

Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society
Online Worship Service
October 4, 2020

Respect for All Existence, 7th Principle
Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

As we continue our study of our 7 Principles of Unitarian Universalism, today, we look more deeply at the 7th principle, namely that we affirm and promote “*respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part*”.

(Please note that we will be looking at a proposed but not yet approved 8th UU principle when I speak again on October 18th).

PAUSE

I have long held that this 7th principle should be the first of all our principles, *placed ahead of* our first principle which is that we affirm and promote “the inherent worth and dignity of every person.”¹

Not that you can have one without the other, but in this age of itunes, iphones, ipads, and so many other societal and marketing messages that tell us that what the individual wants; what we *each* want *is* what is most important. The value of self-discipline or self-sacrifice for the sake of the larger whole is increasingly absent in our societal norms, placing the individual’s desires at the top of our culture’s priorities. And that, I believe, places all of our lives in extreme jeopardy. In other years, you might have thought that I am exaggerating. But, this year?

PAUSE

The concept of interdependence very nearly didn’t make it into our 7 principles. The creation of our principles required a 4 year study by our congregations, from 1980 - 1984, with the expectation that they would be voted on at the 1985 General Assembly of our congregations.

At the end of 1984, we had the first six principles pretty much in hand and ready to go . . . but some felt that something was missing.

What was missing was the theological imperative of interdependence. Not just interdependence between human beings, but interdependence between all existence.

As momentum gathered to vote on the first six principles, some were not satisfied and they were prepared to vote against all six, unless the principles included the concept of interdependence not just between humans but between humans and non-humans, between

¹ <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles> October 3, 2020

humans and our environment and within the various biological, ecological and cosmic systems within which we are all surely a part. (In the 80's more and more began to fully grasp the ecological principle that "no living thing exists in isolation from its environment."²)

This concept of interdependence is not only important in biology and ecology and many other sciences, it is also at the very root of our relational theology. It recognizes the individual, but also names that those around us, our community, and the environment and cosmos is the vessel in which we all live. There is something more than "I", something more than the tribal "we", something more than we can grasp, something more than we can see.

And, when that something is revered and embraced, it has the power to heal the brokenness of our individual lives by binding us together to the greater whole of which we are each only a part.

Such is religion . . . the study and practice of that which binds us together.

PAUSE

In my personal and spiritual life, I like to think of myself as a weaver. A weaver of tapestries and a weaver of individual souls into interdependent communities. Some of you know (having visited my home) that I have a large floor loom. Years ago, I wrote this theological reflection on interdependence and our relationship to that which we cannot name, but on which we are so dependent.

Weaving a Life ©

by Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

The yarns are many colored:

luminous shades of blue,
vibrant shades of red,
glad hearted yellow,
rich earth-bound green.

They lay separate on the table,
each in their individual glory.

Still. Waiting.

Some wait without anticipation,
some may be poorly used,
some will lift themselves to action
to help create the fabric of our world.

² Collier, Kenneth W. Our Seven Principles in Story & Verse (Boston: Skinner Books, 1997) 102-103.

A Spirit of Life we cannot name
places the **warp** on the loom . . .
hundreds of individually, beautifully colored threads
lined up side by side
- still separate, waiting.
Waiting for the shuttles of Life to weave back and forth,
across the many threads to create
the fabric that binds our souls together,
one to the other.

The **weft** of Life wound round the shuttle
is luminescent, nearly invisible,
a radiantly twisted yarn that shimmers in the light.
It is mysterious.
Sometimes, it cannot be seen.
Other times, it pulsates as it glows,
shimmering so brightly,
one barely dares to look.
So soft . . . translucent,
we forget it binds us together.
Without this weft of Life, we are hundreds,
no - thousands of individual strands,
that lay next to each other,
not connected, not moving.
But, once connected by our invisible, luminescent love
and care for each other,
we are bound together,
supported and lifted
by our interwoven connections.

We become the fabric of Life, made whole.

PAUSE

You may have noticed that ministers rely a lot on metaphors to illustrate their messages. No doubt, it will not be the last one you hear from me. ;-)

PAUSE

But, let's take a deeper look at the concept of interdependence. It may be an uncomfortable look. What would it *really* mean if we fully grasped and accepted responsibility for our interdependence with each other and the cosmos of which we are a part?

What would mean . . . ?

if our daily pledge of allegiance was to our whole ecosystem and not just to our local environment;

if it were to our whole world, seeing past international boundaries . . . ;

if it were to the health and well-being of our whole nation and all its citizens, and not just to red or blue states;

if it were to all parts and people of our states, and not just to our local towns;

if it were to all people with different circumstances and experiences, and not just to those who are familiar;

if it were to all beings, and not just human beings;

what **then**, would our lives look like?

If we *could* work together to promote such interdependence, what would we do differently?

I suggest that life would look very different.

Though the road would be difficult, and there are no easy fixes, our effort together to promote interdependence would, I believe, begin to dismantle the many “isms” from which our society suffers.

Racism, classism, ableism, sexism, ageism and more would be disrupted.

Stick-your-head-in-the-sand denial of the ruin of our environment would have to stop.

Seeing each other in each other’s eyes would become for frequent and sought after.

And, then, only then, would we truly be in a position to say that we affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every being.

PAUSE

It is true that our principles are aspirational. But, we cannot even begin to aspire to our first principle (to affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person), *if* we do not incarnate the true and uncomfortable responsibilities of our 7th, to promote the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

These principles are on a continuum; one cannot exist without the other. Nor can the first principle be aspired to without the premise of the 7th.

PAUSE

I end with this story by Kenneth Collier called "How Spider Woman Created the World"³

Way, way back, a long time ago, before there was a universe, Spider Woman went wandering up and down, looking for something. She was lonely and wanted company, but there was no company, for she was alone. All there was, all that she could find, was a huge mountain . . .

[One day she] went up on this mountain and sat down to think. Suddenly she had an idea! One thing everyone knows about Spider Woman is that she is the Weaver. And so she decided to set up her loom on top of the mountain. She strung up the yarn for the warp and it took her a long time, for she wanted this weaving to be something special and very long and beautiful. [When] she got the loom set up, she took up her shuttle and began to weave [across the warp threads].

And as she wove, something amazing happened. Every time one thread crossed another, a star appeared, and before long she had woven thousands and thousands of stars into her weaving, and each one was tied to every other one in the web.

Then she stopped and looked at it. It shone and sparkled and was very beautiful. But it was not quite what she wanted[.] [So] she decided that she would do a little more with this web of stars. She chose one star that happened to have some planets circling . . . it. And she chose one of those planets that had bright blue oceans and sparkling white clouds[.] [She] set up her loom again, right there on that planet. And she began to weave again.

This time as she wove, whenever one thread crossed another, a living thing appeared! She wove roses and pansies and carnations into this world. She wove fruit trees and nut trees and great redwoods. She wove all manner of birds and fish and insects into her web. She wove deer and buffalo and coyotes into it and all of the animals. [Every] one of these living things was connected to each other in her weaving.

³ Collier, Kenneth W. Our Seven Principles in Story & Verse (Boston: Skinner Books, 1997) 110-112.

Then she stopped weaving to look at it. It was very beautiful and very full. Yet it was still not finished. There was still something missing, so she started to weave yet a third time.

This time when she wove, the crossing threads created human beings, men and women and [and others], and children, all of us. And each human being that she wove into her Great Web was connected to every other thing, to the other animals, to the plants and trees and flowers, to the mountains and seas and deserts, even to the distant stars. Every human being – and indeed everything that Spider Woman wove into her Great Web – [was] connected to every other thing. And it [was] all beautiful and sacred. And [it still is. We know this] because every day someone is born and every day a new flower opens somewhere and a tree sprouts and a new animal is born[. . .]

And, so it is.

PAUSE

Every day, life moves on from birth to death, but it moves on. Every day we are connected by our joys and sorrows to each other. Every day we share many common experiences, perhaps more now than before. In these days together we can understand better what the other is going through, how each of our burdens are different but, at their root, the same. We are interconnected even in our isolation.

What does it require of us, *now*, to affirm and promote our interconnectedness?

What can we each do to affirm each other's experience and thereby see each other in each other's eyes?

What can we do now to make the cloth whole?

Now is the time to find out.

In our lifetime, the need has never been greater.

May we each find ways to connect.

Amen.