

Those Who Take Care of Us
Sunday, March 27, 2022
Tri-County Unitarian Universalists
Summerfield, FL
Rev. Cynthia A. Snively

As I began preparing the services for this month in which our theme is care I found the quote from Robin Wall Kimmerer in her book, Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom that I used in the blurb for this week. Kimmerer says, "In some Native languages the term for plants translates to 'those who take care of us.'" As I read that my first thought was that of course they do. What would we eat without plants? Even if your favorite food is a beef steak you would not have it without plants. How many of our medicines would not exist except for the plants from which they are derived? How many plants are in the fibers of our clothes? How much wood is in the structure of our homes? I do not often think to thank plants for my health, well-being and comfort, but every day they care for me.

But then the plants would not survive without we mammals either. They need the carbon dioxide we breathe out as we need the oxygen that they do. Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh wrote in his book Living Buddha, Living Christ, "The Buddhist term is *vipasyana* (insight, or looking deeply). "Looking deeply" means observing something or someone with so much concentration that the distinction between observer and observed disappears. The result is insight into the true nature of the object. When we look into the heart of a flower, we see clouds, sunshine, minerals, time, the earth, and everything else in the cosmos in it. Without clouds, there could be no rain, and there would be no flower. Without time, the flower could not bloom. In fact, the flower is made entirely of non-flower elements; it has no independent, individual existence. It 'Inter-is' with everything else in the universe." Thich Nhat Hanh concludes that, "Interbeing is a new term, but I believe it will be in the dictionary soon because it is such an important word. When we see the nature of interbeing, barriers between ourselves and others are dissolved, and peace, love, and understanding are possible. Whenever there is understanding, compassion is born."

There is no part of me that is not made up of elements that are not me. I myself inter am with all. I am cells from my mother and cells from my father back generations. I am the food I have eaten and the water I have drunk. I am the air I have breathed. I am the thoughts my teachers instilled in me. I am the whole of this planet earth which gives me sustenance. For all that care what will I give back?

The Buddhist Stephanie Kaza of Green Gulch Farm makes these vows.

"Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to kill.

"Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to take what is not given.

"Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to engage in abusive relationships.

“Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to speak falsely or deceptively.

“Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to harm self or others through poisonous thought or substance.

“Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to dwell on past errors.

“Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to speak of self separate from others.

“Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to possess anything or form of life selfishly.

“Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to harbor ill will toward any plant, animal or human being.

“Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to abuse the great truth Of the Three Great Treasures.”

The three treasures of Buddhism are the teacher, the Buddha; the teachings; and the sangha, the community with which one practices. If you like Kaza’s vows but don’t resonate with Buddhism you might substitute your own faith treasures.

I like her repetition of “Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine...” Our lives so deeply intertwine that I would not exist without you, without the plants, without the animals, without the minerals, without the sun and all the other stars. Kimmerer said, “In some Native languages the term for plants translates to ‘those who take care of us.’” Kaza titled her book, [The Attentive Heart: Conversations With Trees.](#) From the tiniest blade of grass to the giant sequoia, from the ant to the stars, the whole of the universe is taking care of us.

Unitarian Universalist minister, the Rev. Robert T. Weston wrote,

“Out of the stars in their flight, out of the dust of eternity,
here have we come,
Stardust and sunlight,
mingling through time and through space.

“Out of the stars have we come,
up from time.
Out of the stars have we come.

“Time out of time before time
in the vastness of space,
earth spun to orbit the sun,
Earth with the thunder of mountains newborn,
the boiling of seas.

“Earth warmed by sun, lit by sunlight;
This is our home;
Out of the stars have we come.

“Mystery hidden in mystery,
back through all time;
Mystery rising from rocks
in the storm and the sea.

“Out of the stars, rising from rocks
and the sea,
kindled by sunlight on earth,
arose life.

“Ponder this thing in your heart,
life up from sea:
Eyes to behold, throats to sing,
mates to love.

“Life from the sea, warmed by sun,
washed by rain,
life from within, giving birth,
rose to love.

“This is the wonder of time;
this is the marvel of space;
out of the stars swung the earth;
life upon earth rose to love.

“This is the marvel of life,
rising to see and to know;
Out of your heart, cry wonder:
sing that we live.”

We live. We live but only because of the stars and the sea. We live in order to love, to enjoy. Peter Hughes quotes Edvard Grieg stating things from a theist's perspective, "Where does one sense God's greatness more than in the roaring of the sea? ...And how beautiful it is that he has endowed his creatures with powers by which they not only can enjoy [the world] but can even create works of art that are echoes of the feelings about God's greatness which are planted in the human breast."

Even in times of struggle our interconnections can be what sustains us. Peter Hughes says of Grieg, "Sickly from his youth, brooding on the passing of his baby daughter and of his parents, Grieg worked out his peace with death through his Unitarian faith, by connecting himself with the Norwegian people and their mountainous landscape, by putting his faith in nature as a whole, and through the life-affirming exuberance of his music."

I said in our window dedication that it was Muriel Bingley's husband who first obtained our stained-glass windows and that they hung in the Bingley home before her husband passed away and before Muriel

moved to Florida. Though she had nowhere to put them here, she still brought them with her. I suggested that they had become a symbol of love and home for her, and that when she gave them to this congregation, she gave more than windows, she gave something that would become a symbol of love and a home for all of us. She cared for us in making the gift, and we offered care for her in receiving it.

When we begin to name all those who take care of us, how many will that list include? How many will we care for in return in our thanks for our interconnections?

To me it seems only music, art, poetry or prayer is sufficient response, and perhaps music, art and poetry are prayer.

Walt Whitman wrote,

"I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars.
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of a wren,
And the tree-toad is a chef-d'oeuvre for the highest,
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,
And the cow crunching with depress'd head surpasses any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels."

For all whom, for all that takes care of us. You are a part of us. We are a part of you. Thank you.