

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Silver City

Order of Service

Sunday 28 December 2003

"Respect for the Interdependent Web of Life "

Presenter: The Rev. Rabiya Lila Forest

Moderator: Melanie Chifari

OPENING MUSIC "Icarus" Paul Winter Consort

WELCOME Melanie

OPENING WORDS/CHALICE LIGHTING Rabiya

As we light this chalice let us open our awareness and our hearts to the whole web of life in which we live and move and have our being

JOYS AND CONCERNS Melanie

SINGING THE CHILDREN OUT "Go Now In Peace"

ANNOUNCEMENTS Melanie

OFFERING "Wolf Eyes" - a lament for earth's creatures Paul Winter Consort

READING excerpt from Chief Seattle's Message (language made inclusive) Rabiya

What is humanity without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, people would die from a great loneliness of spirit. For whatever happens to the beasts soon happens to the human. All things are connected.

You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of our grandfathers and grandmothers. So that they will respect the land, tell your children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin. Teach your children what we have taught our children, that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth. If people spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves.

This we know. The earth does not belong to humanity; humanity belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected.

Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of earth. We do not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.

SONG "The Sun at High Noon" #14

Today, as we near the close of the year, we come to the final reflection in this year's series on the Unitarian Universalist Principles. This one is quite special, because it arose spontaneously from the floor of the General Assembly in 1984. This meeting came at the end of a long process involving all the congregations of the UUA, by which the principles were hammered out in consensus style. Six principles finally came to the General Assembly. And the last one was proposed from the floor of that meeting and was adopted, along with the other six, virtually unanimously. That seventh principle says "We the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of life of which we are a part."

Respect is a very powerful and interesting word for me. It can mean anything from polite behavior towards one's elders, to obeying rules and regulations, to honoring something deeply with the thoughts of one's mind, the words of one's mouth, and the actions of one's being. I believe it is this latter all-encompassing form of respect that we are called to by the Seventh Principle.

What does it mean to respect the web of life? Does it mean that we can never take any life? That would certainly put the Seventh Principle on a collision course with the widespread commitment of UUs nationwide to support freedom of reproductive choice. And it would mean that if we follow this principle, we would all soon starve to death. Life must feed on life if it is to continue.

No, I would maintain that respect for life in this sense is an attitude. One does not take life lightly. A thoughtful woman who finds herself with an unwanted pregnancy will think and feel deeply into all aspects of her situation, including what would be best for the child-to-be, her family, and herself. Only then will she decide whether or not to terminate the pregnancy. This is acting with respect.

And each of us has to make choices every day about what we will eat. It's very easy to go unconscious about the sources of our food; we can

get virtually anything edible neatly wrapped in plastic at the supermarket, and never give a thought to where or what it came from.

Among those of us who take this principle seriously, some of us may choose to be vegan, for health or ethical reasons, not wanting to eat food that has come from the taking of animal life, or from the products of animals.

Some of us may choose to be vegetarian, from the belief that eating eggs and dairy (potential life and the food for the young) does not violate our commitment to respect the web of life, but that the actual taking of animal life in order to eat is a violation of that commitment, while the taking of vegetal life is not.

Others may feel that no matter what we eat, we are taking life, whether animal or vegetable.

But for all of us, what matters is that we remain aware of the sources of our food (the animals, the plants, the soil, the water, the sunlight, the sea, and the people who do the work of raising and processing and transporting and selling it). And that we pause before we eat to honor all of these, and feel and express, whether silently or aloud, our gratitude.

This same principle of thoughtful consideration before the taking of life also applies to war. There are some who may feel that no war is ever justifiable, others who feel that it should be a last resort, arrived at only after trying every other means of disarming a threat to life and the quality of life, and others who see it as a tool of foreign policy. And how much more difficult it is to remain aware of the cost, every hour, every day, in the course of war! The killing of human beings by human beings is a terrible thing. What can we do but pray, and to make our feelings known if we believe that a war is unjustified?

In the arena of this seventh principle, there is another kind of war being waged on our planet now, one that has been going on for millennia. But its disastrous effects are only now becoming obvious. And that is the wanton destruction of life and the pollution of the elements that has been

and is occurring as a by-product of the desire to improve the standard of living for people and to accommodate the growing numbers of people that is a direct result of improving the standard of living. The trouble is, that the waste products we are producing are seriously fouling our own nest as well as the nests of all the other creatures.

It's time for us to grow up as a species and put limits on ourselves in order to save the earth. I see the human race as being in its adolescence, used to being taken care of by its parents (the sun and the earth), and enthralled and preoccupied with its own individuality. Just as an adolescent may begin to realize that he/she must acknowledge and respect the rights and beings of others in order to live a balanced life, so some in the far-flung human family are beginning to wake up. Others are refusing to face facts and counting on more and better technologies to solve environmental crises. And still others are so hard pressed to simply stay alive that they have no room in their minds or their lives for such considerations.

So what to do? Even if we are very aware of the scope of the threat of impending disaster, there is very little action that is in our direct control and capability. This can and often does lead to frustration, anger, fear, and hopelessness.

I believe that the answer is, as it is in most everything, in consciousness. We are called upon to walk in balance. We must live, and in our circumstances, that sometimes means behaving unecologically, whether we like it or not. When I first moved to Silver City from San Francisco, where everything possible to recycle was picked up at my door every week, I was shocked at the quantity of material I had to simply put in the trash, destined for the land fill. But there wasn't another viable choice.

We have to find the balance that feels right to us, in the quiet of our own consciences, between living our daily lives with a modicum of comfort and beauty, and the using up of resources and the polluting of the air and water. It is impossible for us to live entirely purely, with only beneficent effects on our environment; such is the nature of the large-scale systems we have created and have come to depend on.

It's easy to blame large corporations for environmental degradation, and indeed there's plenty of room for blame there, but we must open our eyes and acknowledge that we are the consumers of the goods they produce. Some of these goods, we can choose to forego, and others are necessary for a healthy and balanced life.

What a difficult line to walk!

So what about this consciousness thing? My life view is that it's how we think and feel about things, how aware we are, that makes the difference. We need to find that balance point between ecological living and material necessity, and live by it. We need to live as simply as we can, whatever that means to us. We need to stay aware of the big picture, and to use our power as citizens, individually and in groups, to influence public policy. We need to pay attention every day to who and what is sacrificed that we may live. And we need to be enormously grateful for all that we receive.

Maybe these efforts are not enough. Maybe the human family will have to suffer huge consequences, in our lifetimes or that of our children. Maybe we'll foul the whole planet to such an extent that we make ourselves extinct, along with the millions of other species that have fallen prey to this weird state of the world.

But I believe that this planet is an extraordinary school for the development of holistic consciousness, and that there is wise, loving, and unseen intelligence with an interest in keeping it open. Amazing things do happen. But I think we will only qualify for such aid if we do our part by staying conscious, by taking whatever actions are possible and practical, by living our principles in the choices we make, and by being truly and deeply grateful every day. So may we always be.

Discussion.

SONG “‘Tis A Gift To Be Simple” #16

CLOSING WORDS/CHALICE EXTINGUISHING

Rabiya

As we extinguish this light, may we take in our hearts a burning love for all of life, and may that lovelight transform us.