

Just two weeks ago I went to a retreat center where a friend of mine has begun working, accompanied by two other mutual friends. We four women had worked together as collective members, at A Woman's Place Bookstore in Oakland, and had spent most of our 30's together. Though we have stayed in touch and visited each other over these past 30 years, this was a big deal, to drive 165 miles into the Sierras and spend 4 days together, with no internet or cell service. It went far better than any of us had expected or even hoped. It was a love fest, among ourselves for sure, but also between us and the forest, us and a couple of forks of the Yuba river, us and the animals of the center especially the loud cattle and the quiet horses, and us and the animals of the land especially the grey fox and the mountain lions and the black bear. (I personally only crossed paths with the grey fox.)

On the return trip home, the refrain from Al Green's song, Love and Happiness kept running through my head. I decided then to abandon my almost completed service for this Sunday, which was really only waiting for me to decide whether the title of the homily was going to be Regret or Despair. I had been hit with the realization that I was in the midst of summer, a quite glorious summer. And I was on vacation, a four day only vacation perhaps, but a vacation all the same, and I felt great about it. I was basking in Love and Happiness.

So naturally I had to think on this Love and Happiness thing, and try to analyze it, and trace its trajectory through time, and especially speculate on the evolutionary advantages of Love and Happiness. And there are many advantages.

There is a question in biology whose answer is always shifting. That question is: what makes us human. What about being human is unique among species. The answer always shifts since the more we learn about other beings the less we can claim as human-only abilities. I don't understand why there have to be unique behaviors in order to differentiate into the species that we are, but that seems to be the scientific inquiry. Of the many theories in operation, I am particularly fond of the work of Sarah Hrdy. In the course of her study of many groups and cultures she postulates that our large and complex brains, and the demands on our biology of these brains, creates our organizing strategies for human development, the process of being human. Not

original a finding in itself, but -- what she observes is that our strategy for getting human infants with highly demanding brains to survive to be adults with highly useful brains -- orders all of human social interaction. Those demands of the growing human brain are for disproportionately high levels of nutrition and for abnormally long periods of protection and unwavering parental care. This is in comparison to the strategies of all other beings. The demands and needs for the support of these brains of ours is such that no single guardian nor even one single bonded-pair can fully meet them. There has to be societal support and there have to be non-parental individuals willing to help out.

And thus we humans are tilted toward Group co-operation, Altruism, Empathy and Compassion. **Tilted** toward choosing these behaviors, **just** tilted. We are not locked in by instinct to behave this way (more's the pity perhaps) but we have the inclination to behave so. In the nurture vs nature debate, these traits which we often call values, are subject to the context in which each society operates. A society in a state of fear- of - deprivation or loss, mistrusting of others, tending to identify many other members as enemies or threats, is not going to be a society focused on the flourishing of its members by large scale group giving of time and resources. And so the members of the group Don't flourish, especially the very young or the less well protected. In a different context where there is the consciousness to encourage these nurturing traits, to uplift these values as a social good, where there is emotional reward to be found through Empathy, compassion and altruistic assistance, all members of the group can flourish. They are better taken care and find some ease in their lives and are more successful in the raising of those big brained babies. They are rewarded in these behaviors in ways that encourage the repetition of these behaviors. We are rewarded with Love and Happiness. And fortunately we will always want more.

Our Unitarian Universalist religious movement is organized around values and not creed or dogma. We are a group well placed in the overall effort to tilt all of our society, even all of our species, toward this human flourishing. Co-operation, Empathy, compassion and altruism. We REVERE those values. And we get together regularly in order to encourage ourselves to Act Out and Live those values as concrete BEHAVIORS in our

larger communities. We call that worship. Even in our little group we try to live up to our rather large chosen Mission: Create loving Community, Service to others. I don't know how many here were part of the process of creating that Mission, but I remember it as us trying to draw out the most fundamental values that were paramount to the largest number of members. And here is what we got: *We create loving community through worship and service to others* And we put it in front of ourselves as our Mission. When we are focused on that mission, when we make all of those values into behaviors, we express our happiness at having this group to belong to, we Love the coming together and we love the extending of ourselves. We are expressing and expanding our nature as human beings. We are rewarded with Love and Happiness.

I appreciate so much how we try to craft worship services for each other that continually uplift and reinforce the values that UU congregations promise to each other—that we covenant together—to affirm and promote. I was aware of this more than usual with this service since I found the topic to be enormous, but rewarding. The Rumi poem, Love Dogs refers to the longing for connection. This bittersweet yearning which is not guaranteed to be fulfilled is part of our human need to find our place as the social beings we are. And from our principals, it references that search for truth and meaning that is each individual's right to question and consider. Hymn #360 answers that yearning cry – or howl; Acknowledge each other's pain –kindness can heal us. Our children's story about the far better path to experience each other as friend, to cherish friends and to make every effort including unconditional forgiveness to avoid casting others as enemy or as no longer worthy of our care. From our principle on compassion in human relations as well as our oft quoted first principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person. I have such a soft spot for *The Splendid Torch* by GBS. Dedication to altruism is affirmation of several of our principles referencing Justice, equity, democracy, peace, liberty and even more Justice; dedication that will be expressed in action. Those are not just good ideas, they are calls to action. The choir singing *What a wonderful world*. My favorite line is the one describing small common gestures and revealing what lies behind them: They're just saying I Love You. There's another principle –Acceptance of one another. We even try to select our donation

recipients along those lines. PlayWorks is an organization dedicated to the protection and TRAINING of children toward Empathy and Co operation, in the child's world of interacting during Recess at School. The organization is trying to make sure that that TILT in our nature is nurtured into the forefront of the choices children will make in their behaviors. It can't be left to chance. Every service the worship team offers has that sort of layering of meaning and affirmation for whoever we are in this hour, however we show up. We find this effort to be creative and rewarding. (and we are searching for new Worship Associates to welcome in.) We are rewarded. We are rewarded with Love and Happiness.

I appreciate how so many here take the necessity of personal and individual ministry to heart and do an overflowing measure of service to make our choice of a lay-led Fellowship successful and beneficial to us all. Each time you do, you are modeling our mission statement, building Loving Community and giving service to others. I hope that gives each of you the satisfaction you deserve and are receiving your reward of Love and Happiness.

If I'm known to you at all, you know that a lilting Pollyanna, I am Not. Love and Happiness is not easily come by, it's often a hard fought struggle, moving us past many demons within and many deterrents from without. I would never hold up those peak moments as easily arrived at every day. I do hold up that there are ways to remember, to find and to give these best aspects of our human flourishing. Remember, our very nature tilts **toward** Co-operation, Empathy, Altruism and Compassion. It's always within our ability to draw on this inheritance. Find others who are trying to live out the very values you find to be most dear. Perhaps those others will be in this congregation. All of us imperfect beings can try together to support and inspire each other to continue trying. There will be some successes. There will be many rewards. Being proud of your self, knowing your own worth and value, will be one. The affirmation of living out the best of human values, and perhaps even the best of human nature will be another. And more and more often our reward will be delight itself, Love and Happiness.