

**OUR DEAD TREE
&
THE WEB OF LIFE**

August 11, 2013

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My training is in the field of biological science. When I started thinking about a topic I felt comfortable with, or a topic I thought I knew something about, or even a topic I thought you might be interested in it was logical to gravitate toward the biological end of things. What better topic than our 7th principle dealing with the interdependent web of life?

Annapolis - Web of life Children's Program

Back in the late 80's or early 90's the RE Director at the Annapolis Church asked me to do a lesson with all the kids regarding the web of life and its meaning. I thought it would be easy and agreed. With no research...I gathered some bugs and a bag of treasures and started a conversation with the kids. I talked about how some of the organisms were dependent upon others for food, mimicry, and shelter. I discussed how most of these organisms were good and not ugly critters to be swatted or stepped on.

This was my world and "my" simple view of the web of life.

I thought...this could be an eye opener for some of the folks in UFR.

I had visions of talking about the old dead silver maple out there. At first glance it is just a dead tree. But, on closer examination, I could point out the trumpet vine growing up the trunk...the foliage on top like a hat...the vine produces red flowers that attract ruby throated humming birds that pollinate the flowers to produce new seed that feed a weevil that is eaten by a wood pecker that has a bird louse on its wing feathers...

Or, I could be more basic and start with the

SUN - Chlorophyll - Photosynthesis - Soybean crop - Mexican bean beetle - *Pediobius foveolatus* (a tiny parasitic wasp that feeds on the Mexican bean beetle larvae) - beans - soy oil - bio fuel - chicken feed - Chicken tenders, wing dings, and chicken feet (exports to Asia) Chicken noodle soup that "cures" a cold! And of course...this string could go on and on.

Let's see...White tailed deer - way up the chain. Black legged deer ticks - Lyme Disease - sore joints - antibiotics - research - doctors - medicine - health - work - material goods - transportation - space travel....How did I go from deer to space travel?

Well... Things are interdependent and connected.

With these strings pick any one and create your own chain of interdependence.

Doctors – sickness- death – morticians – churches- ministers- bereavement counselors...

Or chicken feet to Asia...we need a mode of transportation, we need people and machines to manufacture that mode of transportation, we need fuel, we need investors...perhaps you...supporting the work of this very Fellowship!

But let's get back to the dead tree that feeds wood boring beetle larvae that open an area under the dying bark for wood destroying fungi and later a harborage for ants, cockroaches, spiders, millipedes, centipedes, and a host of other organisms. We have at least six species of wasps and hornets that use the wood to construct their "paper" nests – All good guys when they provide biological control by catching other crop destroying insects to feed their developing larvae...but bad guys when they get annoyed and in defending their nest sting you...causing an allergic reaction, hives, and even anaphylaxis and a death.

Oyster floats - cradle the growing oyster within the stream of phytoplankton and zooplankton...the shells the home of sand worms, scuds, and small crabs...barnacles – sea squirts - blue crabs – minnows- grass shrimp – algae - long filamentous algae on which the hooded mergansers feed on in the fall and winter and muskrats in the spring and summer.

My lesson plan was taking shape! I had many examples of MY interpretation of the web of life.

This would be an informative interesting learning experience for many of you.

How to proceed???

We might close our eyes and sit in silence for several minutes in deep concentrated thought. Then in Quaker fashion, when so moved, you could in a soft voice – but loud enough for others to hear name an organism...then someone else would give the name of a dependent organism.

We could play a game. I would start with a statement about the tree. The next person would make a related connecting statement. A person would be eliminated if they failed to make a connecting statement. The game would continue until there was one person left.

Or we could each pick a placard with a name on it like mouse, or hawk, or flea, or dog biscuit, or Indian meal moth...we would line up in order of the "food chain."

In reality, the 7th principle also includes us...the human species...that's fine...I agree with that...BUT the dead tree...ahh, it gives me great pleasure to let my eyes wander from the service to the out of doors...to ponder that dead tree...I wonder what else is inside that old tree? The butterfly garden...

From the historical perspective, as I'm sure you all know the Unitarian and Universalist Denominations merged in 1961. The original principles of the new association were six in number. They were unlike the current principles and did not include reference to "the web of life." The committee structure was strong – as it has always been among UU's and so it came to be that in 1985 a new set of Principles and Purposes was adopted which did include the seventh principle "Respect for the interdependent web of all life of which we are a part." Or in other words..."We care for the earth."

There were amendments made in 1995 and a review started in 2006

So what does that Principle really mean???

So, if I was to talk about the 7th UU Principle, I thought it best to go to the UUA web site and get really familiar with what the UUA was saying about it.

My concept of the web of life was shattered!!!
My dead tree was gone!!!

See for yourself! Go to the web site
UUA.ORG

Beliefs and Principles
Seven Principles

Examples of The 7th principle in action...

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE... STANDING ON THE SIDE OF LOVE FOR THE
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE....

SEND A LETTER TO THE EPA about
environmental justice issues in your community.

SIDE BAR Green Sanctuary
 Ethical Eating
 Climate Change
 Dependence on Fossil Fuels
 Access to Essential Resources
 Sustainable and Local Economy

SOCIAL Justice

RESPECT as ...to show honor or high esteem for...to show consideration for...Avoid interfering with or intruding upon. Now, I like those words. And all I wanted to consider was the web of life I envisioned in the dead tree.

INTERFERING WITH THE WEB OF LIFE...

MACRO

Google News on Monday July 22nd reported a theory that 5 MILLION years ago there was a massive ice sheet melt that caused the sea level to rise 65 feet. So if we go back millions of years...is it possible that the edge of the continental shelf was the coastline????

MICRO

FEEDING BIRDS

COSEQUENSES???

Enjoyment....helping them survive....attracting mice and Indian meal moths ...in NH BEARS

Humming birds: Take your feeders in so the birds will migrate...OR leave them out to feed wayward west coast humming birds that are out of their normal flyway???

I'm off target!

Back to our web of life...Think of a scale...perfectly balanced...both pans at exactly the same level...and what happens when we add to one pan??? Or, take away from the other??? You all will say..."We are out of balance!"

And...in my opinion, that is where we are today...out of balance.

Perhaps you read the article by Jeffrey Lockwood about Adaptation and Defiance in the summer 2013 UU WORLD. Part of his message was that due to a warming of the climate the native spruce bark beetle in British Columbia HAS GONE WILD. It once infested about a square mile of trees...today it has spread to over 1300 square miles. The warmer seasons have allowed the beetle to have two generation per year as opposed to their normal one.

CONSEQUENSES

Thriving beetles - Dead trees – no pine seed - declining Clark's nutcracker – thriving miller moths - Grizzly bears – eating them and expanding their range.... It is a good article and worth going back to.

When one population crashes the hare and lynx, crabs, rockfish, oysters, you name it...we talk about a natural cycle – perhaps exacerbated by humans...but a natural cycle.

Then why is it that we continue to increase the human population??? Our population has been held in check for most of recorded time by limited resources, weather, wars, and most notably by disease. Now we have improved nutrition, break the disease cycles, and keep people alive for far too long.

On That Note Let's switch gears and move from non-humans to humans –
Are you independent? Where do you fit into this thing we refer to as the “Web of Life?”

I recall sitting in a classroom, or a training session and the instructor saying...”now clear your brain...I thought how can you not think of anything??? So my vision has always been a clean chalk board in the front of the room.

Well my vision of independence is the person who moves to the wilds of Alaska – builds a cabin and lives off the land. But guess what? This person needs saws, an ax, a gun, bullets, a canoe, clothes, pots and pans...likely an airlift in and over time needs to be resupplied. Sure, this person may hole up for a year or more but likely less...then will need to use their “gift card” to be resupplied...not as independent as the movie script might depict!

To get down and dirty, up close and personal – let's look at ourselves.

Most of us are sustained by rather lucrative government or industry pensions, social security, 401- K's, lucky investments, and perhaps an inheritance. Okay, so we have the cash to provide shelter, food, clothes, medical services, transportation, and the list goes on. But, can you do it alone? If you have not figured it out or do not know the answer I'll shock you by saying NO YOU CAN'T!!!

First, as of today, we need the electronic systems that transfer those necessary funds to our accounts! What was your thought when told “I can't help you now...our system is down?”

We depend on someone to build our shelter...or at least the materials and tools to build it. We depend on others to produce our food and deliver it to the area we live in. We depend on others to make our clothing...and even if I still have one of these patterns, I need the needles, thread, and scissors...We need expertise to diagnose and recommend treatment for our aches and pains. We can walk, but not very far...with mechanical transportation we obviously depend on others for the devices and fuel.

The interdependent web of life is a chain of events – links - Like the dead tree scenario, if we remove one link...what happens? Perhaps we can adapt...adjust our strategy...move left or right...regroup...and carry on. However, if we can't adapt, we may be dead in the water.

To sum up and conclude, the 7th Principle...”Respect for the interdependent web of life of which we are all a part”...conceived by well-meaning thoughtful UU's back in 1985 may well have very different connotations to many different people. To me, I always thought it had to do with the dead tree – all those interconnected things I assumed

most people were unaware of. Perhaps I really did not give enough people the benefit of doubt!

The bottom line is we must be aware that our actions – whatever they are have ramifications.

A smile begets a smile...I smile you smile and go home and pat your dog...I frown and insult you and you are upset and go home and kick the dog.

For us this morning, I'd like to think I've given a few examples of the succession of events that naturally occur in nature. I also hope you have a better appreciation of these event chains. WE must realize that we personally can disrupt these sequences and "Break the Chain." Perhaps to the detriment of mankind, the extinction of species, oppression of neighbors or folks we have not yet met by ignoring pleas for assistance or turning to look the other way...

BUT on a positive end point, if we think holistically about the respect for the interdependent web of life, we can act to protect our ecosystem...or at least minimize the damage we do to it. Perhaps for the betterment of mankind we can take actions to ensure social justice, reduce poverty, increase literacy, and reduce conflict.

And perhaps stabilize the human population!!!

Jeff Lockwood's salient question was:
We can adapt to the consequences of climate change

AND I'LL INSERT adapt to breaks in the web of life...
But should we?