Aden’s Introduction to Jonathan Livingston Seagull

Good morning, it is so nice to be here this morning. I was here a few months ago to give this talk. The universe had other plans. You had seven new members sharing who they are, why they are here and their hopes. I came away with three “gifts” that Sunday. I was impressed with how you welcome new members and how enthusiastically and creatively they shared. It was powerful. I also came away with an invitation to come back this Sunday. Thirdly, one of you said that I was the perfect speaker even though I did not speak…………. Hopefully, I will be the perfect speaker this Sunday as well !

I saw that morning as a pop quiz. They come up often and without notice. It was the quiz of the two wolves as described in the Cherokee parable:

*An old Cherokee chief was teaching his grandson about life...

"A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy.
"It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves.

"One is evil - he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, self-doubt, and ego.

"The other is good - he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith.

"This same fight is going on inside you - and inside every other person, too."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather,
"Which wolf will win?"

The old chief simply replied,
"The one you feed."*

I cherish this parable. It has the essence of all of my favorite personal growth advice…… I am the source of good and evil and what I experience is the result of what I choose to express. I would add that the evil wolf always seems to sense food first, pawing and growling “feed me! “ as the good wolf sit patiently and alertly just behind.

I have been a motivated personal growth student for over 25 years. It is starting to show results……. I’ve gained 25 pounds. I have also become much better at choosing the loving wolf. Just a simple expression of love and the kind wolf is content. On the other hand when I feed the evil wolf any amount, it always wants more. Pop quizzes can and do appear at any time. An aggressive driver, someone says something that feels “prickly”, a speaking engagement does not go as planned. I know that they are preparing me for a big exam.

Seriously, our lives are often impacted by big exams. It could be a hurricane, flood or fire, a significant illness, loss of a loved one, parent, child or soulmate. Often I look back on my exams and see clearly puzzle pieces that come together from seemingly disparate directions to provide a path through that darkness. This morning I will share a current challenge that our family is finding our way through. The puzzle pieces that have appeared are 1) the Poem that I will share 2) my grandson Aden’s illness 3) Jonathan Livingston Seagull 4) a trip to the beach.

We are doing the Soul Matters small group ministry at our UU. Each month nine of us get a packet that has a theme and a group of exercises that we do for a couple weeks before we come together to share. We got a packet on healing which asked us to read this poem every day.

**A Blessing For One Who Is Exhausted**

*--by*[*John O'Donohue*](http://www.dailygood.org/search.php?op=auth&name=John%20O)*, syndicated from*[*awakin.org*](http://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=736)*, Jun 02, 2014*

When the rhythm of the heart becomes hectic,
Time takes on the strain until it breaks;
Then all the unattended stress falls in
On the mind like an endless, increasing weight,

The light in the mind becomes dim.
Things you could take in your stride before
Now become laborsome events of will.

Weariness invades your spirit.
Gravity begins falling inside you,
Dragging down every bone.

The tide you never valued has gone out.
And you are marooned on unsure ground.
Something within you has closed down;
And you cannot push yourself back to life.

You have been forced to enter empty time.
The desire that drove you has relinquished.
There is nothing else to do now but rest
And patiently learn to receive the self
You have forsaken for the race of days.

At first your thinking will darken
And sadness take over like listless weather.
The flow of unwept tears will frighten you.

You have traveled too fast over false ground;
Now your soul has come to take you back.

Take refuge in your senses, open up
To all the small miracles you rushed through.

Become inclined to watch the way of rain
When it falls slow and free.

Imitate the habit of twilight,
Taking time to open the well of color
That fostered the brightness of day.

Draw alongside the silence of stone
Until its calmness can claim you.
Be excessively gentle with yourself.

Stay clear of those vexed in spirit.
Learn to linger around someone of ease
Who feels they have all the time in the world.

Gradually, you will return to yourself,
Having learned a new respect for your heart
And the joy that dwells far within slow time.

 I remembered when my business was exactly that physically and emotionally exhausting. My exhaustion is what motivated me to personal growth………For me, what I thought was the end, really was the beginning. Perhaps it reminds you of a difficult time in your life……The poem also shares how to grow through a hard time. I thought my daughter, Lisa, might want to hear that poem. A little while later my daughter and family came to visit. In a quiet moment while the others were out I read the poem to her. I could tell from Lisa’s tears that it was timely. When I explained it was from a packet on healing she said send me the whole packet Dad, which I did.

The challenge she was facing was with her son. Aden is nine years old. It is an age of incredibly expanding imagination. Super heroes and monsters. Aden is particularly fond of the comic strip Calvin and Hobbes . He may have acquired the super powers of Calvin’s alter ego Stupendous Man on occasion. After nine years of diligent and dedicated behavioral modification he pretty well had both parental units and kid sister under control. Even moments of being Master and commander of your personal universe feels pretty good. That universe crumbled twelve months ago while they were in India and he became ill. Lisa and Eric took him to the hospital where the doctors diagnosed him as having type 1 diabetes. It took three weeks to get Aden’s blood sugar under control and train the parents to be his pancreas. The difference between type1 and type 2 diabetes is that type 1 is an auto-immune disease that eliminates the ability to produce any insulin. Type 2 is a decrease in the functioning of the pancreas where at times it is not able to produce enough insulin. Both types of diabetes result in wide swings in blood sugar levels but typically the widest swings of a type 2 would be considered well controlled for a type 1. The target is 80-100, if he goes below 50 it can cause a coma and death, if he goes too high, it can cause blindness, kidney failure, heart failure and nerve damage. Lisa and Eric have chosen to go with a low carb diet and frequent monitoring. 24/7 they do a blood test and adjust with either long acting or short acting or some combination of insulin every two hours. It is a Herculean task for both parents. And Aden, no longer the master of his universe, bows to the authority of a number, ever changing and always directing what he must do. It has taken its toll. As O’Donohue said in the poem:

Weariness invades your spirit.
Gravity begins falling inside you,
Dragging down every bone.

The tide you never valued has gone out.
And you are marooned on unsure ground.
Something within you has closed down;
And you cannot push yourself back to life.

A few weeks after I gave Lisa the Healing packet, Lisa and Aden came to visit Grandma and Grampa World. The grandchildren would rather visit us than Disney World, they have more fun with no lines and crowds. The very best is when Aden or Annalise get time at Grandma Grampa World without their sibling. Aden had gone off bike riding with Grandma. Almost as soon as they were out the door, Lisa with tears streaming down her cheeks said, Aden is often saying he wishes he had not been born……………… She said the words as a question. The question I heard was, Dad, what can we do? I have a hundred personal growth books but what do I have for a nine year old? I looked high and low in every room in the house………. Typical UU books everywhere. Until I found Jonathan Livingston Seagull, patiently waiting 30 years for this moment. Aden sat next to me on the couch. I read him the dedication, “To the real Jonathan Seagull, who lives within us all” I explained to Aden that some books, like this one are two books in one. This is a fascinating story about a seagull and it is a story telling ***people*** how to live.

There is no such thing as personal space when reading to my grandchild. His leg , hip and side is right up against me. His hand is holding the inside of my bicep and his head is against the outside of my bicep leaning in close enough to silently read along with me.

Jonathan Livingston Seagull was not like ordinary seagulls. They only learned the basics of flight. For them flying was merely the way to get from the beach to food and back. More than anything else Jonathan loved to fly. He wanted to learn what he can do in the air and what he can’t.. He practiced curving his wings more and more to maintain lift as he flew slower and slower. Each time he would go too slow and stall. Other gulls do not stall. To them stalling is a disgrace. To Jonathan it was experimenting. Most of all Jonathan loved speed. Climbing to a thousand feet he turned beak down into a blazing power dive. In six seconds he learned why seagulls do not power dive. He approached 70 mph, the speed at which his wings became unstable. One more flap and he lost all control and a tumbling ball of feathers splashed into the sea. Ten times he tried and ten times he turned into a churning mass of feathers splashing into the sea.. Finally, he thought flap to 50 mph and then hold wings tight to my body. By six seconds he was at 70 mph. It took every ounce of his strength to hold his wings in as he streaked through 90 mph. He had set a world speed record for seagulls. His victory was short lived, for the instant he tried to pull out of the dive he lost control and slammed into the water at 90 mph. Dejected, demoralized and discouraged Jonathan thought, if I were meant to learn how to fly I’d have charts for brains. If I were meant to fly fast I’d have a falcon’s short wings…………… That’s it short wings. If I hold my wings in tight and just use the tips of my wings…….. Jonathan climbed to two thousand feet and turned into the dive. Seventy, ninety, 120 mph, at 140 mph he twisted the tiniest tips of his feathers and eased out of the dive …….. a gray cannonball shot above the waves.

By sunup Jonathan was practicing again. At 5000 feet the fishing fleet were specs on the water below and Breakfast Flock was a haze of dust at the shore. He tucked in his wings and turned his beak straight down. By 4000 ft he had reached terminal velocity. The wall of air rushing past was so strong that he could go no faster. He was flying straight down at 214 mph. He began to pull out at 1000 feet. The boats and gulls were growing meteor fast…….. and directly in his path. He could not stop or turn so he just closed his eyes………. and shot right through the center of Breakfast Flock at 212 mph. By the time he had pulled his beak straight up into the sky he was still scorching along at 160 mph. When he slowed to 20 mph he was 4000 feet in the air. It was a Breakthrough. The greatest moment in Flock history. A seagull at 214 mph. In that moment a new age opened for Jonathan. He flew out to his practice area and set about to learn how to turn. He learned to turn, the loop , slow roll, point roll and more.

It was full night by the time Jonathan reached the shore. The gulls had flocked to Council Gathering. In delight Jonathan did a loop to a snap roll and slowed to a one footed walk away landing.

Jonathan Livingston Seagull ! Stand to Center! The Elder’s voice sounded in highest ceremony. Stand to Center meant either great shame or great honor……………. Of course, Breakfast flock this morning. They saw the Breakthrough.

But I want no honors. I only want to share what I have learned, Jonathan thought.

Jonathan Livingston Seagull! Stand to center for Shame and Jonathan was banished to the far cliffs……………………………………

Anyone else read to their children or grandchildren? Most of the time I can manage up to about 10 pages. Then my eyelids get heavy and droopy. The book slips from my hand. I start to speak in tongues…… This was different. This was the end of chapter 1, 40 some pages and Aden is drinking up every word. He says Grampa keep reading. We read straight through to the end page 127. In Chapter two Jonathan continues discovering more about flying. Then two brilliant white gulls lead him to a new land. Jonathan finds himself among seagulls that love to fly as much as he does ! He learns at a rapid pace. Eventually his mentor Chaing teaches Jonathan how to fly at the speed of thought. As Chaing parts ways with Jonathan he reminds him to keep working on love. In Chapter 3 Jonathan masters flying at the speed of thought and is irresistibly drawn to return to the Flock, not to show them what he can do, but to model the love of flying. To remind them that they can fly just as well as he can.

When we got to the end of the book I talked with Aden about what the book is saying about how people should live. That life is not just about squabbling over food or money, but about loving the experience of life. It’s about finding what you love to do and exploring it deeply. When you find that path you will find yourself among others who are also exploring life. You will learn about the power of your thoughts and the mastery of them. All that is left then is to lovingly remind others that they too can really fly.

The next day Aden and I went to the beach. Grandma and Lisa were going to join us after about an hour. They would bring his food and insulin. Aden really likes to ride the waves on his boogie board. He was riding some frothy waves near shore, but pretty soon he was wistfully eying the big outside breakers. The only problem was the bottomless ocean filled with sea monsters and sharks between the inner and outer breakers. Up until this day the monsters had successfully thwarted any desire to ride the big waves. But this day Aden said “Grampa lets go out there!” Aden wrapped his legs around his board and had a death grip on my upper left arm with both hands. We made our way through the monster infested waters and soon were knee deep on the outer bar. Then off he goes to catch a giant wave. The first wave he goes up, up and gets parallel to the wave. He looks like a boy and a boogie board in a front loading washing machine. He lands on his knees , sputters a bit. He wipes the water from his face and heads back out again. The second wave looks like the second rinse repeat of the first wave. But the third wave he caught just right. He was going two hundred fourteen miles per hour down that monster wave. Head up, face lit up like the sun. Mouth open with that exquisite shriek of joy and terror. There were many more long rides like that.

When challenges come your way, open yourself up to the small miracles you rush through. Find the joy that dwells far within slow time. My great joy was watching Aden find that Jonathan Livingston Seagull lives inside of him.

May each of you find the real Jonathan Livingston Seagull inside of you.

May it be so