

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

Looking Out to See Within

BY STEVE

Recently I read a story in the *New York Times* about Friedrich Schelling, an eighteenth-century German philosopher. Schelling created and promoted a philosophy of nature that upended the mechanical models developed by thinkers such as Isaac Newton and Rene Descartes. Rather than a click-clacking, gear-and-socket contraption, Schelling imagines nature—rivers, sunlight, birds calling in the treetops, squirrels scampering across the Dell, human beings walking in the shade cast by leafy branches overhead—to comprise one integral organism. Not exactly a sum of parts, but one indivisible living being. “Nature is visible spirit [or *Geist*],” he writes, “spirit is invisible nature.” A vast and mighty *Geist*, or Consciousness, in which all of us—you, me, that squirrel over there sitting on its haunches clutching a nut in its paws, the Blackwater Creek snaking away from College Lake—are networked together in loops of consciousness.

Recognizing this Consciousness is simply a matter of paying attention. What I am describing as a process of networking, Schelling conceived as a “secret bond connecting our mind with nature.” This connection is first and foremost experiential: “At the first moment, when I am conscious of the external world, the consciousness of my self is there as well, and vice versa—at my first moment of self-awareness, the real world rises up before me.”

Studies (Link in email) show that returning to nature promotes a heightened state of sensory awareness and tranquility. Within minutes of entering green space, the body relaxes, blood pressure stabilizes, and stress hormones decrease along with muscle tension. There are practices you can engage in to experience this connection for yourself. One is “forest bathing,” which began in Japan in the 1980s. It is based on the Japanese practice *shinrin-yoku*, which translates as “taking in the

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For more information about the Spiritual Life Center, including info on student spiritual life student groups, go to our webpage - link in the email signature. You can also visit our Linkt.ree (link is in email).

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medicine or atmosphere of the forest.” Forest bathing is an immersive experience that promotes mindfulness and stress reduction. When you practice forest bathing, you create a leisurely, meditative experience. You stroll through nature while engaging all of your senses in order to notice the different ways in which you’re connected to nature, Geist, Consciousness—whatever name you wish to use.

Another practice evokes the flow of creativity. Take some art supplies—crayons, colored pencils, charcoals, and a few sheets of drawing paper—and find a quiet place in the woods or near a body of water. Spend a few minutes becoming still in your body and silent in your mind. Set an intention to be creative and let go of negative thoughts about not being artistic. Then draw what you see. Don’t worry about whether your drawing resembles the original or looks realistic. It’s more about fostering a connection to nature by eliding the distinctions between “inward” and “outward,” “subject” and “object.”

If you try one of these embodied cognitive practices, let me know what you discover—I’m always curious to hear how others encounter themselves in the present moment, looking out to see what lies within.

Coming soon:



CLIFTON L. SNIDOW LECTURE

Queering the Spiritual Life

Lecture by: **Brian Murphy** and **Shay Kearns** of Queer Theology

Father Shay Kearns

Brian Murphy

The poster features a yellow background with a rainbow-colored arrow pointing right. It includes circular portraits of Father Shay Kearns and Brian Murphy. The text is in various colors and fonts, with the title 'Queering the Spiritual Life' in large purple and orange letters.

Dates to Remember

Sundays at 4:30 p.m.
Weekly ROMAN CATHOLIC MASS
in Snidow Chapel

Friday, September 16
PEACE GATHERING
3 p.m. at Friendship Circle

Hispanic Heritage Month

September 15 through
October 15

The Chaplain's Corner is a newsletter published by the Spiritual Life Center (SLC) at the University of Lynchburg. We share campus concerns and updates, spiritual life events and activities, and words for the journey. If you have a joy or concern you'd like to share, reply to this message, email the SLC office - spirituallife@lynchburg.edu, or call 434.544.8348. We only share with your permission. Current and previous issues are on the SLC page of the University website - go to Link in signature (www.lynchburg.edu/spiritual-life) and click on "Newsletter."