

Do you remember when you were seven years old? For most of us the answer is probably yes. But what we remember about being seven is going to be highly individualistic. If you were seven when a parent died, your memory of that time in your life may be associated with loss, sadness, abandonment, maybe even anger.

On the other hand, if you had great fun at summer camp at that time in your life, your memories are going to be of a totally different nature. Thinking about that time in your life may bring warm or happy feelings. It may also prompt you to think of a prank you played on someone or of someone you had totally forgotten about.

Moreover, your experience and memories of being seven can influence how you think about children in general or how you treat your own children. It might even influence more generalized behaviors. I don't know if I was seven or not, but as a child I was bitten by a dog as I road my bike on Lenox Rd. in Schenectady. To this day, I'm leery around dogs, especially those I don't know well. That's true even though I've owned dogs and have lived with dogs for many years.

I'm convinced that, in general, we fail to give proper due to the impact of our long term memory associations, and our childhood experiences, in how we live our lives, decades later. How we were taught to behave at the dinner table may well, impact how we "do" meals as adults. And my guess is that our overarching tendency in how we "do" meals is either in close proximity to your meals as a child or largely divergent. We tend to either follow the path we were placed on as children or go in the opposite direction.

To move away from knee-jerk reactions in opposition to how we've been trained takes conscious effort and can be hard work. So too, diverging from what we know and the way things are supposed to be. Many a marriage has gone down the drain because in large measure we've been unable to make a conscious choice to live a life different from our how memory tells us life, or a marriage, should be.

It's more than an old wives' tale I believe, that men tend to marry their mothers and women their fathers. The corollary I suspect is that we tend to marry the opposite of our father or mother. In any event, I think there is wisdom in the admonition that some elders give to those early in love. Meet the parents and take note, that is what you may be living with many years hence (or sooner!).

In many respects, I believe we can become slaves to our experiences and subsequent memories, even those that do not serve us well. We can become blind to other options. While Moshe Feldenkrais and his devotees may take umbrage at this notion, I think the Feldenkrais method supports this view of reality. The Feldenkrais method is designed to help people become more aware of their habitual patterns of movement in order to help them learn to expand their options in movement.

We all have our own particular way of walking or throwing a ball or sitting. This method helps people focus on their learned—and remembered, way of moving, and through gentle movement, introduces them to ways to improve their movement and functioning.

Their website says they do this “By expanding the self-image through movement sequences that bring attention to the parts of the self that are out of awareness, the Method enables you to include more of yourself in your functioning movements. Students become more aware of their habitual neuromuscular patterns and rigidities and expand options for new ways of moving. By increasing sensitivity the *Feldenkrais Method* assists you to live your life more fully, efficiently and comfortably.”

I’ve been talking about the “implicit” form of long-term memory. The implicit form of long-term memory is distinct from the “explicit” form of long-term memory. The implicit form of memory doesn’t require conscious thought. The memories are embedded if you will, like riding a bike. Once you’ve learned, you don’t really have to think about it, even if you are a bit wobbly, you still remember how to do it.

I suspect you’ve experienced driving home from work, lost in thought, and at some point realize you’ve not been paying attention to your driving for the last several blocks or miles. Your implicit memory has been navigating that part of your trip. We can wash dishes and have a conversation, without a need to focus on the dishes.

Generally, when we think of memory, we often think about the explicit form of long-term memory. This is where we are conscious of what we are remembering. Like remembering being seven, or searching for the right word. These things require us to pay attention, to focus. This type of memory is also associative. Remembering being seven is associated with feelings, maybe colors or certain toys, or a particular house.

Often, that which is associated with memories may go unnoticed. If one was bitten by a dog as a child, one may not focus on the ramifications of that event on our relationship with dogs in our adult lives. It’s often the case that it’s not until we pay particular attention to an issue or preference or thought, that we notice the many associations we carry with that thought or memory.

And this is where I want to focus our attention this morning. I believe it’s important for us to take the time and make the effort to pay attention to the associations we carry with our thoughts and memories. For what we remember matters.

This is Memorial Day weekend, and in researching and thinking about this sermon, I was struck by the various storylines associated with this holiday. Each would seem to have very different meanings and ramifications.

The first “official” Memorial Day celebration was not called Memorial Day at all. It was called Decoration Day and was initiated by General John Logan, in his capacity as the commander in chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, the veteran’s organization of Union Civil War Veterans. On May 5, 1868, Logan proclaimed Decoration Day a day to remember and honor the Union’s war dead and asked that it be observed annually and nationally. The first observance was May 30 of that year. Imagine the implications if Decoration Day had remained as originally proclaimed.

But there is another story of the first Memorial Day celebration that preceded Logan’s announcement. Yale historian David Blight, says the holiday originates with freed slaves in Charleston SC., who gathered on May 5, 1865, to express gratitude to the more than 250 Union soldiers who died in an open air prison. 10,000 people gathered to lay flowers on the battle field, in remembrance of the Civil War and its very real meaning for them. The occasion was covered by the New York Tribune and other papers.

Imagine if our nation’s memory of the first Memorial Day celebration was associated with newly freed slaves following the civil war.

Decoration Day eventually became known as Memorial Day, first celebrated in 1882 and honored all who died in the Civil War. The day did not become commonly observed until after WWII, when it became associated with American exceptionalism, liberty and justice for all. The Viet Nam war and capitalism altered that memory and interpretation.

Memorial Day eventually became a three day holiday and our memories have been forever changed. The degree of nationalism associated with the holiday has waned dramatically. We now are much more prone to remember Memorial day as the beginning of summer, opening the camp, and hot dogs on the grill.

I’m convinced we’ve lost something important. We’ve lost an opportunity to remember Memorial Day as a day of remembrance. We’ve lost an opportunity to truly focus on the impact of war. Not the winners and losers of war, because everyone loses something important during war. We all lose a genuine sense of humanity.

I wish we would take the time during this Memorial Day weekend to remember all the death and carnage of war. To honor those, who bravely or not, lost their lives or limbs or minds as a direct result of war, here and the world around. I wish we would take the time to remember and honor the veterans whose lives have been forever changed by war. The veterans who this country refuses to help by paying their medical bills or addressing their mental health needs.

Memorial Day seems a perfect time to remember the power of destruction we, and no doubt other nations, are capable of. Imagine, if we remembered dropping atom bombs, rather than a war that cemented America's greatness. Imagine if we remembered the great cost of war, across so many dimensions.

If we truly remembered war, death and destruction, perhaps it would help us to use our immense wealth and power to help heal this broken world of ours. Imagine, if we truly remembered war, we just might, by association, remember that every life is worthy of respect and dignity. Imagine, if we truly remembered war, we might use our tremendous knowledge and ingenuity to teach peace, support health and feed the poor. Imagine. Just imagine.

This year, let us remember, because what we remember truly does matter.

Amen