

## ***Joy is an Inside Job***

While driving down the highway one day, I saw a bumper sticker that said, "Joy is an Inside job." At first, everything in my whole being said, "no it is not!"

The older I get, the more I realize that we are each responsible for our own Joy is a "Big T Truth."

I knew a minister once who always talked about the big T truth and the small t truth. The big T, were truths that were universal....truths that came from the big picture like Gravity, they were laws of nature. Happiness, is a small t truth, while Joy, true Joy is a God Thing...a Big T truth.

My minister friend would share that there were many little t truths we tell ourselves about life, about each other. Sometimes those small t truths are messy. They are convenient to us in the moment, but they may not hold over time.

And yet, what we tell ourselves about ourselves and others, is often a small t truth. "I am not capable, I can't..."

As a teenager growing up I really wanted to leave my home before I had finished high school. My father was an active alcoholic at the time and I was very angry with him for the way I felt that he made each day of our lives.

My mother was a dutiful wife, she had 7 kids, and my father was still the breadwinner. My truth then was that she was wrong. She put us in danger; she was responsible for our miserable lives. At the time, neither of them could do anything right in my eyes.

Today when I look back at those times, I see a different truth. Time and experience has helped me see the challenges she was experiencing and given those, she probably made the best choices she had in the moment. My truth then, is not my truth now.

A couple of Big T Truths in our faith: Universalism: God is Love and we are all worthy and Unitarianism: that there is only one God –Divine Love

One god...and that god is love. Ultimately, if you really think about it, our uniting concept about our faith is that Love is All there Is.

We forget that we are all connected to Love – that Divine Thread that flows through all of us. Many times, it feels like we fall asleep and forget who we really are. We need to stay awake to the divinity in each of us. – We need to stay awake.

There is an eco-philosopher, Joanna Macy. She created a framework called "The Work that Reconnects."

Macy believes that what has happened to us as humans, is that we have become so overwhelmed by so many challenges in the world, from climate change to the terrorism that we are seeing on the news daily, that we have become full of fear and ultimately, numb. Macy sees that we have forgotten that Love is really all there is.

We practice that numbing so as not to feel the fear, with our smart phones, television, drugs and alcohol and much more. Macy believes we need to wake up, before the earth and all of humanity is permanently destroyed. Before we are unable to come back from the brink of destruction.

When I am feeling disconnected or numb or challenged by something, I like simple ideas, simple ways to help myself move out of that place. In Joanna's framework, I found such an idea.

In Macy's framework, we begin with Gratitude.

Think of a challenge you are experiencing right now in your life. What about this situation are you grateful for? If you can't find even one small thing, what generally in your life are you grateful for? And how might it relate to this challenge?

Do you have friends, family, a job, are you still breathing, walking, seeing, eating? What is one thing related to the challenge in which you find yourself that you can be grateful for?

Research shows that when we focus on gratitude, our lives become more manageable and our joy increases. If we follow the law that "thoughts held in mind produce after their kind", then the more we worry, the more we see there is something to worry about. AND, worrying doesn't change anything on the outside; it just makes us miserable on the inside.

When my daughters were just starting adolescence, they became really surly. I dreaded every day coming home to a household of grouchy pre-teens. Nothing was right for them, not what I cooked for dinner, not my interaction with them, not where we lived, the weather, anything. So I started imagining on the drive home, every good thing about our relationship. I was grateful for their smiles, their cute ideas, their singing, and their overall presence in my life. Each day as I practiced this, our interactions at dinner took on a more pleasant air. So much so, my oldest commented one day as I drove her to school: "Did you read something about parenting differently on the internet?"

So we begin with Gratitude. What about this challenge am I grateful for? Sometimes it might end up being the "muscle" you create to get through it! Or, it might be the opportunity to be in service. On days I could think of nothing great about coming home to my grouchy children, I focused on being grateful for being in service – to have someone to cook and clean and take care of.

Next, as we experience gratitude, we move to compassion. We see our shortcomings. We understand what we have not been capable of addressing at this moment in time or even in the past. We honor our effort; we honor what has perhaps kept us focusing on the challenge or our inabilities. We honor the part of us that may be feeling overwhelmed.

In Buddhist teachings, the biggest challenge we have as humans is our addiction to what we want to happen, what we expect to happen. Our joy comes when we understand that deaths or losses are important parts of the whole. We will fail sometimes; we will lose people we love. We will die.

True compassion means we begin to face our own vulnerability. A beautiful story of this is the movie, *Still Alice*. In the movie, Alice comes to face early onset Alzheimer's disease. Her world shrinks quite rapidly. She struggles at first with the news, but she gives a speech to a group of patients, caregivers and physicians in which she comes to accept her diagnosis and paints the picture for herself and others for what her life will become. "I may not even remember this moment tomorrow."

It is her youngest daughter who comes to accept Alice as she is, even though earlier in the movie, it is Alice who cannot accept the career choices her daughter was making for herself.

As Christine Feldman writes about compassion: "We surrender the desperate yearning and search for a happy ending, and our hearts and minds begin to calm and settle into a newfound stillness. Acceptance means we find the willingness to embrace the endings that are part of all of our lives." She goes on to say that this process empties us of fear and resistance and in the process, leaves room "to clear away the obstacles so compassion can emerge."

The youngest daughter in *Still Alice* is following her heart for her career and working in the theater. Her ability to take care of her mother, while her father is unable to (he tells her, "you are a better man than I") is the illustration of that.

Compassion encourages us to let go of the outcomes, for ourselves, for others, and live in the moment with the people who are in our lives.....such an easy thing to say, but a very hard thing to do.

By moving to compassion, and accepting all of our own shortcomings, we begin to see the world with new eyes, the next step. Without going through gratitude and moving through compassion, seeing the world with new eyes is often too hard to accomplish. We struggle with wanting to control the outcomes. We are challenged by the fact that most often, things don't exactly reflect the life we are projecting.

But what does it mean to see with new eyes? With my daughters, focusing on the things I was grateful for about them, kept me from looking at all of the negatives I couldn't help but see – the grouchiness, the criticalness, the sheer adolescence of it all!

Instead, I focused on what was positive, being grateful for different parts of them. By seeing them with new eyes, they became different to me. We experienced more moments of happiness. My energy with them changed. Instead of walking through the door braced for the anger and the critical comments, I came into the house with gratitude that they were there. I was grateful I was able to give to them in service. And, at least for my oldest daughter, she noticed that something had changed.

Seeing with new eyes is to live in the moment. When we allow ourselves to see a situation differently by focusing on the NOW – things appear different to us. Most of what causes us pain; most of what causes us to lose our inner joy is the part of us that is either beating ourselves up for the past, or projecting some fear or pain into the future.

Most of the time, in the now moment, we are OK. To see with new eyes follows the Big T Universal Truth that God is Love and only love is real and everything else, we have created. That is a really hard concept to live in every moment. It is hard to live in just this now moment. It is so hard to believe that Love is All There Is.

So we start with gratitude, we move to compassion, we practice seeing with new eyes, and finally, we go forth with active hope.

The first three phases help us set up the final commitment to action. By moving through gratitude, into compassion and seeing with new eyes, we create safe and inspiring space from which to vision a new future.

To paraphrase Mary Oliver: in the poem wild geese

“You do not have to be good  
You do not have to walk in your hands and knees repenting.

You have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.

Whoever you are....the world offers itself to your imagination.”

First Step: Going forth with active hope is using our imagination to vision a new direction.

We can't know any clear destination. The poet, Robin Morgan once said, “We have to go beyond what we sense, because we are already beyond what we know.”

When I was in college, the best career advice I ever got was, keep moving in directions. Don't pick a specific job title, but keep following your heart, your interests, what you want to accomplish in life.

To practice the concept of Going forth: We have to Create space for listening....it means a commitment to what one minister I knew used to call "god's idea." We have to be still sometimes to listen to the small voice within us. Be still and know.

We may have to practice listening to our inner voice if that has been unfamiliar to us. Sonia Johnson, the Mormon feminist of the 1980's created a process called "hearing in to being" – as women, our ideas are often discounted. We may have never had the opportunity to be heard. Sonia created this process as a consciousness raising type activity to give people who were often not heard, a voice.

People would sit around a circle after a period of meditation and take turns talking for 10-15 minutes. No one could agree or disagree, just listen. At first, it was really hard as the speaker to do. All these people were listening to me. What did I have to say? And then I found for myself it was easier to go deeper, to focus on the more powerful ideas within.

Second step in the process of going forth is setting your intention and attention – the intention of "catching God's idea" was coupled with giving space – attention to what you wanted to achieve. With clear intention we are able to listen for the deeper self.

Often we don't set up time to really listen to ourselves. Sometimes that becomes a practice that allows us to move to a different space. Take time to set your intention.

The third part of going forth: Capturing the seeds of inspiration – writing them down or recording them in some way. I have had some powerful dreams in my life that have helped me along the way. When I was in Oklahoma, wanting to move back to the east coast, I asked every night before I went to bed, for a dream to help guide my next career move.

About a year before I applied for the Ferry beach job, I recorded a dream in which I was traveling a long way to a place that was part community center, part hotel and part church. When I re-read the dream during the process of applying to be the Executive Director of Ferry Beach, I was amazed at the accuracy of the ideas in the dream. At the time I recorded them, I had no real clear idea as to what it meant. But over time, after the dream, I began gravitating toward finding retreat and conference centers in which I might work.

Visioning allows us to move into a process of using our imagination. At Ferry Beach, we are visioning an organization that is financially sustainable. Putting those words out into the Universe coupled with right relations has changed many of our relationships with vendors, with organizations that have rented the beach and with long term conference goers.

It has created a new enthusiasm and energy for the organization. We have a long way to go, but when we put those ideas out to our members over the last two years, we have doubled our philanthropy and attracted new people to our conferences and our facilities.

Think of a challenge in your life may be it is you personally, or maybe it is you as a church – and then practice this framework:

Gratitude

Moving into Compassion

Seeing with New Eyes

And Going Forth with Active Hop

How do we affirm Joy in our Lives? We remember that we are Joy – Our Big T Universalist Truth is that God is Love. Our Big T truth in Unitarianism is that we affirm that there is ONE God. We affirm the principle that we are all worthy of that Love. We awaken the joy within when we remember who we really are.

A good practice to set in motion to experience all of this is practicing this framework, it takes us a more connected place.

This summer at Ferry Beach, we will be exploring these ideas for a full week for families entitled Deep Ecology. We'll have workshops for kids and adults alike using the Work that Reconnects. We will practice all four of these concepts in community and using experiential activities.

We have an opportunity with these four ideas to feel better when we feel overwhelmed. We have the opportunity to connect the joy that is our birthright. We have the opportunity to bring more joy in the world in which we live.