

Summaries of Recent Bay School Morning Meetings
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Friday, December 7, 2007
Malcolm Manson, Head of School

This morning, Malcolm spoke about the cultural and religious significance of Hanukkah. Hanukkah is a Jewish celebration of light that rejoices in the miracle of possibility. Many centuries ago, a small band of Jews, now collectively referred to as the Maccabees, went to war against their Seleucid oppressors. Upon defeating these oppressors, the Jews found that the temples for which they'd fought were completely desecrated. They began the re-building process, but only had enough holy oil to light the temple lantern for a single day. Despite the lack of oil, the lantern burned for eight full days, at which point the Jews had successfully consecrated enough additional oil to keep the lantern alight. The Jews' unlikely defeat of the Seleucids, and the subsequent miracle of uninterrupted light, is symbolic of the enormous power generated by any committed, principled minority. The Jews were fighting to regain their freedom and so overcame what seemed to be insurmountable obstacles and, eventually, achieved victory. Hanukkah commemorates their determination and celebrates the courage with which they confronted their reality and chose to change their fates.

Malcolm explained that New Year's and Deepawali, or Diwali, a Hindu "festival of light," also celebrate the same potential of human agency. New Year's is about new beginnings—facing that which one doesn't like about oneself and making a commitment to change. Similarly, Diwali celebrates the possibility that exists within each person for good to triumph over evil. Both New Year's and Diwali focus on "taking out the trash" within oneself, just as the Jews took out the metaphorical and actual trash from their temple. As each of you enjoys this holiday season, think about ways in which you might make changes in your life so that who you are now reflects the person you imagine and hope yourself to be.

Wednesday, November 28, 2007
Daniel Baker, Class of 2009

This morning, Daniel Baker talked about why we meditate at Bay. He explained that meditation, when successful, is simply an acceptance of the fundamental impermanence in life: the inevitable instability of relationships, fluidity of knowledge, volatility of emotion, pliancy of judgment, and capricious unpredictability of even the tiniest of thoughts. Nothing in life is truly static or permanent, despite peoples' collective desire to make things so. Meditation is a means by which one can manage one's fear of uncertainty and find peace in the inescapable impermanence of one's surroundings. Daniel took a few moments to consider people's perceptions of diamonds to better illustrate this point. A diamond, as consumers have carefully been trained to believe, "is forever." And, yet, despite its symbolism as the epitome of solidity and

permanence, a diamond has countless imperceptible holes and imperfections and does, in fact, change—albeit very slowly—over time. The comfort one finds in diamonds as tangible expressions of eternity is, therefore, tenuous at best, and indicative of an unnatural and, indeed, unattainable, need for complete stability and certainty in life.

Meditation helps one to let go of this need and begin to really appreciate—and even find joy in—unpredictability. This process is incredibly liberating, and allows one to more easily let negative thoughts or emotions simply pass through them, rather than bottle-up inside. Perhaps even more importantly, internalizing the unpredictability of life encourages each of us to remain open to, and even seek out, new thoughts and experiences, armed with the knowledge that there is no such thing as a single, fixed reality.

Tuesday, November 27, 2007
Teah Strozer, Bay School Chaplain

Teah showed a brief, yet poignant, video this morning entitled, "A Good Day." The video was a simple narration—set to a five-minute photo slideshow—that addressed the importance of gratitude in one's day-to-day life. Every day is a gift, not an entitlement, and should be lived as if it is both one's very first and very last. This line is, of course, one that each of us has heard before and, through countless repetition, seems to have lost its resonance. However, while the saying itself may have become trite and dreadfully overused, the importance of the message endures. When one experiences something for the first time, one often pays closer attention to the details and appreciates these details with a sense of wonder and unfeigned excitement. Think, for instance, of a wide-eyed infant staring unblinkingly, amazedly at a new face; or imagine an enthusiastic, camera-happy tourist standing delightedly atop a well-known monument in a new city for the first time. Similarly, when one expects to see, hear, feel, or do something for the last time, one takes special care to register each sensation and nuance with deliberate thoroughness. Think this time of a student on graduation day looking out among her peers, etching faces, classrooms and well-trodden hallways into an untouchable corner of her memory. Or think of an old man or woman sitting quietly, contentedly on a bench they know they're sharing with a loved one for the last time. In these moments—the moments in which one experiences things for either the first or last time—one is genuinely, often unabashedly, grateful and infinitely more attune to the beauty and significance of his or her surroundings.

This gratefulness, however, should not be reserved for only rare occasions, but should be extended to every moment of everyday. Indeed, even in the most mundane or quotidian one can find something new or noteworthy. By making the effort to approach everyday with awareness and gratefulness—taking the time to actually look at the cloud formations in the sky or the way the sunlight filters through the trees, and notice when two strangers exchange smiles or help one another on the street—one will find it easier to live more fully in the moment

so that today, rather than just someday in the elusive future, will be truly a good day.

Thursday, November 15, 2007
Laura Coughlin, Class of 2008

This morning, we had the privilege to learn a little bit about Laura Coughlin's senior project. During the past summer Laura conducted cardiovascular research at UC San Francisco, in which she studied fast conduction in the heart and tried to answer the following question: what causes the delay between contractions of the heart? Laura spent more than 700 hours in the lab trying to tackle this question and, as a result of her outstanding work, was listed as a co-author of a recently published scientific paper—an almost unheard of achievement for a high school student. Laura's experience taught her quite a bit about the heart and, of equal importance, also reminded her of two very basic, but important lessons: first, that what she's learned in school really is applicable to the "real" world. Often, students face the temptation to view much of their studies as irrelevant to their future practical and professional pursuits; and yet, as Laura very powerfully explained, she would not have been prepared to do the research she did had she not built solid foundations in biology, chemistry, physics, math, and even English, during her last three-and-a-half years at Bay. Laura's project also reminded her that she is, indeed, more than capable of answering "big questions" herself. While she without doubt, still has much to learn, there is nothing to prevent her from becoming a serious scholar, researcher, innovator and expert NOW, in addition to later in life. Each of you shares this potential, and is capable of creating, rather than simply absorbing knowledge. So, take risks, think big, and cast off whatever fears may be preventing you from exercising your promise.