

Sunday 12th October 2014 '**Decisions Decisions**'  
A service led by Lyanne Mitchell

Life is about decisions. You either make them or they're made for you, but you can't avoid them. When faced with two equally tough choices, most people choose the third choice: to not choose. Not to decide is to decide. Not to decide - is a decision!

Mark Twain wrote - *"I must have a prodigious amount of mind; sometimes, it takes me as much as a week, to make it up!"*

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We are defined by the decisions we make. What part do intellect and emotion play in our individual decision making? And how best can we make group and congregational decisions?

Every day we make thousands of decisions, big and small, and behind all them is a powerful battle in our mind, pitting intuition against logic.

Toby Macdonald, Producer of the Horizon programme called - 'How You Really Make Decisions' writes the following :-

*'With every decision you take, every judgement you make, there is a battle in your mind - a battle between intuition and logic. And the intuitive part of your mind is a lot more powerful than you may think.'*

Prof Daniel Kahneman of Princeton University and Nobel Prize winner believes :-

*'We like to think that our beliefs, judgements and opinions are based on solid reasoning. But we may have to think again.'*

His insight into the way our minds work springs from the mistakes that we make. Not random mistakes, but systematic errors that we all make, all the time, without realising. He teaches that we actually have two systems of thinking. There's the deliberate, logical part of our mind that is capable of analysing a problem and coming up with a rational answer.

This is the part of our mind that we are aware of. It's expert at solving problems, but it is slow, requires a great deal of energy, and is extremely lazy. Even the act of walking is enough to occupy most of your attentive mind.

But then there is another system in your mind that is intuitive, fast and automatic. This fast way of thinking is incredibly powerful, but totally hidden. It is so powerful, it is actually responsible for most of the things that we say, do, think and believe.

And yet, we have no idea this is happening. This system is our hidden autopilot, and it has a mind of its own. It is sometimes known as '*the stranger within.*'

Most of the time, our fast, intuitive mind is in control, efficiently taking charge of all the thousands of decisions we make each day. The problem comes when we allow our fast, intuitive system to make decisions that we really should pass over to our slow, logical system. This is where the mistakes creep in.

Our thinking is riddled with systematic mistakes known to psychologists as cognitive biases. And they affect everything we do. They make us spend impulsively, be overly influenced by what other people think. They affect our beliefs, our opinions, and our decisions, and we have no idea it is happening.

He concludes - *"It may seem hard to believe, but that's because your logical, slow mind is a master at inventing a cover story. Most of the beliefs or opinions you have come from an automatic response. But then your logical mind invents a reason why you think or believe something."*

None of us has the wisdom of Solomon. (see reading, page 6)  
He made his decision between the two women claiming to be the real mother, based on his wise understanding of human nature and trusting to his instincts. Knowing and trusting that the real mother's love would prevail - and that love for the child was far greater than her own needs.

We are all limited, we are not perfect, we are irrational in all kinds of ways. We have all made decisions that perhaps in hindsight, we regret. But we must remember that if we were in the same circumstances again, we would probably make the very same decision.

The Scots, as a nation, recently made the historic decision to say 'No thanks' to Independence and to remain within the United Kingdom. Whether we

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agreed with that decision or not, we can all agree at least, that it was a legal, democratic, majority decision, and the voting process was properly and

legally organised. Personally, I celebrate this precious freedom - (even although I confess I was disappointed with the outcome!)

Even more recently, the Government, on our behalf, has taken the decision to become involved along with other nations, to send bombing raids to Iraq. Two momentous national decisions taken just within the last few weeks - which will have long term consequences for all of us .

These make our own decisions seem very trivial by comparison. Whether to move house? A career decision? A decision about a relationship? and yet, these personal decisions can alter the whole shape and direction of our lives.

I don't really believe in the concept of FATE. I'd hate to believe that our lives are mapped out for us and that there is little or nothing we can do to change the plan.

Do you remember the craze a number of years ago for a range of books for teenagers which had multiple endings? The reader read so far, then was offered a choice of what the characters in the story should choose to do...depending on that choice, the reader was directed to various chapters to continue the story based on that choice. In this way, the book had a series of endings, depending on the readers' decisions. I think this is quite a good analogy for how I see life. We make our own choices and decisions within the framework of our own life-stories.

Some big decisions stand out in our lives, don't they? Let's pause here for a few moments - and each of us think about the significant decisions we have made within our own life-story and what the consequences were .....

(silence)

I can remember clearly as a young woman, walking in Queens Park, trying to finally come to terms with my beliefs about Jesus. I can remember the feeling of taking a big step out into SPACE - into the unknown, when I realised that I did not believe he was divine - but that he was a great prophet and teacher. I realised that day that I was 'editing out' a great deal of the Church of Scotland teaching of my childhood....and I decided that it was time to move on... to move out.... to find another path - and it did feel quite scary. That was one of the beginnings - one of the decisions which led me to this church. It took a certain amount of courage and personal honesty....and I am

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so grateful - because finding a liberal faith I could sincerely embrace, despite all my doubts and questions, has made a huge difference in my life.

Most of us here, at some time in our lives, have taken a similar decision.... perhaps like me, because of a need to break away from childhood teachings, or a need to search for a liberal fellowship where we can be free to explore our own beliefs. As Unitarians, when we are faced with difficult, challenging or vexing decisions, I am sure we all have developed our own ways to face up to deciding. I am talking here about soul-searching decisions, or potentially life-changing decisions. Decisions that require something deeper than a list of pros and cons....or 'eeny meeny miny mo techniques!

In Business Management, there is quite a long list of 'decision tools'..... ie management techniques for making decisions. These include :-

Rating the importance and urgency of the decision  
Generating Options  
Identifying between Best Solution and Make-Do solution  
Mathematical models - decision tree / cost analysis  
Risk assessment - minimum and maximum  
Heuristics (Rule of Thumb)  
SWOT - Strengths / Weaknesses / Opportunities / Threats  
PEST - Political / Economic / Social / Technological  
.....to name just a few!

Where does God fit into all this? Do we believe in Higher Guidance? Do we pray for guidance ? Do we meditate and stay open for guidance?

[James McGreevey](#) was an American [Democratic](#) politician and is now a [Episcopal priest](#). He writes -

*'Never cut a tree down in the wintertime. Never make your most important decisions when your spirits are low - when you are in your worst moods. Wait. Be patient. The storm will pass. The spring will come.'*

I feel sure that most of us here have developed our own ways to pray or to connect with Spirit or whatever we call God. Whatever approach we take to this - whatever methods and techniques we use - I wonder if it would be possible for us to find a way to organise meetings to share and learn from one another, either here or in smaller house groups? In teaching, we used to share what we called 'best practice' . As Glasgow Unitarians, couldn't we share 'Best spiritual practice' ?

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As many of you know, I practise Reiki healing (Rei-ki simply being the Japanese words for Universal Energy) My own way of asking for guidance is to meditate using the 7 major chakras (or energy centres) I consciously open myself to Higher Energy, as I call it, and wait. It's my way of praying. I would be happy to share this method with any among us who might find it useful or helpful in their lives.

Rev Peter Roberts wrote some time ago for the Unitarian Earth Spirit Network :-

*' Our spiritual journey is not meant to be merely an occasional pleasant experience or a meeting with a few like-minded friends. We have been given this life to learn, to create and to participate in a unique Divine-Human relationship. That transforming relationship will have its demanding aspects and should put pressure on us to fulfill our higher potential; to change and to be changed. We need to continually examine ourselves and our chosen beliefs, to see if we are indeed still on the path, or whether we have, almost unknowingly, settled in some pleasant spot along the way.'*

Returning to Prof Daniel Kahneman, Princeton University and Nobel Prize winner....as I quoted him earlier he said -

*' Most of the time, our fast, intuitive mind is in control, efficiently taking charge of all the thousands of decisions we make each day. The problem comes when we allow our fast, intuitive system to make decisions that we really should pass over to our slow, logical system. This is where the mistakes creep in.*

The Horizon programme explored the battle between intuition and logic declaring that the *intuitive part of our minds is a lot more powerful than we may think. It is intuitive, fast and automatic - incredibly powerful, but totally hidden. It is so powerful, it is actually responsible for most of the things that we say, do, think and believe.*

***This system is our hidden auto-pilot, and it has a mind of its own. It is sometimes known as 'the stranger within.'***

OK - I'd like to leave you with this thought.....

I believe that spiritual energy is intuitive and powerful. If our 'fast intuitive mind' is connected to God or Highest Energy on a regular basis, through our own chosen type of spiritual practice, alone and together, I believe this can strengthen and support us tremendously. Through our spiritual practice and

awareness, we can become more deeply connected to our 'auto-pilot' - to 'the stranger within'.

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No one here has the wisdom of Solomon....but I believe we are NOT the prisoners of Fate. We have free will. Yes – it's all up to us. Except when it's not. A fact of our realities is that the fate of each of us belongs not only to you or me, but ALL of us. All of us.

We have a duty to use our precious FREE WILL to make our decisions, no matter how difficult, based on (as far as we possibly can):- our reason, understanding, awareness of how our decisions impact on others, and most of all - trust in the power of love.

Thank you for listening.

The READING used in this service was the Old Testament story :-

*Two young women who lived in the same house and who both had an infant son came to Solomon for a judgment. One of the women claimed that the other, after accidentally smothering her own son while sleeping, had exchanged the two children to make it appear that the living child was hers. The other woman denied this and so both women claimed to be the mother of the living son and said that the dead boy belonged to the other.*

*After some deliberation, King Solomon called for a sword to be brought before him. He declared that there was only one fair solution: the live son must be split in two, each woman receiving half of the child. Upon hearing this terrible verdict, the boy's true mother cried out, "Oh Lord, give the baby to her, just don't kill him!" The liar, in her bitter jealousy, exclaimed, "It shall be neither mine nor yours—divide it!"*

*The king declared the first mother as the true mother, as a true, loving mother would rather surrender her baby to another than hurt him, and gave her the baby. King Solomon's judgment became known throughout all of Israel and was considered an example of profound wisdom.*

