is no otherworldly requirement. In fact, there are many pathways or openings to Spirit: love, prayer, nature, music, knowledge, gratitude, more... For our purposes, we will treat Spirit as the sense or feeling of being alive, animated, soulful, connected, courageous, filled with *spiritus*.

Some questions for individual and communal reflection:



1400 Lafayette St.
Denver, CO 80218

Phone: 303-831-7113

Fax: 303-831-8458

E-mail:
office@fusden.org

Rev. Mike Morran:
revmorran@gmail.com

Erin Kenworthy, DRE:
erin@fusden.org

Website:
www.fusden.org

- What activities make you feel more alive, courageous, animated, soulful?
- Do you pursue or practice those activities with intention? Why or why not?
- What has been your experience with intentional spiritual practices?
Share this with someone at First Unitarian.
- Do the people you know who seem to be most alive, courageous, animated, and soulful have intentional spiritual practices? Are they disciplined, lucky, or something else?
- How would you teach or help a child to feel more alive, courageous, animated, or soulful?

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