

Soul Matters 2020-2021

September's Theme: *Interdependence*

The Soul Matters Sharing Circles provide an opportunity to explore our congregation's overall theme for the 2020-2021 program year, and within that, each monthly theme. We reflect on the previous month's theme in more depth. Here is my theme reflection from The Beacon newsletter:

How do we, as a Unitarian Universalist community, respond to what is going on in the world and in our lives right now?

We come together and focus our energies on how we can make a difference. We do that in our lives and as a group. Sometimes we are in need of support, sometimes we offer support. We want to go deeper this year into the big issues and do it in ways that reflect who we are. To that end, the Worship Services Committee and I reviewed people's feedback from June's Beacon Pulse survey about what you like to see addressed in Sunday services and other programming. From that, we came up with a yearly theme, framing each month with one of our Unitarian Universalist principles.

Our overarching theme for the 2020-2021 program year is:

**Imagining a world community with peace, liberty and justice for all
As Unitarians and Universalists, grounded in our principles,
we use our heads to think, hearts to feel, and hands to serve.**

September is framed by our seventh principle: we affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are apart.

The pandemic has clearly brought awareness to how interdependent we humans are within the larger web of existence – intertwined with humans all over the planet and interconnected to all living things on this planet. It can be overwhelming at times to consider the implications. So, how do we affirm the respect we have within that web in our choices – the little ones and the bigger ones? With other humans and with the other beings in the web?

The beauty of being in an intentional community like Beacon is that we each bring a wealth of life experiences and understandings. As Unitarians and Universalists, we believe in life-long learning within a community of all ages. We can learn from each other and with each other. I encourage you to engage in what this community offers – on Sundays and on the other days of the week. If you aren't sure how to find what you need, how to make connections, or offer your gifts, please let me know and I'll introduce you to others. No one of us creates this community – we do it together. We create opportunities for our heads to think, our hearts to feel and our hands to serve. It is a privilege to be together with you this year.

In the spirit,
Rev. Meg Roberts

A Spiritual Exercise for This Coming Month

Unitarian Universalists want to do more than just read and talk about spiritual topics—they enjoy experiential learning. Many of us learn and process concepts best through direct experience. Given this, group members are invited to choose a “spiritual exercise” on each month’s topic to engage prior to the meeting. I ask you to try the exercises, believing that—whether you “enjoyed” it or not—the experience of doing it will help you learn something about life and yourself—something that sitting in a room just thinking about the topic never could. ***I invite you to choose one of the spiritual exercises below and try it out over the coming month.***

Option A

Using a spiritual practice you already do, take time to reflect on, meditate on, and/or pray about how to be more intentional in how you practice interdependence in your relationships: with the God of your understanding/the Spirit of Life, those you hold dear, others in your world, and yourself. See what arises within you and decide on one thing you will do in response over this month. Come back to the group with something you are willing to share about doing this spiritual exercise.

Option B

The Unitarian 7th principle is to affirm and promote ‘the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part.’ In the coming month, take one action intentionally in your life that puts this principle of interdependence into practice. Come back to the sharing circle with an insight or thought you had from doing this spiritual exercise.

Option C

Read the book, *The Invention of Nature: Alexander Von Humboldt’s New World* by Andrea Wulf to learn more about the interdependence of the universe. Allow yourself time while reading the words to stop and ponder as you go along. Consider Von Humboldt’s connections with Unitarians Charles Darwin, Thomas Jefferson and Henry David Thoreau (discussed in the book). If you can’t access this book, find another book, article, or resource that explores the interdependence of the universe. Come back to the sharing circle with a few thoughts about doing this spiritual exercise and how it has influenced how you understand interdependence in the world and in living your life.

Option D

We are part of an interdependent web at Beacon. Spend time reading the Beacon newsletter. Decide ways you want to engage in what this community offers – on Sundays and on the other days of the week. If you aren’t sure how to find what you need, how to make connections, or offer your gifts, please let Meg know and she will introduce you to others. No one of us creates this community – we do it together. We create opportunities for our heads to think, our hearts to feel and our hands to serve.

Option E

What is a spiritual exercise that comes to your mind when you think of the theme “Interdependence”? Create that exercise and share it with the group by email (if you are willing). Share what it was like doing that spiritual exercise with the group.

Questions to Live With:

Don't treat these questions like "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply look them over and **find the one that 'hooks' you most**. Then let it take you on a ride. Live with it over the next couple of weeks. **Let it wander around in your unconscious the rest of the time**. Allow it to break into--and break open--your ordinary thoughts. And then come to your Soul Matters meeting prepared to share with the group something of what came up for you.

1. How do I understand the concept of 'interdependence'? Where do I see it in my life as well as in the bigger issues in our world today – both in challenging ways and positive ways?
2. As Unitarians and Universalists, we believe in life-long learning within a community of all ages. What am I learning about being part of an interdependent web of life from people of various ages?
3. In my life, what have I learned about dependence, co-dependence, independence and interdependence that might help in my relationship with a person(s) or another being?
4. When have I struggled with feeling too dependent? Or too independent? What would it be like to allow myself to rely more on others, as well as offer what I can without feeling like it's not enough?
5. What are the challenges when I consider how to live in the interdependent web of existence? What might help me overcome those challenges?
6. Thich Nhat Hanh writes, "Selflessness is the interdependent nature of all things. Without interdependence, nothing could exist." What does this mean to me?
7. When I "imagine a world community with peace, liberty and justice for all," what is one thing I will do this month to work towards that kind of community? How does our seventh principle support my action? "We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are apart."
8. What question do I wish had been included here? I'll ask myself that question instead.

Other Resources

Quotes for the weekly e-news update: Beacon This Week

September 3 – "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 Pattilo Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry: The Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High*

September 10 - "I believe that national sovereignties will shrink in the face of universal interdependence."

- Jacques Cousteau

September 17 - "The interdependency of humankind, the relevance of relationship, the sacredness of creation is ancient, ancient wisdom."

- Rebecca Adamson, American Indian Rights Activist, Founder, First Nations Development Institute & First Peoples Worldwide

September 24 - “Leaders in business and government, who fail to see the holistic interdependence of our planet, are destined to cause its demise.”

- Said Elias Dawlabani, *MEMEnomics: The Next-Generation Economic System*

Family Resources – *What does it mean to be interconnected as a family? As part of the planet earth with all its creatures?*

Option 1:

In this time of pandemic, we may be spending more time together as a family and feel the benefits and the challenges of being interconnected. Here’s one way to support each of you having a voice in matters that concern you: create a Family Covenant.

“Stuck at home together, every family member’s behavior affects others some exponential degree more than usual. Families may wish to try making a covenant together.... A covenant is a promise between members of a group on specific ways they will behave to show mutual respect, kindness, and acceptance and to express their shared goal of right relationship.”

During these stressful times and with school starting up again this fall, we need ways to support each other to be kind and treat each other well.

Read this short article online on how to create a family covenant:

<https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/parenting-pandemic/family-covenant>

Set time aside to do that as a family sometime this month. Check in once a week with each other on how it is going practicing the covenant together. Remind everyone that it takes practice to live a covenant – sometimes we miss the mark. Decide how to be compassionate, practice forgiveness, being responsible for our action, and also how to heal our relationships and come together again as a family. Let Meg and Caroline know how it goes, and if you want any support to create your family covenant.

Option 2:

Sharing our gratitude that we are part of this interconnected web of life in a ritual:

At your family meal, light a candle as your chalice, go around the table and each person says one thing they feel grateful for. Remember to think about all beings and all parts of this planet we call home. You can include being thankful for any furry or winged or finned creatures you know, rocks, trees, air, water, fire, cows who make milk, people who make almond milk, etc. Get creative! Make a commitment to do this ritual each week over the month, at least twice a week. See how it affects how you feel as a family. Adapt the ritual to suit your family.

Here are some parenting resources for during the pandemic from the Unitarian Universalist Association:

<https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/parenting-pandemic>

Please let Ashley or Meg know what you think of these family resources and what else we could provide that would be useful during this time as well as about this and other monthly themes. Also, check out Ashley's "Quarantine Kit: Weekly package of resources to help families in this time of quarantine." Email her if you aren't yet receiving it then share it with friends, family and neighbours: dre@beaconunitarian.org.

Quotes

The indigenous understanding has its basis of spirituality in a recognition of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living things, a holistic and balanced view of the world. All things are bound together. All things connect. What happens to the Earth happens to the children of the earth. Humankind has not woven the web of life; we are but one thread. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. - Rebecca Adamson, American Indian Rights Activist, Founder, First Nations Development Institute & First Peoples Worldwide

"Impermanence and selflessness are not negative aspect of life, but the very foundation on which life is built. Impermanence is the constant transformation of things. Without impermanence, there can be no life. Selflessness is the interdependent nature of all things. Without interdependence, nothing could exist."

— Thich Nhat Hanh, *Your True Home: The Everyday Wisdom of Thich Nhat Hanh: 365 days of practical, powerful teachings from the beloved Zen teacher*

"We men and women are all in the same boat, upon a stormy sea. We owe to each other a terrible and tragic loyalty."

— G.K. Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton Volume 28: The Illustrated London News, 1908-1910*

"Our culture values independence and isolation far too much, it seems to me--we have a hard time making ourselves part of things, of making ourselves responsible to others, and trusting others to be there for us. Sure, there's pain involved if we get hurt, but there's far more pain in isolation. I love community because God gave us other people to live with, not to pull away from, and I learn so much from others that I can't imagine my life without the learning I've gained from getting to know other people."

— Tom Walsh

“All have their worth and each contributes to the worth of the others.”

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*

“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* (p.22)

“Talking about independence makes me wonder, Who is truly independent in this world? A farmer who grows food is dependent on a baker, a barber, a doctor, and so on. A doctor is dependent on other people of different professions in order to survive. I am dependent and will be dependent on certain caregivers and therapists. Those caregivers and therapists need people like me to earn their bread and butter and draw their salaries. So no one is doing any favors when choosing whatever his means of livelihood is.”

- Tito Rajarshi Mukhopadhyay, *How Can I Talk If My Lips Don't Move?: Inside my Autistic Mind*

Worship Resources from the Unitarian Universalist Association's Worship Web **Consider using one each day as a piece to meditate on as a private spiritual practice.**

Chalice Lighting – by Eric Heller-Wagner

Blessed is the fire that burns deep in the soul.

It is the flame of the human spirit touched into being by the mystery of life.

It is the fire of reason; the fire of compassion; the fire of community;

the fire of justice; the fire of faith.

It is the fire of love burning deep in the human heart; the divine glow in every life.

Chalice Lighting by Maureen Killoran

In this free church, we come together without creed, focusing instead on the core values of justice, equity and compassion...

Of mutual acceptance of our diverse ways of being, as we seek to connect ourselves more fully with the unfolding truths of life and of our world.

We come together in shared conviction that all people deserve a voice in matters that concern them, and that it is up to each of us to protect the rights of all—particularly those who, for whatever reason, have long been held in silence.

We come together in the stubborn belief that community is possible and that peace is more than a dream.

We commit together to affirm in our actions as well as our words, the inherent worth and dignity of every human being.

We come together in awareness of our interdependence with all humanity, and with the wider web of existence, for that too is part of what is meant by "we."

In this free church, we come together without creed, believing that the way we live in the world bears testament to the value of our beliefs.

We light this chalice as a beacon of hope for who have gathered here this day. For all who have ever walked through our doors, for those who may yet find this spiritual home, and for those whose paths will never come our way.

For all this, and for all those things we dare to hope and dream, we kindle our chalice flame this day.

Opening - We are people of all ages – by Carol Meyer

We are people of all ages who enter this space bringing our joys and our concerns.

We come together in hope.

We greet each other warmly with our voices and our smiles.

We come together in peace.

We light the chalice to symbolize our interdependence and our unity.

We come together in harmony.

We share our growth and our aspirations.

We come together in wonder.

We share our losses and our disappointments.

We come together in sorrow.

We share our concern and our compassion.

We come together in love.

We come to this place bringing our doubts and our faith.

We come together as seekers.

We sing and pray and listen. We speak and read and dream. We think and ponder and reflect.

We cry and laugh and center. We mourn and celebrate and meditate. We strive for justice and for mercy.

We come together in worship.

Prayer by Lyn Cox

A long exposure, stacked image of the Pole Star and the light trail caused by the planets rotation.

Spirit of Life, ancestor of the stars and the sun, you who embrace the vastness of space and us along with it, be with us today. Hold us in our worry, our exhaustion, our grief. Keep us close as we sit with our truth, whatever that may be. Lead us to rest in the quiet, to find solace and renewal in this time of shifting light and dark.

You whose arms open with the spinning galaxies, help us to make room, as you do, for all that is. Open our hearts to our loved ones, our neighbors, the beings with whom we share this planet. Lead us to reach out to others in compassion. Turn us toward one another in mercy, right relationship, and reconciliation.

You who have seen the rising and setting of suns, of seasons, of civilizations, remind us of all that we have learned from the history of the world and from our own histories. Give us the courage to face our mistakes, and to repair them whenever possible. Help us understand our interdependence, our gravitational relatedness with all of the other spinning lives around us, and lead us to treat those relationships with care.

In this space, filled with the people among us who shine like stars, this space filled with the sparkle of love and care, we give thanks for this moment to be together. May our senses be open to the beauty of this day, this season, this world. We continue our contemplation in silence.

(Pause)

Blessed be.

Prayer by Sara Eileen LaWall

Spirit of Life and Love,
In this time of uncertainty
Of fear and angst
Our nation holds its collective breath
In this time
When rhetoric blusters about
And words are used as weapons
Our nation clenches its fists
Tightens its shoulders
Eyes squeezed shut
Some are preparing for a fight
May we remember we are a people of resilience
We have faced uncertainty before
We have weathered storms
We have been consumed by flames
We have risen like the phoenix from the ashes
And we will again
We the people
May we remember our shared humanity
Our universal kinship; our interdependence
As we unclench our fists and breathe together
Breathing in love and breathing out peace
May we recognize the spark of the divine inside all of us
Even those we are not quite sure about

In this time of uncertainty
We remember the good will go on
As we work to move forward together
We the people
Seeking that which unites us
With our arms reaching out wide
For life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness
May love prevail.
In the name of all that is holy we pray, Amen.

Closing by Andrea Hawkins-Kamper

May we see all as it is, and may it all be as we see it.
May we be the ones to make it as it should be,
For if not us, who? If not now, when?
This is answering the cry of justice with the work of peace,
This is redeeming the pain of history with the grace of wisdom,
This is the work we are called to do, and this is the call we answer now:
To be the barrier and the bridge,
To be the living embodiment of our Principles,
To be about the work of building the Beloved Community,
To be a people of intention and a people of conscience.

Closing by Denise Cawley

Love our Earth.
Take action to consume less,
use less energy, respect water;
And be cooperative, collaborative
and creative community –
like the moss and the mushrooms.
Our children's lives depend on us.