

All Souls Church Unitarian

Covenant Group Guide

April 2016

“Interdependence”

One could not pluck a flower without troubling a star.

Francis Thompson

Alfred North Whitehead once pointed out that when we really understand the biological and physiological functioning of the human body and the behavior of the molecules which constitute it, it becomes impossible to entertain the notion of a discontinuity between the the body and its external environment. Living on this mountain, I can't help but realize that my body is completely integrated with the body of the mountain. Every time I drink the water that spills out of it into the mountain stream, the cells of my body assimilate it. My body is now largely composed of the water that comes from this mountain. We grow our food in the mountain's soil. The plants start out as a single seed, and, by taking water, light, and minerals from the mountain, eventually manifest themselves as fruits, vegetables, flowers. Thus, we take the mountain into our very being; we consume it. Our septic system even returns our waste to the mountain. How could we feel separate from it?

John Daido Looi, *Three Gates of Zen*

Lack of awareness of the basic unity of organism and environment is a serious and dangerous hallucination.

Alan Watts

When we try to pick anything out by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.

John Muir

The salt of the sea is in our blood; the calcium of the rocks is in our bones; the genes of ten thousand generations of stalwart progenitors are in our cells. The sun shines and we smile. The winds rage and we bend before them. The blossoms open and we rejoice. Earth is our long home.

Stewart W. Holmes

A Declaration of Interdependence (www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzZ1Gl5UfE0), a video by Let It Ripple: Mobile Films for Global Change.

How Can I?

The patience of a small brown spider
reweaving a web from its gut
for the third time this week
admonishes me.

This time I will let its grey net
hang still from mirror to shelf.
A spider too must make its living
as it can.

My Abyssinian Puck inserts himself
between monitor and keyboard
saying pay attention to me, not
email. I am alive.

Lover with almond shaped pale
green eyes like newly opened
birch leaves, how can I continue
to resist you?

Surrounded by creatures with
their own agendas, feed me,
leave my house alone, don't
step on me.

I make my awkward way balancing
my own and others' needs,
a clumsy waitress hoisting
an overloaded tray.

Marge Piercy, at eco-poetry.org

A group of people are sitting in a boat. One takes an axe and begins chopping at the floor. The others cry in horror, 'What are you trying to do?' The man answers, 'What business is it of yours? I am doing this to my part of the boat!' Vayikra Rabba 4:6

One way of understanding the toxins in our water, rising inequality and a destabilized climate, is as a crisis of fragmentation. It is because we have lost the belief and understanding that the world is connected by a complex web of relationships: human, God, neighbor, land. In other words, it is because we see cheap food products, industrial agriculture, human health, and the disappearance of monarch butterflies as separate issues that we find ourselves in this bind.

The iconoclastic philosopher Ivan Illich, the poet farmer Wendell Berry and many others have critiqued the culture of fragmentation, specialization and commodification in which we live. As we hand over large parts of our lives to specially trained professionals we become passive consumers of food products, entertainment, education, and spiritual programming. We lose touch with the trees and birds, with our own learning and personal growth, and with primary experiences like harvesting and cooking food, singing, and teaching ourselves and others new skills. When we grow or cook food, gather community in prayer or song, or learn to use hand tools we become empowered to make connections.

Shamu Fenyvesi Sadeh, published by the Jewish Peoplehood Foundation

For Reflection and Discussion

1. How do you experience interdependence?
2. What gets in the way of your awareness of interdependence? Are independence and interdependence in conflict? Are you guided more by one than the other?
3. Has there been a shift in the way you experience interdependence? How would your life be different if you intentionally cultivated awareness of interdependence and lived by your own personal "declaration of independence"?
4. How does your engagement with All Souls relate to your awareness of interdependence?

Prepared for All Souls Covenant Groups by Mary Beth Hatem