



Interdependence

Small Groups: November 2014

At the October 4th statewide gathering of the Unitarian Universalist Justice Arizona Network (UUJAZ) the Rev. Deborah Holder gave the keynote presentation on Building Beloved Community. She talked about paradigm shifts happening across the country. One shift she identified is the shift from language of rights to right relationship. One reason for this shift is that when justice work only focuses on rights, we can get stuck in false choices between my rights and your rights. Right Relationship invites us to reflect on qualities of justice, fairness and respect between peoples. It gets beyond focusing on the individual to paying attention to interdependence.

Interdependence refers to the mutual dependence between things. It is a reminder that we are not isolated beings, either socially or biologically, but are mutually dependent on one another, from the time we are born, to live, grow and thrive. We, as human beings, are also not an isolated species, but live in relationships of interdependence with creation and our planet.

As Unitarian Universalists, the importance of being mindful of our interdependence is deeply rooted in our theology, practice and principles. The last of our seventh principles calls us to live in such a way that we affirm and promote a respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. In actual practice of our liberal religion, we come together as a covenanted community, not a creedal community. What this means is that we don't all have to believe the same things about life, God or the afterlife, to agree to live together in right relationship seeking the mutual benefit and growth of our lives, children and community.

Covenant is deeply rooted in our history. You can look all the way back to 1648 and the Cambridge Platform, the organizing document of the Congregationalist church, from which Unitarianism would arise about 150 years later. In that document is the principle that it is not through faith and not through the individual heart, but by becoming a part of a covenanted community that we live our faith. In other words, it is by being a part of a congregation that we embody and make visible our deepest values. And more than this, it is in community where we learn how to live in right relationship.

More recently in our tradition, we have emphasized our freedoms and rights as religious liberals. We are free to develop our own spiritual practice, free to articulate our own religious beliefs. We affirm the right of conscience, the ability of each person to name what is true in their hearts, and the right to a vote in matters critical to the congregation, for example the calling of a minister. Along with these rights, covenant reminds us we also have responsibilities. We have responsibilities to nurture the health of the congregation, the responsibility to care for our community and nurture the health and growth of one another.

I often tell new members to UUCP, that part of the responsibility of membership is a commitment to your own spiritual growth because being in community challenges us to grow. It is far easier to have your own personal, individual spiritual path to follow. Becoming a member of a religious community is much more difficult. You will meet people who challenge you. There will be times when we step on each other's toes. We will disagree. Through our covenant, we agree to stay engaged, to listen thoughtfully, to create room for diversity of perspectives and the capacity and willingness to learn from each other. It's not easy, but the opportunity is the chance to build a community of justice and diversity that we would hope to see in the larger world. To do this requires a willingness to grow in every one of us.

This month is an invitation to reflect on the web of connections in which your life depends, the web of creation and connections that inform our world and see the possibility that comes when we move from looking at our independence to our interdependence.

Yours in love,
Rev. Susan



Living the Theme: Interdependence

Choose one of the exercises below to engage the theme. Come to the meeting prepared to share how you tried to experience interdependence and what you learned from the practice.

1. TAKE A BEAUTY IMMERSION WALK

There is a Navajo saying, “May I walk the Beauty Way”. This week, take a series of short ten minute walks focusing on the beauty around you, before you, above you, and behind you. Breathe it in and let it seep into every cell of your body. Let yourself fall in love with this beauty-filled universe. Practice seeing how everything in nature is connected and dependent on one another. Place yourself in that web of existence and understand your role in the natural world.

2. THINKING LIKE THE UNIVERSE

What if we could adopt the mindset of every single thing in the world being connected to every other thing? We would be “thinking” like the universe. Give it a try. As you go through your days - at home, work or school, at parties, at the grocery store, on walks or at play - try seeing everyone and everything as expressions of connection and communion. It will take practice. Share your experience/experiment with a friend, your family or your small group ministry.

3. CREATE A DIALOGUE BETWEEN YOU AND ALL LIVING THINGS

Take a look at photos of family and friends. Imagine having a conversation with each person in the photo. Tell each person how they have affected you, both positively and negatively. Now, imagine what each person might say to you in return. In what ways have your words and actions affected each other and fostered a need for each other? Now, extend this practice to images of animals, landscapes, insects, sea life and our solar system. Reflect on ways that your interaction with all of creation affects you, and consider ways that the life around you is affected by your words and deeds.

4. INTERDEPENDENCE AT THE DINNER TABLE

When sitting down to eat a meal, discuss with your family all the various hands that went into the meal you are eating. Discuss the role of the animal, the vegetable, the farmer, the butcher, the truck driver, the inspector, the grocer, and finally, the person who cooked the meal. Question how making certain food choices affects everyone involved.



Some Questions to Think and Talk About

As always, don't treat these questions as "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply look them over and find one that "hooks" you most. Live with it for a while. Allow it to regularly break into – and break open – your ordinary thoughts. Then come to your small group prepared to share that journey with the group.

- **What aspects of the UUCP covenant and covenanted community mean the most to you, and why?**
- Living with respect and care for the Earth is very challenging, given our society (food, transportation, etc.) **How do you try to live mindfully in respect of the Earth?**
- Gandhi said, "Interdependence is and ought to be as much the ideal of man as self-sufficiency. Man is a social being." **How do you balance independence and interdependence?**
- **How do you understand living in right relationship?** Where do you feel your life reflects this? **Are there areas that need tending for right relationship?**
- **What is a story from your own life where you depended on another for help?** What did you take from that experience?
- Jesus said, "That which you sow also shall you reap." The Taoists say, "Returning is the motion of the Tao." Folklore says, "What goes around, comes around." The Hindus and Buddhists call it "karma." **Have you seen this principle at work in your life or in the world? If so, how?**
- José Ortega y Gasset says, "Tell me to what you pay attention, and I will tell you who you are." **To what parts of the interdependent web are you most closely attuned? Are there parts of the interdependent web that you tune out by necessity or choice? If so, what are they?**
- **Have your feelings of interdependence required a sacrifice on your part?** How do you feel about that?
- **Has interdependence ever saved or transformed you?** What was the experience like? How has that altered or enriched your life?
- **Are there interdependent connections that you feel are lacking?** What can you do to foster that connection?
- **Do you think about interdependence when you vote for politicians or make consumer choices?** Do you reflect on how politicians and corporations affect the lives of you and your loved ones?
- **Can you recall a time when you first realized you were a part of the Earth community?**



Recommended Resources

*These are **not** required reading. We will not dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started and offer different ways to see and explore the theme.*

First Thoughts and Wise Words

Dependence: the state of relying on, needing, or placing trust in someone or something

Interdependence: the state of being mutually dependent; depending on each other

The center of the universe which is everywhere, not the least place in the human heart.

Barbara Pescan, UU

We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us...And among those fibers, as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes, and they come back to us as effects. On a daily basis, we affect the web of all existence, just as we are affected by it.

Herman Melville, Unitarian novelist

If, recognizing the interdependence of all life, we strive to build community, the strength we gather will be our salvation.

Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley, UU

The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all living beings.

Thomas Merton

We are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness.

Thich Nhat Hanh

The only real nation is humanity.

Dr. Paul Farmer

The telling and hearing of stories breaks through illusions of separateness and activates a deep sense of our collective interdependence.

Annette Simmons

We can either emphasize those aspects of our traditions, religious or secular, that speak of hatred, exclusion, and suspicion or work with those that stress the interdependence and equality of all human beings. The choice is yours.

Karen Armstrong, Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life

The task that remains is to cope with our interdependence - to see ourselves reflected in every other human being and to respect and honor our differences.

Melba Pattillo Beals, Warriors Don't Cry: The Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go with others.

Traditional proverb

*From you I receive-To you I give-
Together we share, And from this we live.*

Hymn #402, Singing the Living Tradition

*The sea rolls easy and smooth,
Or the sea roars and goes wild.
The smell of clams and fish comes
out of the sea.*

*The sea is nothing to look at
unless you want to know something-
unless you want to know
where you came from.*

Carl Sandburg

The law of conservation of energy states that the total energy of an isolated system is constant; energy can be transformed from one form to another, but cannot be created or destroyed. Ergo, all the energy there is in the universe was created (distributed) in the Big Bang. Nothing is ever added. Nothing is ever really destroyed. Energy is all there is.

Small Group Facilitator



Our liberal religious covenant is to trust one another enough to seek help when we're down and to offer assistance when we are able.

Rev. Tom Owen-Towle, UU

The Larger Circle

*We clasp the hands of those that go before us,
And the hands of those who come after us.
We enter the little circle of each other's arms
And the larger circle of lovers,
Whose hands are joined in a dance,
And the larger circle of all creatures,
Passing in and out of life,
Who move also in a dance,
To a music so subtle and vast that no ear hears it
Except in fragments.*

Wendell Berry

When we try to pick anything out by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.

John Muir

Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.

Martin Luther King Jr.

A spiritual sensibility encourages us to see ourselves as part of the fundamental unity of all being. If the thrust of the market ethos has been to foster a competitive individualism, a major thrust of many traditional religious and spiritual sensibilities has been to help us see our connection with all other human beings.

Rabbi Michael Lerner

A mystic sees beyond the illusion of separateness into the intricate web of life in which all things are expressions of a single Whole. You can call this web "God, the Tao, the Great Spirit, the Infinite Mystery, Mother or Father," but it can be known only as love.

Joan Borysenko

A human being is a part of the whole, called by us the "Universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest--a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

Albert Einstein

When I think of interdependence, I think of connections. And when I think of connections, I think of the ultimate connection -- Carl Jung's concept of the collective unconscious. Every human shares a unique piece of humanity with every other human being, living or that has ever lived. This is the reason we have the same feelings, have the same thoughts, share the same symbols in our dreams, share the same archetypes -- regardless of our culture, our gender, our age or our location. The collective unconscious is a shared piece that makes us all uniquely human and intimately connected for all time.

Small Group Facilitator

Things derive their being and nature by mutual dependence and are nothing in themselves.

Nagarjuna

Shaking the Tree

Vine and branch we're connected in this world of sound and echo, figure and shadow, the leaves contingent, roots pushing against earth. An apple belongs to itself, to stem and tree, to air that claims it, then ground. Connections balance, each motion changes another. Precarious, changing together, we don't know what our lives support, and we touch in the least shift of breathing. Each holy thing is borrowed. Everything depends.

Jeanne Lohmann



One Today

*One sun rose on us today, kindled
over our shores,
peeking over the Smokies, greeting the*

*faces
of the Great Lakes, spreading a simple truth
across the Great Plains, then charging across the
Rockies.*

*One light, waking up rooftops, under each one, a
story
told by our silent gestures moving behind windows.*

*My face, your face, millions of faces in morning's
mirrors,
each one yawning to life, crescendoing into our
day:
pencil-yellow school buses, the rhythm of traffic
lights,
fruit stands: apples, limes, and oranges arrayed
like rainbows
begging our praise. Silver trucks heavy with oil or
paper -
bricks or milk, teeming over highways alongside
us,
on our way to clean tables, read ledgers, or save
lives-
to teach geometry, or ring-up groceries as my
mother did
for twenty years, so I could write this poem.*

*All of us as vital as the one light we move through,
the same light on blackboards with lessons for the
day:
equations to solve, history to question, or atoms
imagined,
the "I have a dream" we keep dreaming,
or the impossible vocabulary of sorrow that won't
explain
the empty desks of twenty children marked absent
today, and forever. Many prayers, but one light
breathing color into stained glass windows,
life into the faces of bronze statues, warmth
onto the steps of our museums and park benches
as mothers watch children slide into the day.*

*One ground. Our ground, rooting us to every stalk
of corn, every head of wheat sown by sweat
and hands, hands gleaned coal or planting
windmills
in deserts and hilltops that keep us warm, hands
digging trenches, routing pipes and cables, hands
as worn as my father's cutting sugarcane
so my brother and I could have books and shoes.*

*The dust of farms and deserts, cities and plains
mingled by one wind - our breath. Breathe. Hear it
through the day's gorgeous din of honking cabs,
buses launching down avenues, the symphony
of footsteps, guitars, and screeching subways,
the unexpected song bird on your clothes line.*

*Hear: squeaky playground swings, trains
whistling,
or whispers across cafe tables, Hear: the doors we
open
for each other all day, saying: hello, shalom,
buon giorno, howdy, namaste, or buenos dias
in the language my mother taught me - in every
language
spoken into one wind carrying our lives
without prejudice, as these words break from my
lips.*

*One sky: since the Appalachians and Sierras
claimed
their majesty, and the Mississippi and Colorado
worked
their way to the sea. Thank the work of our hands:
weaving steel into bridges, finishing one more
report
for the boss on time, stitching another wound
or uniform, the first brush stroke on a portrait,
or the last floor on the Freedom Tower
jutting into a sky that yields to our resilience.*

*One sky, toward which we sometimes lift our eyes
tired from work: some days guessing at the
weather
of our lives, some days giving thanks for a love
that loves you back, sometimes praising a mother
who knew how to give, or forgiving a father
who couldn't give what you wanted.*

*We head home: through the gloss of rain or weight
of snow, or the plum blush of dusk, but always -
home,
always under one sky, our sky. And always one
moon
like a silent drum tapping on every rooftop
and every window, of one country - all of us -
facing the stars
hope - a new constellation
waiting for us to map it,
waiting for us to name it - together.*

Richard Blanco, for Barack Obama's second
inauguration



Invocation of Universal Unity

*Hush 'sh 'sh 'sh and Listen, all
peoples –
Pause from your busy-ness*

*and hush 'sh 'sh
To hear — Yahhhhhh,
The One Breath of Life –
For all breath is One:*

*We breathe in what the trees breathe out,
And the trees breathe in what we breathe out.*

*Hear in the stillness the still silent voice,
The silent breathing that intertwines life.*

*If we Breathe in the quiet,
Interbreathe with all Life —
Still small Voice of us all —
We will feel the Connections;
We will make the connections
And the rain will fall rightly
The grains will grow rightly
And the rivers will run:
All creatures will eat well in harmony,
Earthlings / good Earth.*

*But if we break the One Breath into pieces
And erect into idols these pieces of Truth,
And choose these mere pieces to worship:
gods of race or of nation
gods of wealth and of power,
gods of greed and addiction –
Big Oil or Big Coal –
If we Do and we Make and Produce
without Pausing to Be;*

*If we heat the One Breath with our burnings —
Then the Breath will flare up into scorching,
The corn will parch in the field,
The poor will find little to eat,
Great ice fields will melt
And great storms will erupt:
Floods will drown our homes and our cities,
And the Breath, Holy Wind, Holy Spirit
Will become a Hurricane of Disaster.*

*What must we do?
Connect what we see with our eyes
To what we do with our hands.
Turn to sun and to wind
To empower all peoples.*

*Then the grass will grow,
The forests will flourish,
And all life weave the future in fullness.*

*Honor the web that all of us weave —
Breathe together the Breath of all Life.*

Rabbi Arthur Waskow

Connections Are Made Slowly

*Connections are made slowly, sometimes they
grow underground.*

*You cannot tell always by looking what is
happening.*

*More than half a tree is spread out in the soil
under your feet.*

*Penetrate quietly as the earthworm that blows
no trumpet.*

*Fight persistently as the creeper that brings
down the tree.*

*Spread like the squash plant that overruns the
garden.*

Gnaw in the dark and use the sun to make sugar.

*Weave real connections, create real nodes, build
real houses.*

*Live a life you can endure: make love that is
loving.*

*Keep tangling and interweaving and taking
more in,*

*a thicket and bramble wilderness to the outside
but to us*

*interconnected with rabbit runs and burrows
and lairs.*

*Live as if you like yourself, and it may happen:
reach out, keep reaching out, keep bringing in.*

*This is how we are going to live for a long time:
not always,*

*for every gardener knows that after the digging,
after*

the planting,

*after the long season of tending and growth, the
harvest comes.*

Marge Piercy

*We don't set out to save the world; we set out to
wonder how other people are doing and to
reflect on how our actions affect other people's
hearts.*

Pema Chodron



We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise ... It is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

The Earth Charter

It is a natural aspect of the world's design that life forms are interdependent. If compassion means empathic awareness of that natural interconnection, then compassion is a law of nature we cannot deny. If we want to live in harmony with the logic of our world, we can't ignore the parts of us that are custodians of the earth and our brothers' and sisters' keepers. We're responsible for one another's wellbeing whether we choose to act in accordance with that responsibility or not, because our wellbeing is inescapably collective.

Hannah Dresner

Additional Resources

Articles

The cause and effect principle in parenting: "Manifesto of the New Fatherhood" by Stephen Marche (*Esquire*, June 2014)
http://www.esquire.com/blgs/news/manifesto-of-the-new-fatherhood-0614?click=main_sr

Independence and Interdependence:
July 2014 Quest Journal (the magazine of the UU Church of the Larger Fellowship)
http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/featured_listing/728

Videos

Harvest of Empire:
http://www.amazon.com/Harvest-Empire-Juan-Gonzalez/dp/B00DCYVEP6/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1407856877&sr=8-2&keywords=harvest+of+empire

Neil deGrasse Tyson- The Most Astounding Fact:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9D05ej8u-gU>