

## **LIVING THE DREAM**

*(Not that Dream, the Dream of a Better World)*

If we lived mindfully aware of our 7 Unitarian Universalist Principles, we would be doing our best to live the dream of a better world. The Principles are not a perfect and complete statement of our religious beliefs, but they reflect our concerns about justice, compassion, equity, respect, democratic processes, encouragement for our journeys, and the hope of a better world. Our 7 Principles would have us live a very different dream than that promoted in all the commercials and ads telling us we need a hot new car, a tough new truck, a big new house, an elegant new kitchen, and all the newest fanciest appliances, gadgets and electronic devices. The Principles also lead us to be aware of the rest of the world, not just our own land. It is a different kind of dream, one that is inclusive, accepting, and respectful that comes out of our UU Principles. It is a dream of global justice and compassion. Living the American Dream has come at great cost to the rest of the world and to the earth itself. How do we balance our comfortable place in American society with our commitment to living the dream of our UU Principles?

Jesus and Buddha were concerned about the poor, outcastes, those who were having a tough time in society. They and other religious exemplars and heroes reached out to care for those who lacked food and shelter. In our society we treat the poor as if they are criminals in what too often is self-fulfilling prophecy. We leave some people feeling as if they have no other option than to lie, cheat and steal to get by. When the number of poor, unemployed, and disabled persons became too large for churches and aid organizations to deal with, much of the responsibility was given to various levels of government. In recent years, by vilifying and blaming the poor for their limitations, there has been an ongoing assault on aid programs which have been relabeled as entitlements.

It is a continuing battle for those with the least education and fewest advantages to receive a living wage, while Christian moralists worry about abortions and gay marriage and do very little for the poor and outcasts, for those who work but struggle to get by and those who due to physical and mental limitations are not able to work. Even the Pope got into trouble recently for calling Catholics to focus on the broader message of Jesus rather than on worrying only about abortion and gay marriage all the time!

Amazingly over all the years I have worked in ministry and social services, I have seen few of the poor people reputedly gaming the system or taking advantage of it. Far more frequently I have seen or heard about the wealthy or those better off taking advantage of the poor in rentals, work situations, loans, and limited availability of affordable stores for shopping. The myth of all the poor people gaming the system has been told so often that masses of people have come to believe it and use it as an excuse to cut taxes and programs to save more for themselves. Like other big lies, that myth has enough truth to be believable, and yet in the context of people's lives, it is easily shown to be a myth.

International relations have been shaped by similar myths, especially of the abilities of people in the developing world. Consider how often you have heard about darkest Africa or about the evils of Communist countries or non-western kingdoms or dictatorships. Our ideas and prejudices are often shaped by unexamined language describing groups and nations of which we know precious little. Too often, to be different in itself is to be bad. We and most of the Western world, from whence many of our ancestors came, are good places, while the rest of the world, unfamiliar to too many of us, is seriously lacking, ignorant and evil.

To live by our Unitarian Universalist Principles, we need to uncover the truths beyond the myths and lies, about people, nations, and the universe in which we live. Nobody is all bad, that's what the first Principle tells us, that in each person we are to look for their *inherent worth and dignity*. There is something in each person to respect.

Our second and third principles remind us to accept and encourage each person and to deal with people with honesty, fairness and love. We are to affirm and promote *Justice, equity and compassion in human relations*; and we are to practice *Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations*.

The Principles also remind us that our journeys are not about collecting the most stuff, buying the coolest new toys, waiting in line for days to get the newest i-phones. Our journeys are about spiritual growth and philosophical truth and discovering a sense of transcendent meaning. Our fourth principle calls us to a *free and responsible search for truth and meaning*.

Our fifth principle calls us to affirm and promote *the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large*. Too often we see people acting without thinking, putting their own interests before all else or following the herd or some loudmouthed fear-monger rather than using their own brains or listening to their own conscience to sort through whether an idea, program or decision is good or bad. Rarely do Unitarian Universalist congregations or groups make a decision without examining it in painstaking detail! I can not count the number of times I have watched a congregation heatedly debate an action or decision at great length before approving it unanimously! We are all about the democratic process in its grittiest bare-fisted basics! Younger generations of UUs are not quite as enthusiastic about the never-ending debates, however!

Our sixth principle is *the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all*. We claim Presidents Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and John Quincy Adams and many of the founders of our nation who were not just patriots but Unitarians. The recognition of human rights and civil rights for all persons has been at the core of our religious beliefs since the establishment of Unitarianism and Universalism in the early 19<sup>th</sup> and late 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries respectfully.

The humanism that developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century in both sides of our religious heritage came as a counter to extraordinary other worldly claims being brought into religion by early fundamentalists who saw in science and reason an enemy to rally against. The rational perspectives of our religious forebears led many to focus on humanity and the human condition rather than a deity whose existence could not be proven and an increasingly arrogant and unrealistic branch of Christianity which was denying the discoveries of natural science, history, archaeology and other empirical views of the world to promote their view of God.

Unitarian Universalists have always had a progressive view of humanity, believing that human beings are continuing to learn and grow and shape a better world. Our seventh Principle calls us to affirm and promote *respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part*. We are not uniquely separate from and privileged above the rest of the living universe, we are a part of that universe. We are currently at the top of the food chain, but it might only take one nuclear exchange or a few more decades of environmental degradation due to air and water pollution to leave another species in our place. The cockroaches have been around far longer than we have, perhaps their turn is coming!

The Seventh Principle has long been a favorite of many of us, for it recognizes the value of the rest of the universe, reminding us that we have a responsibility for the rest of the living beings of earth and any that may be found beyond the earth. Over the years, the Seventh Principle project morphed into the UU Earth Ministry Program, which itself has gone through many changes over the last several years. The overall intent of the Earth Ministry program has been to encourage UUs to focus on ecological concerns through worship, programs, and efforts to lessen the carbon footprints of UU individuals and congregations.

Though our credentials as an American religious tradition are more substantial than most contenders, many of the religions currently influencing national policy are far larger and in many of their beliefs much narrower. We have long been out of the limelight in this country's religious spectrum, and yet the vision of human progress that we offer is

exactly what is needed to insure the future of our nation and humanity. Our Principles ought to be the Principles of our nation and all religious communities. Many religious traditions and many people generally could accept what we have to offer far more readily than the principles and values currently controlling votes to effectively deny health care to millions of people, insure that the wealthy and corporate persons remain in control of our society, and limiting the voice of millions of people in this country and billions around the world. And our values and Principles are not just revolutionary, they are evolutionary! They have evolved out of the best statements of religious and civic leaders going back to Jesus and beyond and forward through U.S. history and the history of Unitarian and Universalism. And they were democratically enacted after long and at times intense debate! In time they will be replaced by newer statements that better speak to the world of that day, but for now they are the best statement of our Principles available.

In a future sermon, I will address the six sources that go hand in hand with the Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism and the attempt made a few years back to change and update both the sources and principles!

For now, I want to go back to the question of balancing our lives with the Principles of Unitarian Universalism! Which dream do we support? Which dream is worth our lives? Too many people die within a year of retiring. Too many people set aside family commitments and focus their lives to get ahead only to discover that some unforeseen health problem or bad investment decision leaves them lonely and broke in their elder years.

I want a dream that deals with ultimate meaning and universal truth, not one that can be knocked down by a big wind or wave or fire. I want to reach the end of life feeling that I made a difference in the lives of people I touched, that I left the world a bit better for the things I did and the people with whom I spent my time. I would like to see the world when I retire, but I have seen a lot of beautiful places and met a lot of wonderful people along the pathways of my journey so far. I hope I have a lot of years left, but if not, I really have few regrets.

I would like to see the world less focused on accumulating money and more focused on providing a decent quality of life for everyone. I would like to see a national healthcare program because Obamacare doesn't go far enough and I would like to see the restoration and expansion of the human safety net to make sure that nobody has to be homeless or hungry in this country or around the world. I would like to see everyone who works receive a living wage and everyone who can work full time given a full-time job. I don't mind incentives for those who will work hard, but they should give back much more voluntarily or via taxation rather than amass the unbelievable fortunes that some currently hold. What taxes would Jesus put in place?

Change comes slowly, and we should enjoy our lives, but the dream of acquisition does not really fit our Principles nor our religion. I challenge you as I challenge myself to better live the dream of a better, more just and compassionate world!

So May it Be. Amen!