



Touchstones Project

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

November 2023

Interdependence

Wisdom Story



the value of love as the Purpose of our faith. Interdependence is also unique because it is both a value and the process that connects the petals (i.e., values).

This is the Study Commission's description of interdependence: *We honor the interdependent web of all existence. / We covenant to cherish Earth and all beings by creating and nurturing relationships of care and respect. With humility and reverence, we acknowledge our place in the great web of life, and we work to repair harm and damaged relationships.*

Interdependence was an after-thought. At the 1983 General Assembly, the Bylaws Revision Committee presented seven principles to the delegates. The last read, "to defend and promote..." "the integrity of the earth and our responsibility to protect its resources for future generations." At the 1984 GA, there was unhappiness with this wording as being human-centric with no recognition of the non-human or the reality of interdependence. The Rev.

(Continued on page 5)

Introduction to the Theme

Interdependence is one of the seven values proposed by the UUA's Article II Study Commission to replace the 1985 seven principles and six sources. The Study Commission uses the non-hierarchical image of a flower with love in the center overlaid on a flaming chalice and surrounded by the six other values as petals. Are these six values equal? The flower design suggests equality, but we can only assess their functional equality over time. The Study Commission's description of each value is brief, so additional discussion, contemplation, exegesis, sermonizing, theologizing, etc., are needed to explore and deepen each.

The Study Commission has proposed

Interdependence & the Common Good

Individuals and groups can support the common good by recognizing their interdependence and working together to benefit everyone. Still, given the weak force of community, overcoming the strong force of individualism is difficult. We can balance individual self-interest and impulses with the common good by emphasizing interdependence. Beyond resource allocation, moral principles stressing fairness, reciprocity, and justice support a robust concept of the common good. Yet, a human-centric common good has been destructive. Thoreau wrote, "What is the use of a house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?" A viable understanding of the common good requires acknowledging our radical interdependence with the Earth, our only home, our only heaven.

A Theme-Based Ministry Project

This project is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian Universalist congregations.

Sustaining the Tree of Life

Rev. Lynn Gardner, edited for length

The tree stood in the middle of the village. Its trunk ...took six people holding hands to reach around it. The roots were strong..., and its branches spread out over the village square, offering shelter from the rain, or shade from the summer sun. Its fruit was juicy, sweet, and plentiful.

The people of the village loved the tree. Children played beneath it.... Young people ...whispered ...dreams to the tree.... People ...proclaimed their love ...for one another beneath its branches.... The tree had been witness to so much, and when the breezes blew through the leaves, one could hear echoes of generations: laughter, conversations, dreams, prayers, and songs.

Animals loved the tree, too. Rabbits lived in burrows under the roots, squirrels and monkeys lived in the branches, and bats and birds flew in to eat the abundant fruit. The tree seemed to buzz with life!

One day, a traveling merchant arrived in the village. He rested in the shade and ate two pieces of delicious fruit. "This fruit is incredible," he said. "I would like to have some to sell in the next villages that I visit. Who owns this tree?"

"No one owns this tree," replied a villager. "If anything, we belong to it."

"Well, then, if no one owns the tree, ...no one will mind if I pick the fruit," said the merchant, and began to fill a basket.

"I mind," said the villager, "and today I am the keeper of the tree."

"We each take our turn being here with the tree. We could never own it. We are here as protectors, as sustainers."

"That's ridiculous. This tree doesn't

(Continued on page 2)

Reimagining the Common Good

More than just you

(Continued from page 1) **Sustaining the Tree** need you! You could just take what you need; take what you want. The tree will continue."

"...Sir, this tree isn't like that. We don't come here to take from it ...even though we receive much. We are keepers of the tree because this is where we are nourished. This is where some of our most precious memories are, and where our people have dreamed. This is where we remember who we want to become."

"Well," said the merchant, "you may think this tree is very special, but it still doesn't need you to sit with it..."

"Ah," replied the villager. "The tree itself may not need me—but what of others who come by? Just this morning I sat with a woman whose heart was heavy with worry. ...And this afternoon, a tired couple came by, and they rested with me. They said they had been looking for a place like this. And then an elder came by, and we watched the birds in the branches..."

"And now you are here. You were

confused about what this tree is, and how to be with it. Imagine if you had arrived and not found anyone here to talk with? You might have continued thinking that everything you do is all about you. Luckily for you, my friend, I'm here to let you

know that when you care for the tree of life, it becomes about so much more than just you."

And the merchant sat for a while in the shade, thinking about these ideas that felt new and a little challenging. As the sun went down, he picked up his bag and headed out of town, whistling a song that he hadn't thought of in years. On his way, he shared a smile with each person he met, his heart feeling strangely light and joyful.

And the people of the village? They continued to sustain the tree of life: to care for one another and to share their

2 gifts, with grace and gratitude.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/story/sustaining-tree-life>



Send in the Clouds

Interbeing: Each in All

Thích Nhất Hạnh

If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet



of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow: and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either. So we can say that the cloud and the paper *inter-are*.

Interbeing is a word that is not in the dictionary yet, but if we combine the prefix "inter" with the verb "to be", we have a new verb, inter-be. ...

If we look into this sheet of paper

even more deeply, we can see the sunshine in it. If the sunshine is not there, the forest cannot grow. In fact, nothing can grow.

Even we cannot grow without sunshine. And so, we know that the sunshine is also in this sheet of paper. The paper and the sunshine *inter-are*. And if we continue to look, we can see the logger who cut the tree and brought it to the mill to be transformed into paper. And we see the wheat. We know that the logger cannot exist without his daily bread, and therefore the wheat that became his bread is also in this sheet of paper. And the logger's father and mother are in it too. When we look in this way, we see that without all of these things, this sheet of paper cannot exist.

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/v2/read/view.php?tid=222>

I am because of you

The Ethic of Ubuntu

Mark Nepo

The following by Mark Nepo is from his book, *More Together Than Alone: Discovering the Power and Spirit of Community in Our Lives and in the World*

Since prehistoric hunters had to work together in order to survive, people have had to learn how to share both the workload and the harvest, and the problems and the joys. Through the centuries, traditions have formed and complexities have grown. But the health of all community depends on how we treat each other.

...The African ethic of ubuntu is often translated as *I am because you are,*

you are because I am. It implies that we find our humanity in each other. *Ubuntu* literally means *a person is a person through other persons*. This heartfelt tradition concentrates on the irrevocable connectedness that exists between people. Based on this fundamental commitment to human kinship, there is no word for orphan in the African continent, because each tribe automatically assumes a lost child as part of its larger family.

At work here is the belief that in our very nature, we rely on each other to grow. As quarks combine to form protons and neutrons, which then form atoms, which then form molecules, individuals innately form families, which then form tribes, which then form nations. Our strong need to interact stems from the irreducible nature of love. In fact, all the worldviews we're discussing are manifestations of our innate need to join. The practice that comes from the notion of ubuntu is the vow to water our common roots by which we all grow and to honor our strong need to join.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28338>



Readings from the Common Bowl



Day 1: "Gratitude awakens us to the truth of our interdependent nature." Haemin Sunim

Day 2: "The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another, and all involved in one another." Thomas Merton

Day 3: "I believe that dialogue is the key to breaking through our tendency to separate and isolate. Dialogue changes isolation and loneliness into connection and interdependence." Vinessa Shaw

Day 4: "The idea of interdependence is central to Buddhism, which holds that all things come into being through the mutual interactions of various causes and conditions." Daisaku Ikeda

Day 5: "In the progress of personality, first comes a declaration of independence, then a recognition of interdependence." Henry Van Dyke

Day 6: "Interdependence is a fact, it's not an opinion." Peter Coyote

Day 7: "Life doesn't make any sense without interdependence. We need each other, and the sooner we learn that, the better for us all." Erik Erikson

Day 8: "We know from science that nothing in the universe exists as an isolated or independent entity." Margaret J. Wheatley

Day 9: "When will we learn, when will the people of the world get up and say, Enough is enough. ...We are not made for an exclusive self-sufficiency but for interdependence, and we break the law of our being at our peril." Desmond Tutu

Day 10: "Collective wisdom is about our capacity to recognize interdependence and to make decisions demonstrating that we have a stake in each other, that we can indeed care for each other and the physical planet we share." Alan Briskin

Day 11: "...We now realize as we have never before our interdependence on each other; that we cannot merely take, but we must be willing to sacrifice for the good of a common discipline, because without such discipline, no progress is made, no

leadership becomes effective." Franklin D. Roosevelt

Day 12: "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. ...Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." John Donne

Day 13: "America is not the crude stereotype of a self-interested empire. Given our interdependence, any world order that elevates one nation or group of people over another will inevitably fail." Barack Obama

Day 14: "Ego's trick is to make us lose sight of our interdependence. ...In reality we all depend on each other and we have to help each other." Gelek Rimpoche

Day 15: "Only by restoring the broken connections can we be healed. Connection is health." Wendell Berry

Day 16: "I am part of the sun as my eye is part of me. That I am part of the earth my feet know perfectly, and my blood is part of the sea. There is not any part of me that is alone and absolute except my mind, and we shall find that the mind has no existence by itself, it is only the glitter of the sun on the surfaces of the water." D. H. Lawrence

Day 17: "The further human society drifts away from nature, the less we understand interdependence." Peter Senge

Day 18: "In America we have a Declaration of Independence, but our history, our advancements, our global strength all point to an American declaration of interdependence." Cory Booker

Day 19: "Interdependence is a fundamental law of nature." Dalai Lama

Day 20: "My life is not my own business." Anthony Hopkins

Day 21: "...the core values that underpin sustainable development—interdependence, empathy, equity, personal responsibility and intergenerational justice—are the only foundation upon which any viable vision of a better world can possibly be constructed." Jonathon Porritt

Day 22: "We're either going to be driven to a whole new sense of radical interdependence where we are, in the Bible's words, our neighbor's keeper, or destroy ourselves." John Shelby Spong

Day 23: "...Depending on others ...gives people a chance to serve. ...I'm not so much big on independence, as I am on interdependence. ...I'm talking about giving people the opportunity to practice love with its sleeves rolled up." Joni Eareckson Tada

Day 24: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe." John Muir

Day 25: "We are all connected; To each other, biologically. To the earth, chemically. To the rest of the universe, atomically." Neil deGrasse Tyson

Day 26: "Interdependence is not a slogan, it's a fact. And our independence as individuals depends on our interdependence with others." Thích Nhất Hạnh

Day 27: "Interdependence is unity of diversity. It's the way the whole of life operates." Elisabet Sahtouris

Day 28: "All life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny." Martin Luther King Jr.

Day 29: "We cannot live for ourselves alone. Our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads, and along these sympathetic fibers, our actions run as causes and return to us as results." Herman Melville



Day 30: "The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together." William Shakespeare

Day 31: "None of us can ever save himself; we are the instruments of one another's salvation, and only by the hope that we give to others do we lift ourselves out of the darkness into light." Dean Koontz



Faith and Theology

A Theology of Interdependence

The Article II Study Commission's value, *interdependence*, is captured in the phrase the "interdependent web of all existence." This image is in *Building Bridges: A World Religions Program*. One workshop contains *Indra's Magnificent Jeweled Net*, a story about the Hindu God Indra. He is the king of the gods, and his metaphorical net symbolizes the interconnectedness, interdependence, and mutual influence of everything in the universe. The net stretches indefinitely in all directions, and a jewel hangs at every intersection of the net's strands. Each jewel reflects all the other jewels, the whole in each part. Whatever you do to one jewel affects the entire net.

Likewise, the "butterfly effect" is the idea that the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil could set off a chain of events leading to a tornado in Texas. This metaphor illustrates the interdependence within Earth's highly complex systems and informs a UU theology of interdependence, elements of which follow.

Beloved Community: Human interdependence is thoughtfully symbolized by the beloved community and grounded by the conviction of every person's inherent worth and dignity. Beloved community is created and nurtured by respecting and embracing diversity, supporting inclusion, opposing oppression and injustice in word and deed, demanding accountability, and loving neighbor, stranger, and enemy as oneself.

Connectedness of All Creation: Connectedness includes human beings and their human-created world, the planet Earth, all non-human life and planetary systems, and the cosmos. Instead of dominion theology's instrumental value of the Earth due to her resources, we must assert Earth's intrinsic value independent of human need or use. But does this go far enough? Theologically, *inherent worth and dignity* have privileged humans, which the Commission's proposal contin-

ues. Is it time to ascribe inherent worth and dignity to all creation and act accordingly? As Thomas Berry wrote,

"...the universe is a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects."

A Covenant with Earth: Ron Engel,

Professor Emeritus of Meadville Lombard Theological School, has emphasized our covenant with the Earth in developing the idea of *Ecological Democratic Citizenship*.

Drawing on the *Land Ethic* of Aldo Leopold, Engel agrees that we are fundamentally citizens of Earth. Informed by UU theologian James Luther Adams' writings about covenant, Engel concludes, "The values and practices of democracy and ... ecological responsibility ... are ... interdependent parts of one comprehensive and explicit covenant of democratic ecological citizenship." Hopeful, he adds, "our relations to one another and to the earth can be both creative and redemptive." He also draws on environmentalist Wendell Berry to emphasize "the religious nature of ... covenant as a practice of faith." Engel writes, "Berry evokes the trait of covenantal faithfulness as the preeminent democratic environmental virtue: faithfulness to the land and to the succeeding generations that pass over it ... and above all, right livelihood through skilled care of our small place in the cosmos."

The Location of the Divine: Traditionally, theology has divided reality into the sacred and the profane, with most as profane. Echoing the Transcendentalists, Thomas Berry wrote, "The divine communicates to us primarily through the language of the natural world. Not to hear the natural world is not to hear the divine." So, is nature the divine's profane medium or something more? For First Peoples, it is sacred, but for Western culture, it is profane, except for pantheism, which views the universe as a manifesta-

tion of the divine, or panentheism, which asserts that divinity is both within (immanent) and beyond (transcendent) the universe. If the Earth is interfused with divinity, it and all non-human life are sacred.

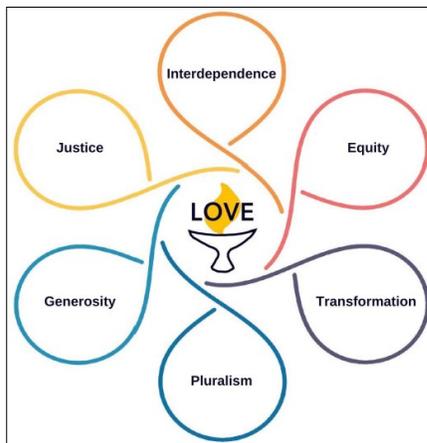
Deep Ecology: Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess coined *deep ecology* in 1973. He called for a radical shift in

human consciousness, resulting in the *ecological self*, which exists on the same level as nature, not above it. This "biocentric egalitarianism" considers each entity as inherently equal and valuable to every other entity, completely departing from the medieval concept of the *Great Chain of Being* that placed

humans below God and angels but above animals, plants, and minerals. Many First Peoples were not hierarchical. Consider a symbol sacred to the Lakota Sioux, the *Cangleksa Wakan*, i.e., "Sacred Hoop" or "Sacred Circle," which symbolizes the interconnectedness and equality of all living beings and elements.

Gratitude and Stewardship: To intimately understand the scale of planetary interdependence, we must ask, "What do I receive?" Earth's gifts, beginning with life, are so innumerable that we can only count them metaphorically as "the ten thousand things." If these are a debt, we can never repay it. If these are a burden, even Atlas would be forever bowed. If these are bees in a hive, we are awash in honey and unending gratitude. But if these are tears, how can we imagine Earth's suffering due to our dominion? How can we ever respond with empathy and integrity? Seventh-generation stewardship is our only worthy response.

Earth Literacy: Our interdependence with the Earth, the accelerating harm to this life-creating and life-sustaining planet, and the speed by which we must bend the environmental arc of the Earth toward sustainability require that we reach and teach the "one-hundredth



Our Most Ancient and Most Worthy Responsibility

(Continued from page 1) **Introduction to Theme**
Paul L'Herrou proposed an amendment to revise the language. It was then word-smithed into our poetic seventh principle emphasizing the interdependent web. Rev. Ken Collier writes, "We appeal to these Principles for all sorts of things, from supporting social action projects to theological projects and beyond. Of all seven, it is this last Principle that is appealed to by far the most often."

While you can find word fragments of the seven principles throughout the descriptions of the values, the 7th principle, survives largely intact.

The idea of "the interdependent web of all existence" is essential, but here we are talking about an adjective, interdependent, and not the noun, interdependence. To "honor the interdependent web of all existence" requires that we understand interdependence deep in our bones and act interdependently, with our species and with other forms of life including the Earth itself.

We don't seem to understand and live according to the radical interdependence through which we have our life and being. Every breath we take, every food we eat, every glass of water we drink, every piece of clothing we wear, every medicine we receive, every step we take, every book we read, every song we sing are examples of interdependence. We did not evolve without it; we do not exist without it. Our biology, chemistry, and physics operate at the molecular level and within the planetary systems in which we live based on interdependence. Evolution across time "designed" every aspect of our being in concert with other species and within the Earth's ability to sustain human life.

If all of this and more are true, why do we value autonomy and independence while ignoring the fact and importance of interdependence? Our cultural emphasis on individualism, independence, and self-reliance seems to devalue interdependence. Ironically, whether we are dependent or independent, we are supported by system upon system of interdependence.

Stephen Covey placed a very high value on interdependence. (See page 6) He wrote, "Interdependence is a choice only independent people can make." By this, he meant that we need a certain level of autonomy and awareness to recognize and value interdependence and begin to act with others in this spirit. Jenna Jameson writes, "Maturity comes in three stages: dependence, independence, and interdependence."

Interdependence is at the core of human relationships and society. Each morning, the human world arises anew because of the companionship, cooperation, and collaboration in a vast and complex system of human interdependence. We understood the importance of our human web during COVID as people worldwide relied on first responders and medical personnel and then learned how to interact in countless new ways to keep things going.

A compelling symbol of human interdependence is the *Welcome Table*, which comes from an African-American spiritual by an anonymous author, who was likely enslaved. The earliest published version appeared in 1874. The *Welcome Table* represents a gathering place of hospitality where all are welcome, where all are accepted and supported. It symbolizes inclusivity, diversity, resilience, right relationship, and the ongoing struggle for a more just and equitable world for everyone. The *Welcome Table* encourages a sense of belonging, cooperation, and mutual support among individuals and communities, all aspects of interdependence.

Working interdependently with others requires trust, respect, communication, flexibility, empathy, cultural awareness, open-mindedness, and being a good ally. Cultivating these skills is essential as our circle of concern expands to include the Earth, which is distinct from the world created by humans.

An intriguing symbol of our interdependence with the Earth is the *Three Sisters*, a 3,000-year-old, sustainable planting technique used by tribes, including the Iroquois Confederacy, the Pueblo tribes, and the Cherokee. There



are several legends about the origin of the sisters. The Iroquois legend is part of their creation myth. According to it, Sky Woman fell from the sky and landed on Turtle Island, now called North America. She gave birth to a daughter who also became pregnant but died giving birth to twin sons. Sky Woman buried her

daughter; three sacred plants grew from her grave—corn, beans, and squash. The plants provided food to her sons and then the Iroquois. When planted together, the corn provides a natural trellis for the beans to climb, beans add nitrogen to the soil, benefiting the corn and squash, and squash helps prevent weeds and retains soil moisture.

The emphasis on interdependence by the Special Commission is Earth-centric rather than human-centric. Its covenant to "repair harm" is reminiscent of the Jewish concept, *Tikkun Olam*, meaning "repair of the world," which historically focused on addressing human suffering, social injustice, and ethical behavior within human society. Many Jews are expanding *Tikkun Olam* to address environmental challenges.

Other world religions that teach care for the Earth include Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Shintoism. Understanding their beliefs can deepen our own, as can our sixth source: "Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythm of nature." Wendell Berry writes, "The care of the Earth is our most ancient and most worthy, and after all our most pleasing responsibility." It is also our most important and most challenging responsibility.

Interdependence

While young children may not appreciate their dependence, they begin exploring and understanding their world with growing independence when they are young. Learning about the meanings of dependence and independence is important, as is exploring the reality of interdependence.

Jennifer Breheny Wallace, author of *Never Enough: When Achievement Culture Becomes Toxic — and What We Can Do About It*, writes, “Early in the semester, Mike McLaughlin, a teacher at Saint Ignatius High School in Cleveland, conducts a simple exercise with his sophomores. Take out a piece of paper, he’ll say, and make two lists: one with everything they’ve done over the past 24 hours that has contributed to their well-being and the other with everything others have done for them.

“At first, most lists show a 50-50 split: They’ve studied hard, but their parents have fed and clothed them. Then McLaughlin presses them. Who teaches and coaches you? Who encourages you through setbacks? The students gradually revise their lists. By the end of the exercise, they realize that only about 5 percent of their well-being is because of their actions and 95 percent is because of the actions of others.”

This exercise can be adapted to younger children by parents helping them create their lists. The arenas for learning about interdependence include family, friends, neighborhood, daycare, preschool, school, sports teams, Girl and Boy Scouts and other groups activities, congregation, and community. Their list can take in these as well.

At every stage of development, children can learn about interdependence and its importance. Their contributions to interdependence include helping, sharing, and cooperating with others. They can learn the value of working together and supporting each other while valuing their independence.

The above represents half of their education about interdependence. They should also learn about their interdependence with the Earth. This can

begin with pets, both enjoying their companionship and caring for them. It can then go to questions about food. Why do we need food? How do we get food to eat? The “supply” chain for a child includes parents preparing the food, stores selling the food, companies processing the food, farmers growing/harvesting the food, and sun, soil, and rain nurturing the food, which all begins with the Earth. We eat food because of the Earth. Of course, the Earth also provides the water we drink when we eat food.

Helping children learn about the interdependent web of all existence they are a part of is a crucial element in their education.

Source: Touchstones

Family Activity: *Because of...*

Because of an Acorn is by Lola M. Schaefer and Adam



Schaefer and illustrated by Frann Preston-Gannon. It shows 11 links going from an acorn to a hawk, and more. It is available on Kindle and in print. Watch a video reading at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqTDaw-zO2w>. After reading the book, involve your children in identifying links, e.g., Because of a worm, a bird or Because of a flower, a bee and Because of a bee, some honey, etc.

Family Activity: *A Sharing Song*

Hymn #402 in *Singing the Living Tradition* is a singable, simple song that is profound. It was written by two brothers who were singers and songwriters. They wrote the song in 1969. They were also cantors, which is an official religious position in a Jewish worship service who sings and leads prayers. And they were rabbis. Joseph and Nathan Segal wrote the song, *From You I Receive*. The words are, “From you I receive, to you I give, together we share, and from this we live.” Listen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBlou4G3FL0> to learn how to sign and sing the song with your children. You might want to sing this song together before eating dinner as a way of blessing all that connects each to all.

Seeking Interdependence

Stephen Covey’s seven-habits model seeks interdependence. This involves moving along a maturity continuum from dependence, the paradigm of “you” must do for me, through independence, the paradigm of “I” can do it, to interdependence, the paradigm of “we” can do more together.

Covey wrote, “It’s easy to see that independence is much more mature than dependence. Independence is a major achievement in and of itself. But independence is not supreme. Nevertheless, the ...social paradigm enthrones independence. ...Most ...self-improvement material puts independence on a pedestal....” Covey saw the emphasis on independence as “a reaction ...to having others control us, define us, use us, and manipulate us,” yet independence was “not the ultimate goal in effective living.” While interdependence is the goal, Covey acknowledged that it “is a choice only independent people can make.”

Covey’s first 3 habits help move a person from dependence to independence. They are (1.) *Be Proactive*, don’t react, anticipate and act (2.) *Begin with the End in Mind*, envision your ultimate destination and examine everything using that criterion, and (3.) *Put First Things First*, organize and execute around priorities.

Habits four, five, and six are intended to help a person move from independence to interdependence. (4) *Think Win/Win*, “is a frame of mind and heart that constantly seeks mutual benefit in all human interactions.” (5) *Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood*, begin empathetically by listening with your ears, eyes, and heart to really understand, then use this understanding, along your character, your relationship with the other person, and the logic of your presentation, i.e., ethos, pathos, and logos, to seek to be understood. (6) *Synergize*, by “opening your mind and heart ...to new possibilities, new alternatives, new options.” Synergy values differences, seeks to increase trust and cooperation, and goes beyond either/or to a third way, fourth way, etc., one that is based on interdependence.

Source: Touchstones

(Continued from page 4) **Faith and Theology** global monkey” as quickly as possible to achieve a tipping-point response to match the urgency of the environmental crisis. While we must “teach our children well,” many youth and young adults are very literate about what is happening to them and their future. The monkeys include the denialists, businesses protecting their economic interests, politicians whose power depends upon environmental gridlock, those in despair and paralyzed by eco-gloom, and those who are simply unaware.

Cosmology & Progressive

Eschatology: Systematic theology has bookends for understanding the Earth. The first bookend is traditional Cosmology, which takes creation described in Genesis literally. A liberal approach to this would focus on science beginning with the Big Bang, and it would draw Darwin into the discussion. In Genesis, God pronounced his creation good but not sacred and that creation was under human domination. The other bookend is Eschatology, the end times, and the fate of humanity and the Earth foretold in four books in the Hebrew *Tanakh* and six books in the New Testament. In the *Book of Revelation*, Christ and his followers defeat the forces of evil at the battle of Armageddon. On Judgement Day, the righteous achieve eternal bliss, and the wicked are damned to eternal punishment. This “rapture” mentality further devalues Earth and life. In *A House for Hope: The Promise of Progressive Religion for the Twenty-First Century*, Rebecca Ann Parker and John Buehrens begin their book with theological consideration of the Garden in profound reverence for the Earth. They discuss three progressive eschatologies: *Social Gospel* (“We are here to build the kingdom of God on earth”), *Universalist* (“God intends all souls to be saved,”) and a *radically realized eschatology* (“Paradise is here and now.”). Parker thoroughly describes the first two before choosing the third as the best way forward. She writes, “Radically realized eschatology offers a third way—one that holds promise, especially for those who have found idealistic

(Continued on page 8)

Living Presence

Kabir Helminski

Interdependence is a living practice. Courtesy, manners, and right action are the expression of a practice that allows brotherhood to find expression. It is most characteristic of the Way of Love.

This practice begins with respect. We can respect the carpet that is walked on, the cup that is drunk from, the candle that bears light. In times past a dervish wouldn’t “put out” a candle; he would “put it to rest.” A dervish, knowing that the word dervish also means “threshold,” always paused in remembrance before stepping over the threshold. In this respect for inanimate things is the recognition of an identity between the observer and what is observed. Although the material world is not taken as the final reality, it is considered a manifestation of the Spirit and therefore worthy of respect.



If the material world deserves our gratitude and respect, if the Sufis kiss the tea glass from which they drink, how much more respect do they owe to other creatures and beings? It has been said by Muhammad, “Humility is the foremost act of worship.” Inner selflessness manifests itself in one’s actions. In traditional circles students don’t turn their backs to a teacher, leader, or other respected person, and they do not stick their feet out directly toward another person. A thoughtful person offers a seat to any guest or older person and considers their comfort first. On this esoteric path there are certain manners to be observed, never as mere formality, but in remembrance of this fundamental respect.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/quotes/quotations/view/30089/spiritual-quotations>

Rachel Carson’s Spirit

Terry Tempest Williams

...Call it sacred rage, rage grounded in the understanding that all life is intertwined.... We can ...learn from the grace of wild things as they hold an organic wisdom that sustains peace.

Do we have the moral courage to step forward and openly questioned every law, person, and practice that denies justice toward nature?

...Rachel Carson ...dared to expose the underbelly of the chemical industry and show how it was disrupting the balance of nature. ...But perhaps Rachel Carson’s true courage lies in her willingness to align science with the sacred, to admit that her bond toward nature is a spiritual one.

... [She wrote,] “I believe that whenever we destroy beauty, or whenever we substitute something ...artificial for a natural feature of the earth, we have [hindered] ... some part of ...[our] spiritual growth.”

Rachel Carson has called us to action. [Her book,] *Silent Spring* is a social critique of our modern way of life....

...There are many forms of terrorism. Environmental degradation is one of them. We have an opportunity to shift the emphasis on ...independence to ... interdependence and redefine what acts of responsibility count as heroism. Protecting the lands we love and working on behalf of the safety of our communities ...must surely be chief among them. Perhaps this is what the idea of “homeland security” is meant to be in times of terror.



... I walked outside and sat on our back porch. The blinking bodies of fireflies were rising and falling above the grasses. They appeared as a company of code talkers flashing S.O.S. on a very dark night.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28474/patriotism-and-the-american-land>

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion:

Interdependence

Preparation: (Read *Explorations* and the questions.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “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*

Chalice Lighting: (James Vila Blake)

(In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.... This is the inter-related structure

of reality. *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Living the Questions

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. What does being dependent versus independent mean to you?
2. What does interdependence mean and how does it impact your daily life?
3. Consider the role of interdependence in personal relationships, such as friendships, family, and romantic partnerships. How does it impact these connections? How can it be strengthened?
4. In what ways can the Beloved Community cultivate interdependence? What can get in the way?
5. How can interdependence be a source of strength, resilience, and hope in times of crisis or disaster? Are there specific examples that come to mind?
6. How would you describe your relationship with the Earth?
7. What does the interdependent web of all existence mean to you?
8. What encourages/sanctions human domination of the Earth? How can activism counter this?
9. What are your concerns about environmental destruction & global warming?
10. In the face of despair about what is happening to the Earth, what gives you hope and/or what could give you hope?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person for the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together and the experience of exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice: (Elizabeth Selle Jones) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Closing Words: (Rev. Philip R. Giles) (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Earth, a Sanctuary

(Continued from page 7) **Faith and Theology** belief in progress too fragile a foundation for sustained social activism. It begins with affirming that we are already standing on holy ground. This earth—and none other—is a garden of beauty, a place of life. Neglecting it for some other imagined better place will be a self-fulfilling prophecy—it will make earth a wasteland. There is no land promised to any of us other than the land already given, the world already here.”

Environmental Liberation &

Activism: Environmental and economic injustice oppress both the Earth and the marginalized, whose interdependence multiplies their suffering due to environmental degradation. Liberation theologies are written from the perspective of the oppressed and seek justice. In this case, environmental liberation demands justice for marginalized communities and the Earth.

The Cosmos is our home, the Earth is our sanctuary, and the interdependent Web of all existence is our reality and destiny. Words misattributed to Chief Seattle, i.e., Chief Si’ahl or Sealth, from his speech in a Salish language in December 1854, are well known because of their profound and prophetic wisdom. They are in our hymnal #550, *We Belong to the Earth*, and end, “Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.” Ultimately, a Unitarian Universalist Theology of Interdependence requires urgent and sustained activism for the Earth grounded in love and hope.



Attribution for Images

Page 2: Journal, photo by 6689062 & Cloud, photo by Kanenori on Pixabay

Page 2: Giant Tree by PublicDomainPictures on Pixabay
Page 2: ubuntu-cof-610, by Sérgio Luiz Araújo Silva, July 8, 2007, (CC BY-SA 2.0), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sergioaraujo/756652757>

Page 3: Bowl, photo by Lidye on Unsplash

Page 3: Spider Web, photo by Zach Plank on Unsplash

Page 4: UU Values, image from Article II Study Commission

Page 5: Three Sisters, photo by Garlan Miles, March 25, 2021, (CC BY-SA 4.0), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Three_Sisters_4.jpg

Page 6: Acorn, photo by Marys_fotos on Pixabay

Page 7: Glass Tea Cup by NoName_13 on Pixabay

Page 7: Fireflies, photo by monicore on Pixabay

Page 8: Earth, photo by wikiImages on Pixabay