**The Power of Thought**

**“You become what you think about all day long,” said Ralph Waldo Emerson, our wise and perhaps most famous Unitarian.**

**“Life is a mirror and will reflect back to the thinker what he thinks into it,” said Ernest Holmes, founder of The Church of Religious Science.**

**I became a Unitarian Universalist many decades ago as a young adult. I had been raised a Congregationalist, but in high school realized that I no longer believed in the anthropomorphic Father God figure or the *Divine* Jesus being taught about in my Sunday School. When I shared my disbelief with my mother she said that I was a Unitarian. Religion and church remained very important to me and when I was a young adult seeking a church I remembered my mother’s words and found a Unitarian Universalist church. I was home!**

**In my forty’s I was seeking more. I was, and still am, satisfied—and proud—to be a UU. I just wanted to *know* more, *feel* more. I had so many unanswered what and why questions. Enter Christina, an 80 something year old widow in the UU church that I was serving as Director of Religious Education. For some reason she took an interest in me and invited me to her home for tea and conversation. She gave me stacks of books and magazines hoping that they would be of use to me or the Sunday School. Busy as I was, I put the books on shelves in my home and the Sunday School, then put most of the bundles of magazines under my bed. I did look at a few of the magazines. They were of great interest to me; I just didn’t have time for them right then. One in particular caught my eye and I enjoyed reading a few articles and appreciated the markings that Christina had made in the margins. It was titled Science of Mind and across the top of each issue was printed: “Change your thinking; change your life.” It struck a cord, but you know, the time thing……**

**Christina, I came to realize, was much more than the quiet somewhat mousy octogenarian that she appeared. She was extremely intelligent and a seeking soul. At age 80 she had taken a course in Quantum Physics hoping to find answers to some of her spiritual questions. Christina no longer watched t.v. or read the newspaper. Instead she chose what books she wanted to read, listened to music that stirred her soul, and interacted with people of her choosing. How different my life would be if she had not chosen me. When she died I was one of a small group of people who were invited to her home to spread her ashes and to help ourselves to her books. Some of us had not met each other before; we enjoyed hearing each other’s stories about how we met Christina and how she had changed our lives.**

**Sometime in the next year or so, out of the blue, an offer for a subscription to Science of Mind magazine appeared in my mailbox. I clearly remember opening it as I walked back down our dirt road, looking up and saying aloud, “I guess I am supposed to subscribe to this, right?” Of course I did, and I sometimes wonder who I would be today if I had not mailed in that subscription.**

**Before I go on, I just want to clearly say,--- pay attention to those who come into your path. I no longer believe in coincidence. I don’t know how it works, but random meetings in airports, grocery lines, in the water here on St. John,--anywhere!—can be significant and even life changing—for you or the other person. Pay attention.**

**Reading Science of Mind magazine brought me into the world of New Thought. What we call New Thought is not *really* new thought. Most of the teachings and principles can be found in ancient wisdom. In England “New Thought” is sometimes referred to as “Higher Thought”. The New Thought movement as such began in America in the 19th century. It emphasized the power of mind over matter, particularly in having power to heal the body. Dr. Phineas Quimby from Portland Maine is credited with its’ beginning in America. He experimented with hypnotism to heal the body. Mary Baker Eddy was one person whom he healed and she went on to found the church of Christian Science.**

**Ralph Waldo Emerson comes into this New Thought story because of his involvement in the philosophic movement of Transcendentalism. In Transcendentalism individuals were believed to be at their best when they were self reliant. As an individual uncorrupted by society and institutions, they could think for themselves and were thought to be capable of completely original thoughts (thus “new thought”).**

**In 1927 Religious Science also referred to as Science of Mind, began when Ernest Holmes began to teach his beliefs about metaphysical spirituality. He had done intense study of the teachings of Dr. Quimby, Mary Baker Eddy, Ralph Waldo Emerson as well as Eastern religions. He developed his own belief system that was partly based on Christian Science, Unity, and Transcendentalism and he gave lectures on it. However, his Religious Science Teachings differed in that they did not affirm the *divinity* of Jesus. God is thought to be omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. God (sometimes referred to as First Cause, Infinite Intelligence, Universal Presence, or It with a capital I) is spirit or Divine mind. It is in all and all is in It. God is eternal and the Cause and Source of all.**

**Science of Mind sees science and religion as two sides of the same coin. Both understand and explain how the world works, but in different ways. The expectation is that mainstream science will eventually validate what is already known through religion. All sacred literature is used to define and discuss religious principles for living,--and the Bible is considered just one of many. According to Religious Science, the key to God is not found in writings though; it is within oneself.**

**I want to briefly speak about the Law of Attraction which is all that many people know about the New Thought movement; a principle that I believe is often misconstrued. This law is basically the idea that our thoughts are energy and attract circumstances of like energy. Thus positive thoughts attract positive outcomes and vice versa. This belief was sometimes put forward or worded in such a way that folks put the emphasis on manifesting material objects. With our culture such as it is, some folks took this idea and ran with it trying to use it to manifest a new car etc. And I am not going to say that I think that is impossible, because I do not think that *anything* is impossible and a motorized wheelchair came to my husband in an *extremely* unlikely way when he expressed a desire for one. However, to me, the worth of Religious Science is in the area of enhancing the quality of life.**

**There are three basic principles to Religious Science as Ernest Holmes described it in 1927 in his book Science Of Mind:**

**1. Meditation, meaning the practice of quieting the mind and pushing away the distractions of the outer world, and then listening to the voice of the divine within.**

**2. Visioning, meaning a positive thinking technique that visualizes the desired outcome as if it already exists.**

**3. Affirmative prayer (which differs from the usual form of prayer which is asking an entity separate from itself to act). Affirmative prayer is a positive thinking technique that has five steps.**

**(1)Recognition—knowing that God is all there is, thus all things are connected**

**(2)Unification---knowing that you are one with God and through that connection your mind has power over matter**

**(3)Declaration—State what you wish to manifest. State it positively as a fact that already exists.**

**(4)Thanksgiving—Express appreciation toward God and the ability to work with and through It.**

**(5)Release—Expresses recognition of working in the present by letting go and expressing “And so it is!”**

**So, what difference has any of this made in my own life? Turned it on its ear, that’s what it did. When you take charge of your thoughts you gain all sorts of power. You have to give up some things though, like being a victim blaming events and other people for your sad state of affairs. When you decide to take control of your thoughts you realize how big choice is. And you ALWAYS have a choice as to the thoughts you think. You may not have control of other people and the world around you, or all the events of your life, but you DO have control of your thoughts, your attitude and your reaction. That is huge!!**

**Victor Frankl has been one of my inspirations since I read his book, Man’s Search For Meaning in college. He took control of his thoughts in the midst of the utmost suffering in a concentration camp. He learned there that he could choose to find meaning and he could train his mind to focus on love. Imagine!**

**We choose what thoughts fill our minds. If we fill it with grudges, worries and fears we have no room for blessings. Be careful what you feed your mind and what you choose to store in there. It *is* a choice. You have power over what you watch, read, or pay attention to. If you don’t like worrying, then don’t! There is a difference between concern and worry. It isn’t just *what* you think about, but *how* you think about it.**

**When we found out that Dan had lung cancer, it would have been easy to sink into the mindset that this was our worst nightmare come true. But we didn’t want to live in a nightmare, so instead we thought of it as the biggest challenge we had ever faced. Doing that allowed us to come into our power in facing that challenge. Thinking about it that way changed the whole dynamic. It left room for possibility, for hope, and for positive action.**

**Focusing on possibility *is* a choice. Thinking “realistically” can be a euphemism for thinking negatively*. Realistic* people thought Columbus should stay put on his side of the ocean and that astronauts should stay on the ground. Realists think that idealists are just pie in the sky dreamers and want to pat them on their heads as they say, “get real”. I say thank goodness for the dreamers and idealists who persisted in their positive ideas and visions. Bravo for the Wright brothers for not giving up on their silly experiment; hurray for Martin Luther King Jr. and his dream; thank goodness Jonas Salk persisted in finding a cure for polio,--etc. etc. etc.**

**However, positive thoughts themselves are not enough. I believe that there has to be more than daydreams and passive hoping. There has to be *feeling*, clarity of vision, belief and a mindset picturing what will come to be. (All this resembles what is involved in affirmative prayer.) Then you need to add intention and action.**

**Lynne McTaggert’s book, The Intention Experiment, has the sub title, Using Your Thoughts To Change Your Life and the World. One of the things that I love about this book is the reporting of scientific experiments that have shown that constant ordered thoughts seem to be changing physical realities. It seems to me that more and more science and spirituality are coming together—I believe they really are just different sides of the same coin.**

**Being intentional and being mindful are closely related. Being mindful— aware of our thoughts,-- being present in the moment,---- allows us to be intentional about our choices---of thought, action and state of being. Intentions are like seeds—we can choose what intentions we plant, and tend, in our lives.**

**Athletics is a great example of the use of intention. Muhammad Ali was a master of intention. He developed a set of mental skills that eventually altered his performance as a boxer. Remember him chanting his mantras about being the greatest in the world? I remember that the words were often silly and the repetition and volley of words was irritating and weird, but I now understand that he wasn’t just seeking attention, but was finding ways to verbalize his intentions. He also trained hard with mental intentions to his body,-- and his body followed orders. Focused intention is now a routine part of the training of many athletes. It is considered essential to alter and improve performance. The cameras sometimes capture a hopeful Olympic skater or skier mentally going through their race or routine moments before their actual performance.**

**Mental intention has been proven to produce actual physiological changes in the bodies of athletes. The same vivid techniques of visualization have been proven to be highly effective in treating illness. I almost refrained from mentioning this because it is such a huge subject. However, I couldn’t leave it out because it played such an important part in my growing awareness of the power of thought.**

**When Dan and I faced the reality that he had lung cancer we soon taught ourselves not to think about the cancer. What you think about is what you pay attention to and we believed that what you pay attention to gains power. We chose to pay attention to making Dan’s body as healthy as we possibly could—to making it a terrible host to cancer. We changed his diet, used conventional medicine, alternative medicine, and every modality that made sense to us. We learned as much as we possibly could to intentionally strengthen him physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We got years longer than any of the statistics –or his doctor—predicted, but our goal was a cure, and we didn’t make it.**

**Did we fail then? I choose not to think so. There is great satisfaction in knowing that you learned and grew and gave your very best. I do believe that we were on the right path. We believed that the immune system was the one known cure for cancer and we tried to improve Dan’s immune system in every possible way known at the time. Recently, there have been great strides in using the immune system to rid the body of cancer.**

**I have had the same power available in my choice of thought and intention in dealing with the death of Dan as I had in dealing with his illness. I chose reactions and attitudes that led me to inner and outer resources that helped us deal with his illness, and I have chosen reactions and attitudes that have led me to find ways to cope, regroup, and grow since Dan died. I don’t know why we have to have adversity in our lives to discover the expanded life that Martha Beck writes about that is available to us on the other side of grief. That expanded life is *always* available to us. We just have to be in touch with our own intuition and knowing and then trust our inner voice to lead us where we need to go on our individual journey.**

**Over the past weeks I have shared some of the experiences of *my* journey hoping that they would be of interest to you and promote discussion. I have shared my rediscovery of the Precious Present and the appreciation I feel when I know that I am right where I am meant to be. I have shared the blessings I have found in traveling alone and some of the connections I have made when doing so. I shared my feelings about the many shades of okay, how we can make ourselves as okay as possible, and be sensitive to the shades of okay of others. Over and over again the importance of choice has come up and the fact that we DO have choice at every moment—even if only in our reaction and attitude. There is power in that choice. We looked at some of the choices that Henry David Thoreau made and had a great discussion about the choices *we* can make on the same issues. Today I have pointed out that there is power in how we use our thoughts and intentions.**

**Although we often share similar paths and discover some of the same universal truths, each of us has our own unique viewpoint and way of expressing our individual experience. And we are always growing from these discoveries and experiences. I have become deeply aware that at *each* stage of our lives *each* of us is *always* on a forming edge---evolving, changing, becoming. And we can choose to have this awareness fill us with the promise of possibility, hope and joy.**

**Until we meet again, Blessed be.**