I never took a philosophy course, but somewhere along the way, I heard about René Descarte’s famous statement, “I think therefore I Am.” I’m not sure what that means, exactly, but lately I have been thinking about those words. As I grow older, I connect Descarte’s statement to the joy I get in learning things.

To me, a very important part of life is the pleasure of lifelong learning. It stimulates me and connects me with life. I believe that finding out about things can actually improve our moods and positive outlook. The internet (and the resources available through it) has speeded and enhanced the process of learning and, therefore, my satisfaction in life.

A long-time Google fan, I recently became a devotee of Twitter and twittering. (See “Twittering for Elders,” May issue of Brookline Senior Calendar.) Initially attracted to Twitter by its amusing name, I signed up and now have a small number of fellow twitterers whose tweets I follow and who follow my tweets. (I do this via computer, not by writing text on my cell phone, which seems very arduous and unpleasant.) Twittering has actually become a very enjoyable part of my life. It’s very social – you get tweets only from those whom you choose to follow, and only those whom you permit can follow your tweets. I’ve made new twitter friends and colleagues, some near and some far. I also keep in frequent contact with my brother, who lives quite a distance away.

Twitter has become a very agreeable part of my life in a very short time; but the real surprise has been Twitter’s potential for facilitating learning. Many of my twitter friends use it to point to the URLs of articles on the web that may be of interest to their twitter friends. URL is short for Uniform Resource Locator, and it is the address of the article or webpage you are reading, that starts with “http://www.” (By the way, in case you’re interested, “http” stands for hypertext transfer protocol. I just found out through a Google search.)

Sometimes URLs are very long. Because a Twitter message is limited to 140 characters, free services such as TweetDeck or Hoot Suite make it possible to shorten the URLs to fit into our (short) Twitter messages that point our friends to material on the web.

Twitter is really about sharing. I, myself, enjoy finding interesting videos on internet news channels such as MSNBC, YouTube, or cable TV programs that are put onto the internet. I send them to my twitter friends by linking the URLs in my tweet. I feel good about it because I am sharing things that I have found enjoyable. Recently, I sent my friends the very humorous Barack Obama speech from the White House Correspondents’ Dinner and Wanda Sykes’ presentation at the same event.

I also like those tweets I get from my twitter friends that comment on life. Because a tweet is written, it can be composed very thoughtfully into a poetic or insightful message. Amazingly, for
its 140-character limitation, Twittering is truly an art form: one meant to be shared with friends, old and new.

--Laurie Israel   May 9, 2009

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Laurie Israel is a lawyer/mediator who helps clients resolve their disputes with a high level of dignity, integrity and creativity. Laurie works in the areas of collaborative divorce, divorce mediation, divorce negotiation, and prenuptial agreements. She also helps people who wish to stay married through providing marital mediation (“Mediation to Stay Married”) and negotiation of postnuptial agreements.

She is on the board of the Massachusetts Collaborative Law Council and the Massachusetts Council on Family Mediation. You can find out more about her work and read her articles on her websites: www.laurieisrael.com and www.mediationtostaymarried.com.

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