

The Wind is My Friend

Unitarian Fellowship of Kelowna

Sundays at 10:30 — 1310 Bertram Street

Before I get started, I want to acknowledge this sacred space, and to give thanks to those that have come up here and spoken their truths. I also want to apologise, for I am not gifted spiritually, and while I may sense the presence of truth, I fail to grasp the mysteries. But the tools, notions, and inspiration that have been shared here have helped me to continue my spiritual journey. Here in our community I have sensed a real feeling of unity, a kind of collective enthusiasm, as we struggle to connect with that special something we can almost touch when we open ourselves up at the edges of reality.

I first came across the notion of observing the symbolism in waking life in the writings of Carlos Castaneda, now there are many reoccurring symbols in my life, but today our limit is two, videography and cyberspace. Recording sound and images is about being in the here and now, about being alert and present, foreground, background — texture, contrast — what is or is not. On the other hand, software is a product of the mind. The mind does not exist in the here and now, most of the time it replays the past, but occasionally it connects disparate pieces of memory and comes up with something special, it creates a future that was not possible an instant before. The mind and its extensions, like cyberspace, are powerful tools, but they have their limits, they exist in the past and the future, not in the here and now.

Let us start like this — allow the most spiritual person you have met to come to mind, recall that sense of “a steady river of quietness flowing, or a great peace penetrating the inner reaches of being.”

I am not like that, never had a flash of awakening, no moment of epiphany. As a young man, physical spacetime and mental reality was all I was willing to accept, it did not help that I also loved science fiction, which dismisses religion as “the opiate of the masses”. But I was harbouring an inconvenient truth from myself, an uncomfortable mystery, I held onto a stubbornly persistent denial for many years, so much so that even now it is awkward to say these words;

I have an invisible friend.

My friend is complex, ancient, misunderstood, full of mischief, and not always kind. But no one will ever see my friend.

The wind is my friend.

For the important moments in life, there are no words. The “Tao Te Ching” warns that “The Tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao”, so what am I going to talk about today, today I will circle around what I know of the wind, and circle around what I know of myself, and circle around what we share together, and hope that you and I might connect in the resonances in between.

Our fourth principle affirms a free and responsible search for truth and meaning; I was looking for clarity, the natural great perfection, contentment, peace. I have found that truth and meaning are what they are, and lead me to doubt and complexity. I mean seriously, how can a reasonable person claim that the wind is his friend. It is not rational, and it is unexpected; truth and meaning are what they are.

I feel closest to the wind at the helm of a sailboat, and yes, exposure to the elements, sleep deprivation, dehydration, a combination that is clearly a recipe for delusion. I have always been afraid of steering a course over the edge, but this time I know it is okay, because even at the helm, the fact that the wind is my friend is still uncomfortable. Robin Lee Graham of the Dove, who lost track reality for a while, said that “the problem with going crazy is that it all makes sense at the time”; one less thing to worry about.

Still with me?

Let's circle around again, our fourth principle affirms a free and responsible search for truth and meaning; not a serious and rational search. Searching for truth and meaning is fun, please do not make the mistake of stopping when the going gets silly, zaniness does not mean you are on the wrong heading, is just the first waypoint marking the edge of your comfort zone, push on, sailing has taught me that even when I am lost, I am often making good time. Hoban Washburne of Serenity said it better than anyone, "I am a leaf on the wind... Watch how I soar..."

In the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna laments, "For the mind is restless, turbulent, obstinate and very strong, O Krishna, and to subdue it, I think, is more difficult than controlling the wind." Maybe Arjuna got it backwards, what if we let the wind control the turbulence of our minds, when you get a chance, try this outside:

First prepare, (Skippers tend to lean on a rail, usually looking out at the horizon) be alert and aware, let time slows down, breathe, and listen — deeply. This takes practice, the hardest part is getting past feeling silly. Leave aside your mind and thought, let the voice in your head blow away. I usually feel it in my hair at first, then my cheek, nape of my neck, back of my arms, the little wind, dancing on the edge of chaos, like it always has. The wind is simply what it is, it does not want to be fixed, or changed, or understood, it does not expect anything of us, although it appreciates being felt and heard. Felt and heard, that is the key, I like to be felt and heard, so does everyone I know. Felt and heard, this is how friendships begin.

"A friend is someone who knows the song in your heart and can sing it back to you when you have forgotten the words."

Let's circle around again, this time we will start at the beginning. Prepare for a mental journey into deep time. In our universe, the passage of time is the only thing that is by definition, completely predictable. Even so, deep time can be surprisingly disturbing, we will ease into it.

5 hundred years ago

This is a religious time. The printing press did not yet exist. Global was not yet a notion, the world had not yet been circumnavigated Literacy was captured by the state, without access to history, geography and scripture, the world was flat, unchanging, eternal. No one had inherent worth, worth was assigned by authority, people were valued not for who they were, but for their skills, surnames like baker, cooper, smith. Even today, people ask "What do you do?" Once, tried answering with my passion, "I am a sailor" It did not work, confusion would ensue and most thought I was in the navy, I gave up on that approach.

50 thousand years ago

This is a mystical time. Our species, Homo Sapiens had already been around for 200,000 years. We had populated much of the globe, but then Toba supereruption came, and we were wiped out. Only 10,000 people survived, Homo Sapiens was an endangered species. Then everything changed, called the Paleolithic Great Leap Forward, we began to exhibit new strategies, social organisation; art, dance, music, spirituality. There is a difference between adaption and invention, symbolic thought allows to see the invisible. No one knows how that special something that makes us different from other animals got started, why we are both spirited and mindful, what we do know is that an important part in us is not in our DNA, beyond biology. It is a mystery.

50 million years ago

A brief 5 degree temperature rise and resulting extreme changes in Earth's carbon cycle, separates the Paleocene from the Eocene. Mount Boucherie was brand new, 2km tall and it's base covered Kelowna. My friend the wind, blew across it's newborn face. At this time scale, a human lifetime is like a heartbeat. How can the wind know I exist? Heartbeats are important, but mostly I take mine for granted, I notice when one goes missing, like when Heather walked into the room, but otherwise they are in the background.

500 million years ago

The origin of vision. Single-celled organisms evolved a flat 'light spot' on the exterior of their bodies. At this time scale, all of spritual behaviour, passes like a single breath, the most recent. My last breath will not be the most important. My most important breath was taken when Sarah was first placed in my arms. Because then everything changed, my life was no longer the most important part of my life.

5 billion years ago

The Earth and Moon did not yet exist, the notion of a year has to be projected here, it does not exist yet. But on the the bodies that would eventually collide and form our worlds, there was the wind, doing what it always does. The wind is profoundly ancient, older than mountains, older than life, older than the oceans, older than the moon. The wind is the only primordial force on this planet that we can interact with directly, we can feel, and smell, and taste and hear it; but we can not see the wind. How can the wind be my friend, my lifetime is but a single vibration, not even a wave on the beach. But here is the thing, the wind lives only in the here and now, so when we connect, the wind has always been, and always will be, my friend. Our friendship is entangled both in an eternity and an instant, perhaps time is more complex than being completely predictable.

The wind is my friend.

On a sailboat, at night, the wind is easy to perceive, it is overwhelmingly, everywhere. Sarah and I were at Trader's Cove and at night we listened to the wind purring to the mountains. Overhearing the low bass and the slow pace of this conversation is intimidating, Sarah was unsettled by the awesome size and power of the wind. I explained to her that Blue Grouse Mountain is only 20 million years old, and the wind was giving it a backhanded complement, commenting how the mountain has grown while also complaining about having to go out of its way as a result. Sarah thought the wind sounded a little grumpy, like Grandpa, which made her Daddy proud.

So why am I here? Not in the "life the universe and everything" sense, ask that spiritual person you were thinking about. I mean why am I living here in Kelowna, I am an ocean sailor, and Kelowna is known as the one of the least windy cities in Canada. Here again, I think there is an issue with perception, "least windy" really means having the most days where the wind is listed as calm. Go outside, take the time to listen, the wind is there, it is just — calm. Right now, I need a lot of calm.

I go where the wind blows

Going with the flow, aimless wandering, is more than changing the channel. It is about turning the stories off. When I am in my little boat, dancing a pas de deux with my friend, going where the wind blows, I can be simply human for while, trading the past and the future for presence and awareness... All voyages end, and I am inevitably drawn to doubt and complexity. Living in the moment can be a disaster if one has not prepared with checklists, routines and visas.

I go where the wind blows

Going with the flow, aimless wandering, it sounds powerless, lazy, unproductive. From up here I have listened to talks of manifesting, the notion that life experience is drawn to you through the thoughts you think and the stories you tell about your life. When we share stories it is often better than sharing a life experience because we all get the same perspective. But stories are inherently deceptive. Stories have a beginning, progress to a middle, and there is an outcome. In life, I am always starting in the middle, there is history I do not know, random threads connecting and going away, a vast quantity of beginnings, bewildering waypoints, and a scarcity of outcomes. Be sceptical of stories.

Let me circle around one last time... with a story...

A long time ago in a bay far, far away. Heather and I were returning in the Wandering Monarch, bolts in the clutch plate worked loose, and as we were under sail at the time, the prop shaft was pulled back, lodging the propeller into the rudder. The upshot of this is we lost propulsion and steering at the same time. Now, most non-sailors are unaware that while an engine and rudder are certainly useful, one can manoeuvre a sailboat the set of the sails alone. The trickiest manoeuvre is tacking, bringing the front of the boat through the eye of the wind, onto a heading towards harbour. The problem is that vessels lose power when pointing to the wind, just when it is needed most, and the waves push you back. Which was exactly what was happening. So I set course for the lee of a nearby island. As we approached the cliffs of the island the Monarch would pull up into the wind and the waves would push us back, again and again, until eventually we came close enough to the island that the waves diminished, the Monarch tacked, and we set off to make repairs in Clipper Cove.

Now to me this was simply about the wind and the waves behaving as they always do. Rational and predictable. To Heather however, this was an answer to prayer. We have struggled with this a lot since that day. I learned about her relationship with God and prayer, and she learned about my relationship with the wind. At the physical level, where the wind lives, the here and now, our world is a complex and inhuman place. This is uncomfortable, so we do not live there much. Instead we take refuge in our minds, spending our time on a responsible search for meaning, unity, and clarity. Albert Camus called this dichotomy absurd, and for a time, I was quite the absurdist. But there was this girl, with her big laugh and that twinkle of mischief in her eyes, she changed all that, Heather sang a song in my heart that Camus forgot. There is truth that touches something endless and deep within us. It is invisible, beyond both the rational and the imaginary, it is what it is, and it endures till the end.

I am not sure this is truth, but I do know... the wind is my friend.

Fair Winds and Following Seas.