

## First Unitarian Society of Ithaca - April 23rd, 2023

### Opening Words:

Thank you so much for being here today. Let's take a moment to breathe and really arrive here, taking in the beauty of this space and the people who have gathered in person and virtually.

The theme of the month here at the Unitarian Society is: Resistance.  
Today's service is about "breaking through inner resistance."

The ultimate invitation to say yes to the things that bring greater joy and connection as we grow together in community.

Let's begin by listening to the words of the 13th century Sufi poet Rumi:

In the silence of spring, Avian music charms us.  
Do you not know what awaits you at the end of the journey?  
You do know! Yes, you do know.  
So enjoy natural delights. Feel the spring wind.  
Listen to the birdsong as it creates a picture in sound.  
Watch the birds float on the wind.

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### **"Breaking Through Resistance"** a sermon by Elisa S. Keeler

Thank you for your presence and generosity here today. I'm feeling very grateful to be with you and to be coming to this building more often to offer singing classes and private counseling sessions. This is truly a place for healing, connection and joy.

As mentioned, the theme of the month, here at the First Unitarian Society, is Resistance. Today I'm choosing to speak about Inner Resistance and the way in which we resist things that might be good for our growth or development.

I'm going to invite you, right here, right now, to contemplate the things that you might be resisting. Is there something that you know would be good for you, but you may be putting it off?

- A household task?
- Saying yes to a new experience?
- A lifestyle change?
- An opportunity for connection, growth or joy?

Whatever it is, let yourself see it, let yourself feel it and know that you are not alone...

**Resistance** is a common theme for those who engage in the work of healing and transformation. And this may include...all of us. Transformation or change, involves letting go of what we know and facing the unknown, which can evoke...fear.

Here's what the 13th century Sufi poet, Rumi has to say about this....

“Try not to resist the changes that come your way.  
Instead let life live through you.  
And do not worry that your life is turning upside down.  
How do you know that the side *you are used to*  
is better than the one to come?” - Rumi

Many of the people that I work with in the Hidden Treasure Program are seeking some kind of change or deepening. Perhaps they feel it's time for a career shift, retirement, a new relationship, a new spiritual practice, a creative outlet or a new way of being in the world that brings about more connection and joy. (Many of us long for this!)

We often find that the barriers to leading a more fulfilling life reside within. In many cases, these barriers are linked to “inner resistance”. Or resistance to change.

So, my sermon today is about “**Breaking Through Resistance.**”  
During this talk, I'll highlight 4 different ways that we can work with resistance within ourselves.

First, I'd like to acknowledge that: **Resistance serves a purpose.** When we're able to be conscious of it, it invites us into a discernment process.

When resistance surfaces, we could ask ourselves... why am I resisting?  
Is this a sign of an incorrect next step? Or is it connected to a fear of change?

### **Tip #1: Notice and Question Resistance.**

How can we tell when resistance is arising? It's often unconscious, it lurks in the shadows... but it evokes a certain kind of tension, or stuckness or indecisiveness. This is often easier to see in others than it is to see in ourselves.

### **Breaks & Gas Petal Analogy**

From an outside perspective it looks like one big foot on the breaks. Someone saying “no, no, no...” or making excuses or just not moving forward. And sometimes, one foot is on the gas pedal, saying yes to growth and change and the other foot is on the breaks ...resisting.

Now that's where you get the real friction of resistance. A desire to grow, change, evolve, move forward and a simultaneous desire to stay in the safe, the mundane and the known.

I've seen this in myself and many people who have come through the Hidden Treasure Program. This friction of wanting to grow, yet keeping our foot on the breaks.

It often arises when we are assessing our next step in life.

We might think to ourselves, “wouldn’t that be great if I actually had the courage to pursue”... (you...fill in the blank) And then notice how you resist or shut yourself down.

The invitation of this moment is to let yourself dream. And ask yourself, even deeper than resistance, what is it that you most long for... (Pause & Take a moment)

### **Review Tip #1: Notice and Question Resistance**

When resistance arises, we can ask ourselves....

- Is this a sign or indication that I should pause and not move forward?
- Is it trying to alert me of an incorrect next step or incorrect aspiration?
- Or is my reluctance.. fear based and preventing me from stepping into who I’m meant to be?
- Could it be blocking me from experiencing that which I most long for?

How do we find these answers? How can we tell if resistance is serving us or hindering us?

This leads to **Tip #2: A body-centered approach - Consult the Head, the Heart & the Gut**

**Take another moment to consider the thing or things that you resist.**

- What does your mind say about this thing you are resisting?
- What does your heart say...?
- What does your gut say...?

**Personal Story #1:** When I was first asked by Stephanie to give this sermon... well, I noticed...resistance. I have my own deep seated fear of public speaking, and I wasn’t sure if I should say yes to this opportunity or not. So I decided to consult my head, my heart and my gut.

I asked those 3 parts of myself to offer some feedback on the matter. They each charged a modest hourly fee...but I think we got somewhere.

The internal conversation went something like this...

Should I take this opportunity to speak in front of this lovely congregation? Or not?

The head said: “It’s too much pressure. What if you mess up? I’ll never succeed.”

The heart said: “This could be good for your growth Elisa”

When I dropped deeper and asked my gut, I literally felt a kick in the pants and an internal voice sternly said, “Get out there and do it!”

So I chose to listen to that.

**So Tip #2: Is to Consult The Head, Heart and Gut.** Repeat after me... (head, heart and gut).

You could apply this same process for assessing any next step in life, large or small.

- Should I take that job offer?
- Should I make that big move?
- Should I enter or exit this relationship?
- Should I take that new class, pick up that paint brush again, plant that garden again?

**Consult the head, the heart and the gut.**

**You may find there's great insight and wisdom there.**

**I'll now move into topic #3:**

Another place that resistance can show up is around commitment. Commitment to others, to self, to a spiritual practice, exercise, diet or any form of self care.

"I'm gonna go to yoga, tai chi, the gym, out for walks...I'm gonna call my friends, read that book, learn a new language..." Do we do it... sometimes? Maybe? never?

So what is it that keeps us from taking steps forward?

To save time, let's just call it "The Big R"... resistance.

**Personal Story #2:** 20 years ago, I met with my spiritual mentor, Alice McDowell for the first time. Alice is the founder of Light on the Hill Retreat Center and also of the Hidden Treasure Program that I now teach. When we first met, it was for private spiritual counseling sessions and after a few visits she suggested a specific meditation practice. She suggested that I do a daily meditation that involved being present with my inner child for five minutes a day. I was to ask that younger part of myself what she needed and to simply spend time with her.

The exchange went something like this: "This would be good for your growth, Elisa..."

Now, can YOU all play the part of my mentor, Alice?

**Your line is:** "This would be good for your growth Elisa..." (repeat)

**Elisa:** (dramatically nods yes) but did I go home and do it?  
No...why? Because of resistance.

A year passed and my life seemed to become increasingly miserable. Finally I got to the point where I thought to myself, I'll try anything. I happened to attend a weekend retreat entitled: The Inner Child, as part of the Hidden Treasure Program. After this, I decided to give the meditation a try...5 minutes a day... in time this turned into a daily meditation and creativity and playfulness were restored into my life. Songs flowed, bands formed, performances happened.

Now...do I recommend waiting till your life reaches an all time low before making a change? No, I do not. Which brings me to **Tip #3.**

**TIP #3: Dialogue With Resistance**

**The Question I'd Pose Is:** Who is the me that's resisting?

I might take myself through this dialogue process, either through journaling or inward contemplation ...that conversation might go something like this...

**\*Who is the one that resists?**

The one who doubts my own ability...

**\*Who is the one that resists?**

The one who lives in fear...

**\*Who is the one that resists?**

The one that clings to the known...

**\*Who is the one that resists?**

The one who is trying to protect me by keeping me...small.

Ok, boom. We're getting somewhere. I think I'm sensing a theme here...and that theme is around fear.

This leads to **TIP #4 - Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway.**

This is actually a title of a book by author Susan Jeffers. Her theory is that the biggest fear is that we won't be able to handle something. I can't handle that change, or the discomfort of the unknown or the grief involved in letting go...

Again, I return to the concept of dialoguing with parts of yourself...

- who is the one who is fearful?
- how old is that part of you?

Spend time with that part of you, but then...

Feel the fear and do it anyway - The first invitation is to "feel it", get to know it.

Feel the fear and do it anyway - Notice it, question it, dialogue with it.

Feel the fear and do it anyway - Consult the head, the heart and the gut.

Feel the fear and do it anyway - Listen to the guiding voice (or that gut level kick in the pants!)

Feel the fear and do it anyway - Know that you are not alone.

Feel the fear and do it anyway - Know that community enhances courage.

Know that you can face anything within the support of a community container.

This kind of support can be offered by this congregation, that is what happens in the Hidden Treasure Circle. Or among family and friends. We get support for this process of facing our fears and examining our resistance to growth.

In community, we come out of our seemingly safe rooms of resistance and step into the sacred sanctuary of the unknown... which is also the path of expansive possibility.