

Showing Our Roots, Sharing the Harvest¹

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18 September 2016

Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church

Opening Words

We Need One Another Adapted from Erik Walker Wikstrom

T.S. Eliot said: “What life have we, if we have not life together? There is no life not lived in community, and no community not lived in celebration and praise!”

We come together this morning because within us there is something that knows we need more than we can find in our aloneness.

We know—instinctively, in the depths of ourselves—that we need others for this journey of life even though we also guard our independence and individuality quite jealously.

So let us celebrate all that makes us unique yet also all that makes us one, and let us dream dreams of all that we can do... together.²

Reading

The Web of Life by Robert T. Weston

There is a living web that runs through us
To all the universe
Linking us each with each and through all life
On to the distant stars.
Each knows a -little corner of the world, and lives
As if this were his all.
We no more see the farther reaches of the threads
Than we see of the future, yet they're there.
Touch but one thread, no matter which;
The thoughtful eye may trace to distant lands
Its firm continuing strand, yet lose its filaments as they reach out,
But find at last it coming back to him from whom it led.
We move as in a fog, aware of self

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² <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/opening/we-need-another>

But only dimly conscious of the rest
As they are close to us in sight or feeling.
New objects loom up for a time, fade in and out;
Then, sometimes, as we look on unawares, the fog lifts
And there's the web in shimmering beauty,
Reaching past all horizons. We catch our breath;
Stretch out our eager hands, and then
In comes the fog again, and we go on,
Feeling a -little foolish, doubting what we had seen.
The hands were right. The web is real.
Our folly is that we so soon forget.³

Sermon

Showing Our Roots, Sharing the Harvest by Israel Buffardi

Have you ever experienced a sense of connection with the universe so deep and so profound that it brings you to tears?

I found connection in a humble pot of zucchini soup.

The year was 2012, and perhaps appropriately, I was living in Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love. It was a swelteringly hot summer day in mid August. I find that kind of summer heat to be inescapable, but it keeps me in the present moment. It makes me aware of every beam of sunshine, every wisp of the refreshing breeze, and every movement of my body.

The air was almost as heavy as the box of farm fresh produce I was cradling in my arms. I was walking back from the co-op where I went to collect my weekly community supported agriculture farm share. As I made my way home from the co-op, I savored the sweet vegetal bouquet of the perfectly ripe and squishy tomatoes and admired the zebra like patterns of the bright green striped zucchini skins.

On my walk home, I also walked in gratitude for the hardworking farmers who labored many long hours for this bounty I carried. When I returned home, I found myself standing in my kitchen staring into the box of lovingly grown produce, wondering how to do it justice. Instinct kicked in, and into a pot went onions, garlic, tomatoes, stock, and finally the chopped zucchini. I tossed in a Parmesan rind for good measure and set the pot to simmer and do its magic on the stovetop.

I stepped out onto my patio to reward myself with a cold glass of refreshingly crisp pinot grigio while I waited. After I finished my wine, I opened the door to reenter my kitchen,

³ <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/poetry/web-life>

when a blast of aroma washed all around me. It was incredibly familiar but I couldn't quite place it. Curious to determine the familiarity of the scent, I walked over to the stove, leaned over the pot, closed my eyes, and absorbed the familiar fragrance.

Suddenly, I was a 12-year-old boy walking into the kitchen with a fistful of basil from my grandma's garden. There she is, 4 1/2 foot tall smiling Vincenzina, standing barefoot in her salmon pink housecoat, hovering over a simmering pot of zucchini soup.

I was overcome with a well of emotion. The hair on the back of my neck stood up straight, and I felt a rush of energy enter through the crown of my head and overcome my core. I open my watery eyes back in my present day kitchen staring into the same pot of soup.

I swear I can feel a little soft hand pinching my cheek and my grandmother's voice whisper "grate the cheese, the soup's ready."

What was so moving about the aroma of a simple pot of zucchini soup? Consider this. In his book, *How to Eat*, Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh says, "a grain of rice contains the universe. Mindfulness and concentration allows us to see that this grain contains the whole world—the rain, the cloud, the Earth, time, space, farmers, everything⁴."

Taking in the aroma of that soup for me was like taking in the aroma of the universe. My grandmother passed away over ten years ago, but standing over that pot, she was still with me.

But my grandmother was not the only one with me in that pot of soup. In that pot were the photons of light that grew the zucchini plants, the droplets of rain that watered their roots, the worms that gave nutrients to the soil, the farmers who sowed the seeds, and the community volunteers at my co-op who packed and handed me my CSA box with a smiling face.

That soup connected me across space and time to reveal the interconnected web of life that sustains me. That soup revealed to me the universe as a complex interconnected web of communities of communities of communities, from the quarks and atoms that make up matter right on up to planets, stars, and galaxies. That soup revealed the universe as a multitude of diverse interrelated things intermingling with each other in a beautiful cosmic dance.

How was it that many vibrant lovingly grown ingredients wondrously came together and transmuted themselves into a harmonious new concoction, and in that concoction I saw my grandmother, space, time, rain, and sun-drenched tomato vines? In that moment, I paused and allowed myself to become present. In being present, my sensory

⁴ <http://www.parallax.org/product/how-to-eat/> Quote found on Page 30 of Book

experience of the soup brought me out of my head, into my body, and allowed me to experience a sense of ultimate connection.

In that pot of soup I saw and experienced the universe, and I sensed my place amongst that beautiful cosmic dance. In that pot of soup, I experienced love. Love for me is a glimpse of eternity, a glimpse of the essential unity of all that ever was, is, and will be. In that glimpse, I feel my oneness with all.

You could say, that I found my calling in that pot of soup. My tears were not just a reaction to a profound experience of connection; they were a call to action. What does it mean to say that I am one with all? If I am one with all, I am beholden to all.

That knowledge of interconnection calls me to set more places at the communal human table, so that everyone has the opportunity to find both their true soul food and their soul's true food. I believe that our soul's true food, true nourishment is found at the great communal table of life.

Picture life as one great communal feast, and we are all called to bring our gifts and our best selves to the table. This communal feast of interconnection is also a great illustration of what binds us together in community, a concept UU's refer to as covenant.

Think of community life as a great feast to which we are all invited. We all cultivate our own unique crops in life. At any given time, some of us might have a greater bounty to bring to the feast, but it is through mutual support that we all get fed.

A great feast requires a great bounty, but it also requires many hands to cook, set the table, serve food, wash dishes, and clean up. When we all take up responsibilities and work together, the work gets done. We each commit to bring what we can to the feast and when we bring it willfully and lovingly the feast is a delicious one!

What unique gifts do you bring to our table?

Each pair of hands is needed and contributes in a unique way to the beauty of the celebration. Healthy vibrant community happens when the unique gifts and talents of each person are welcomed, accepted and authentically valued. But we cannot all feast at the table together unless we embrace our interdependence.

Take for instance the following folktale, often called the *Parable of the Spoons*⁵. In the parable, a rabbi prays that he may be made to understand what heaven and hell are truly like. An angel appears and whisks the rabbi through beautiful golden gates to a lush green meadow. The angel tells the man this is hell, and the rabbi looks at him in

⁵ http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-08-23/features/sns-201208221330--tms--godsqudctngs-a20120823-20120823_1_remarkable-story-heaven-text

disbelief, “but it is so beautiful, the meadow, the birds chirping, the scent of a thousand sweet flowers!”

The rabbi’s mouth then begins to water as he smells the tantalizing aroma of a great feast in the castle beyond the meadow. The angel brings the rabbi to the castle and into a grand luxurious dining hall. In the dining hall is one great table set with bowls of a savory rich soup. The aroma of the soup is intoxicating.

Then the rabbi notices that sat at the table are emaciated sickly looking people, moaning and wailing with hunger. He sees that each person is holding a long spoon and is able to take soup from their bowl, but each person’s arm are splinted with wooden slats, so no-one can bend their elbows to bring the food to their mouth.

The rabbi recoils in horror and asks to leave hell and see heaven.

The angel then took the rabbi to Heaven. The rabbi is surprised to see that heaven looks almost exactly like hell. The meadow, castle, and dining rooms are just as lovely and luxurious. As he entered the dining room in heaven he could barely tell it apart from hell, until he noticed that in heaven, the people seated at the table looked healthy and happy.

They had their arms splintered in the same way as the people in hell, but they were all eating, joking and singing joyfully.

How is this you ask? In heaven, each person used their long spoon to feed the person seated across from them. The recipient of this kindness would express gratitude and then return the favor by leaning across the table to feed his benefactor

It was then that the rabbi understood. Heaven and Hell place us in the same circumstances and conditions. What makes the difference is how we treat each other. In the parable, the basic tools and food people had were identical. The people who could not acknowledge the communal nature of the feast had created a hell for themselves. But those who realized their interdependence with one another sought to work together and they created a heaven.

We can create our own heaven’s feast right here on Earth, right here in our community by remembering the sacred power of connection and being in right relationship. I believe that we have the power to unite and sustain ourselves as we strive to foster just community that is well nourished, body, mind, and soul.

Close your eyes and lean in.

Can you take in the aroma of interconnection with me?
Can you smell the fragrant steaming bowl of zucchini soup set before you?
Can you smell the floral sweet basil, the savory tomatoes?

Now look across from you and into the eyes of your hungry dining companion.

Will you welcome them at the table by extending your long spoon outward to feed them?

The soup is portioned. We are all set together at one human table.

Let's work together to make our feast a heaven right here on Earth. Bon appetit!

Closing Words

Universal Rhythm by Israel Buffardi

My friends, when you go from here know that our hearts are always in a holy place, for they are always connected to one other.

Know that deep down, they beat in one universal rhythm.

May we each find the sacred space to hear it.