A poster that has been with me for years has a nature scene with tall snow covered mountains, large pine trees and a river flowing peacefully. On the lower right hand side says: *Nothing is ours but time*. This poster has helped me put many things in perspective... In fact it has helped me to put my whole life in perspective. Contemplating those granite mountains, ancient pine trees and the river, has the effect of making my life seem fragile and short. I know that barring the advance of human destructive forces, those marvels of nature, will be standing where they are, long after I will be gone from this earth.

Contemplating the scene in that poster and meditating on *Nothing is ours but time*, led me to two profound truths: One, I really, really, have the innate power to decide how I will conduct my life, and two, there is no greater decision I can make, than to live every moment of my life to the fullest.

Having awareness of what we could and want to do with our lives and moving to action to accomplish this are different things, however. Faced with obstacles and change, we try to justify our inertia by reciting a common list of constraints: economic, geographic, biological, educational and so on. It is difficult to accept that barren insurmountable circumstances we have the power to choose, that we can decide how to live every moment of our lives.
There are fascinating and inspirational examples of people who under the most rigorous deprivations, including being imprisoned in concentration camps, decided to live free, and at peace. And who among us is not aware of the Special Olympics? How do these people display such courage and determination? Let’s listen to these Buddha’s words:

*Mind is the forerunner of all actions.  
All deeds are led by mind, created by mind.*

*If one speaks or acts with a corrupt mind, suffering follows, as the wheel follows the hoof of an ox pulling a cart.*

*Mind is the forerunner of all actions.  
All deeds are led by mind, created by mind.*

*If one speaks or acts with a serene mind, happiness follows, as surely as one’s shadow.*

The secret of happiness then, consists on speaking and acting with a serene mind. But what is a serene mind and how can we attain it? A serene mind is the mind attuned to the reality of life. It is the mind that knows how to let go of expectations. It is the mind that can concentrate on the miracle of the here and now.

The first time I understood the meaning of such mind and the fullness that it brings to one’s life was when I heard this anecdote from the life of Domingo Savio. Savio was a school boy in Italy, educated with the Salesians fathers and who at the time of his death at the tender age of fourteen, was considered a
saint. One time when he was playing in the yard one of the fathers asked him: *Domingo, what would you do if I knew that you were going to die in five minutes?* His immediate reply was: *I’ll continue playing.* That to me was, and still is, an impressive example of living in the moment, of having attained serenity of mind.

Thich Nhat Hanh the contemporary Vietnamese monk, poet, Zen master and Nobel prize nominee, has become a most beloved and popular teacher here in the West. He says: *Mindfulness frees us of forgetfulness and dispersion and makes it possible to live fully each minute of life. Mindfulness enables us to live.* I always loved to read his description of how he carries his daily activities. Take washing dishes for example: *Even washing dishes after a big meal can be a joy. ... Once you are standing in front of the sink with your sleeves rolled up and your hands in warm water, it really isn’t so bad. I enjoy taking my time with each dish, being fully aware of the dish, the water, and each movement of my hands. I know that if I am in a hurry in order to go and have a cup of tea, the time will be unpleasant, and not worth living. That would be a pity, for each minute, each second of life is a miracle. The dishes themselves and the fact that I am here washing them are miracles! And this is how he describes a big aha he had while doing dishes. One day, while washing a bowl, I felt that my movements were as sacred and respectful as bathing a newborn Buddha.* Like many others before him, after such moments of awareness, he concluded that *Each thought, each action in the sunlight of awareness becomes sacred. In this light, no boundary exists between the sacred and the profane. I must confess, he adds, it takes me longer to do the dishes, but I live fully in every moment, and I am happy.*
Albert Schweitzer another great champion of awareness and compassion for all living beings described the sense of awe and connection he felt when he was watching a group of hippopotamus peacefully and joyfully bathing in a river. Although through his life he had deep respect for creation, at that moment he felt that in fact, all life was deserving of reverence. I believe it was then that Schweitzer coined the term that we Unitarian Universalists like so much *Reverence for life.*

These testimonials point out to the awesome rewards of peace, happiness, reverence, wisdom, and connection resulting from mindfully living every moment. And, who could desire more? But wait! You might not believe me, but there is more. Achaan Chah says: *Learn to pay attention and there is nothing you will not understand.* Can you imagine? *Learn to pay attention and there is nothing you will not understand.*

There we have it! The secret of wisdom! Paying attention, being mindful, living in the moment. Unbelievable. Isn’t it? So many benefits! Can we think of one more? How about living mindfully each moment makes us truly human. As we become increasingly sensitive to our own needs, we become more sensitive to the needs of others. By acting mindfully under circumstances that affect us, we start acting mindfully under circumstances that affect others. That is why living mindfully is the best antidote to despair and to the feelings of helplessness
when we are confronted with the immensity of the needs and the pain of the world.

As I grow older and my awareness of the preciousness of each moment intensifies, I have been able to diminish my preoccupation with a lot of stuff that used to consume my mind and that brought me so much unhappiness and waste of time. I recall one of the first times that I had the pleasure of experiencing serene mind, in the form of non-judging mind. I was riding in an almost full elevator in New York when this man came in exuding a very strong smell of onions and garlic. My first reaction was: *This man has eaten garlic and onions.* Then I felt such peacefulness and even a sense of true connection. This experience of non-judging was so different from other times when under similar circumstances I would think: Gosh this man really smells bad, or, this man really loves onions and garlic or, whatever else I would had thought of saying to express my disgust.

I have shared with you that when I am eating or cooking, I try to pay attention, to be mindful. Peeling a banana, an orange or any other fruit or vegetable, I try to think how I would feel if I was that particular fruit or vegetable, being divested of my peel and being made part of this person’s body. Sometimes I tell the fruit of vegetable that I am grateful for its presence in my life and for being essential in my nutrition. If Sam is around and he hears me muttering he would ask: *Are you talking to me?* No I respond *I’m talking to the fruit or to the vegetable.* By now he knows I do this and understands, more or less…
Simple acts of mindfulness, lead to empathy and gratitude and can turn our actions sacramental in nature. They are also wonderful opportunities to show reverence and to become one with whatever is at hand. I have let myself dream about what could happen in our congregations if we were to seriously consider living in the moment. For starters, we could live our principles more fully. Around the world millions of Hindus and Buddhists salute each other with their hands in attitude of prayer and bowing their heads while saying: “Namaste” or “Jai Bhagavan.” These loosely translated mean: “I salute, or honor the Light, or the Divine within you.” Would not it be easier to affirm and promote our first principle the inherent worth and dignity of every person if we were to salute those we meet in the manner just described?

Or what if were to adapt the Christian greeting: The kingdom of justice be with you and the reply and also with you? Of course these practices would not need to be overt. We could easily do our greetings mentally, being mindful of the fact that indeed in each of us resides the sparkle of divinity, and the potential for the true kingdom of love and justice. By greeting mindfully, we would be also practicing our third principle since we would be affirming and promoting the acceptance of one another and the encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.

By mentally saying the Native American prayer: Great Spirit grant that I may not criticize my neighbor until I have walked a mile in his moccasins, every time we were about to judge, criticize or compare others in a degrading manner, we would be practicing our second principle Justice, equity and compassion in human relations.
And let’s imagine how living in each moment could help us practice our fourth principle *A responsible search for truth and meaning.* Imagine the truths we could learn and the meaning we could give to our lives if we were to pay attention. Remember Achaan Chah saying: *Learn to pay attention and there is nothing you will not understand.*

Now, If we agree with, Kabir that great Fifteen Century mystic, weaver, musician, husband and father, when he said: *God is the breath inside the breath,* then, by breathing mindfully we could remember that on the inhale we are breathing life itself, the Spirit of Life, Ruah as the Jewish tradition calls the spirit. On the exhale we could lovingly and gratefully surrender our breath to the universe. What could be a better and easier way to affirm and promote our seventh principle *respect for the interconnected web of all existence of which we are a part?*

Life in the path of awareness, living in the moment is not easy, however. Every day we are bombarded by multitudes of distractions both internal and external competing for our attention. It takes strong motivation and a great amount of discipline to combat and overcome those distractions. However there are so many benefits and unbelievable rewards awaiting that it truly is worth making the effort. By living in the present one is able to rise to opportunities calling for action. There is great power and satisfaction in being present to the moment, in being the masters of our lives. Practicing mindfulness we learn to be contented with imperfect solutions as long as we continue growing a good heart and allowing ourselves to keep a
compassionate attitude towards our own shortcomings and the shortcomings of the others.

The Holy does not ask that we journey towards perfection, only that we journey towards wholeness. That we row, row, row the boat of our life into this moment, and to the next, gently down the stream. And merrily, also, since appreciating the immense gift that life is leads to joy and gratitude.

Amen and blessed be.