

## **6<sup>th</sup> December 2020 – ‘Finding Common Ground: The Seven UU Principles’**

led by Rev Kate Whyman

### **GATHERING MUSIC American Tune, Paul Simon**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gs-BK\\_BxY2g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gs-BK_BxY2g)

### **WELCOME AND CHALICE LIGHTING**

Hello! A huge welcome back to church, to those of you who are here. It's so nice to see you and to have some company here, to share this beautiful physical space with you. And welcome, too, to those of you joining us online. It's good to share this time across the ether with you, too. Together we each contribute to making this a sacred space for us all.

I'll start by lighting our chalice this morning, as a symbol of our free religious faith.

*If you have a candle you might like to light yours with me now.*

Some words from Dawn Buckle...

We open ourselves to worship today.

May the peace of this house bring us calm.

May the joy of this hour make our hearts glad.

May the challenge of this hour awaken our courage.

May the communion of this hour confirm our togetherness.

Our theme this morning is 'Finding common ground', and we'll be looking at the Seven Principles drawn up by our spiritual cousins in the United States, the Unitarian Universalists (UUs), to see if we can learn anything from them. You may be wondering, why now? Well, tomorrow is the beginning of a week-long celebration called 'Chalica', which is an invitation to focus on each of the Seven Principles as part of Advent.

### **HYMN: 142 Shining through the universe (Purple)**

Shining through the universe

runs the golden thread;

woven in along with white,

black, yellow, green and red.

Cooling water burning fire,  
metal, wood and clay,  
in the earth's five elements  
the gold thread marks the Way.

If we try to pick it out  
From the fabric fair;  
When the threads are pulled apart  
The gold's no longer there.

Under heaven, over earth,  
north to southern pole,  
if you trace the golden thread  
the Way will calm your soul.

"Turn your feet along the Way",  
sages taught of old;  
live life well and tread the path  
marked by the thread of gold.

**PRAYER** We come to a time of prayer. This prayer is by *Daniel Kanter*

God of many names and mystery beyond all our naming,  
Persist in guiding us to a quiet measure of this moment,  
That we might link heart to heart in the stillness and calm,  
Leaving behind all scurrying and fury, rush and contempt  
For the shore of this quiet moment.

We who gather together today  
Coming from many corners of the land  
Join in breath over breath  
So that we might hold the suffering, and care for the mourning,  
And celebrate with the joyful.

Today we pray for those in our midst who struggle  
And appreciate those who have enough spirit to give today.

We pray in the names of all those known and unknown, present and absent, remembered and forgotten. We pray in the names of all helpers of humankind. Amen.

**STORY: The Dervish in the ditch** (Sufi tradition)

Once upon a time, in a land to the east, a Dervish holy man and his student were walking from one village to the next. Suddenly they saw a great huge cloud of dust rising in the distance. They stood and stared at a grand carriage, pulled by six horses approaching at a full gallop. Riding on top were two liveries dressed in red, each holding a rein. The Dervish and the young student soon realized that the carriage was not going to slow down, let alone veer to the side to avoid hitting them. The carriage was coming at such a speed that they had to throw themselves from the road and jump into a ditch to save themselves. Covered with dirt and grass, the two got up. They looked after the carriage as it sped away into the distance.

The student was first to respond and began to call out and curse the drivers. But the teacher ran ahead, cupped his hands over the student's mouth, and called to the carriage: "May all of your deepest desires be satisfied!"

The student stared at the teacher and asked, "Why would you wish that their deepest desires be satisfied? They nearly killed us!"

The old Dervish replied, "Do you think all their deepest desires are satisfied? If they were happy, would they be so thoughtless and cruel as to nearly run down an old man and a student?" The young student had no answer, but was deep in thought. And so, in silence, the two continued their journey down the dusty road.

**READING: The Seven Principles (UUA)**

Unitarian Universalist congregations say: 'We affirm and promote seven Principles, which we hold as strong values and moral guides. We live out these Principles within a "living tradition" of wisdom and spirituality, drawn from sources as diverse as science, poetry, scripture, and personal experience.'

As Rev. Barbara Wells ten Hove explains, 'The Principles are not dogma or doctrine, but rather a guide for those of us who choose to join and participate in Unitarian Universalist religious communities.' Here are the seven Principles:

1<sup>st</sup> Principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person

2<sup>nd</sup> Principle: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations

3<sup>rd</sup> Principle: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations

4<sup>th</sup> Principle: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning

5<sup>th</sup> Principle: The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large

6<sup>th</sup> Principle: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all

7<sup>th</sup> Principle: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

### **REFLECTION** 'Metta Bhavana' – meditation on loving kindness

Metta means 'love' and bhavana means 'cultivation'. This Buddhist practice supports the 1<sup>st</sup> principle 'The inherent dignity and worth of every person' and the 2<sup>nd</sup> principle 'Justice, equity and compassion in human relations'.

1. Begin with yourself. Start by focusing on feelings of peace, calm, and tranquillity. Allow these to grow into feelings of strength and confidence, and then develop into love within your heart. You may like to visualise golden light flooding your body, or repeat a phrase such as 'may I be well and happy'.
2. Next think of a good friend. Bring them to mind as vividly as you can, and think of their good qualities. Feel your connection with your friend, and your liking for them, and encourage these to grow by repeating quietly to yourself 'may they be well; may they be happy'. You may like visualise light flowing from your heart to theirs.
3. Then think of someone you don't particularly like or dislike. Your feelings are 'neutral' about them. This may be someone you don't know well but see around. Reflect on their humanity, and include them too in your feelings of loving kindness. And wish them well.
4. Now think of someone you dislike, or are having difficulty with. Try not to get caught up in feelings of anger or resentment, but instead think of them as positively as you

can and send your loving kindness to this person too. Wish them well.

5. Finally think of all four people together — yourself, the friend, the neutral person, and the person you struggle with. Then allow your feelings to extend out further — to everyone around you, to everyone in your neighbourhood, in your town, your country, and so on throughout the world. Have a sense of waves of loving-kindness spreading from your heart to everyone and to all beings everywhere.

**MUSICAL INTERLUDE** - A tender shoot, Otto Goldschmidt, Giltspur Singers

<https://youtu.be/jh7B3W9GLjY>

## **COMMENTARY**

Just a little bit of history to start with. You may or may not know why Unitarians in America are called 'Unitarian Universalists'. Well, the answer is that in 1961 the American Unitarian Association (as it was called then) merged with a Christian organisation called the Universalist Church of America. The defining theology of Universalism was that everyone is saved – no one is eternally damned in hell. Thank goodness for that.

The newly formed 'Unitarian Universalist Association' needed to come up with a shared statement about themselves, which they managed to do. And then later, in 1985, that statement was revised and it became the Seven Principles, which you heard earlier. The people involved in formulating the Seven Principles wisely focused on 'values and moral guides', on which they knew they both could and were willing to agree. Even so, we can only imagine the discussions and debates that must have gone on. It was quite an achievement, I think, to come up with these Principles, even more so given that they've endured this long. We certainly haven't managed to come up with anything similar here in the UK!

Theology was deliberately left to individuals and congregations to decide, since, like here, diversity of belief in Unitarian Universalism is both acknowledged and actively encouraged. However, the 4<sup>th</sup> Principle calls UUs towards 'A free and responsible search for truth and meaning' and the 5<sup>th</sup> principle commits them to 'Acceptance of one another and

encouragement to spiritual growth in their congregations'. So they don't agree on theology, but they do agree on how to approach it.

It's important to understand, too, that the Principles are grounded. They've not been dreamt up out of thin air. They have emerged from, and need to be continually re-rooted in, what the UUs call the 6 sources of the 'living tradition'. And these 6 sources are (briefly): direct experience of transcendent mystery and wonder; the words and deeds of prophetic people; wisdom from the world's religions; Jewish and Christian teachings on love; Humanist teachings on reason and science; and the spiritual teachings of the earth-centred traditions. Those 6 sources underpin the 7 principles.

While beliefs, and choice of sources, may vary from person to person, and from one congregation to the next, the Seven Principles can be viewed as the common ground of Unitarian Universalism. Something everyone can hold on to. And if at first glance they seem a bit obvious, it's worth considering that just principles 1 and 2 - which are essentially 'the golden rule', common to all religions - that these are probably a lifetime's work on their own. After all, who did you identify with in the story of the Dervish in the ditch? The Dervish or the student? Would you have called out to the carriage driver "May all of your deepest desires be satisfied!"? Or might words a little more colourful and less loving have come to mind as you picked yourself up from the ditch?

And how did it feel to practise Metta Bhavana? How comfortable are you with wishing yourself well? And how about wishing well the person you dislike or have a conflict with? These Principles are easily said and relatively easily agreed to, it's true, but it is challenging to make them real and manifest in our lives, rather than just let them waft around us as little more than nice ideas.

Somewhat like the metta bhavana, the Principles also tend to move outwards from self and congregation to the wider world. So Principle 5 calls for democratic processes and the importance of giving everyone a voice; Principle 6 holds up the lofty goals of world peace, liberty and justice; and Principle 7 demands respect for the interdependent web of existence. Each one takes us further out from our own little bubble, across boundaries of race, culture, creed, sexuality, and finally beyond mere humanity to life and the universe itself.

And so the festival of Chalica is about celebrating all that: these seven Principles that UUs have managed to agree on. It begins on the first Monday in December (i.e. tomorrow) and lasts seven days. The idea is to honour one of the seven Principles each day. So, on each day, a candle is lit, the day's principle is read, and some way of making that principle more real in personal or congregational life is carried out. It might be an act of kindness, or taking a first step towards reconciliation, or maybe even wishing someone well who pushes you off the pavement!

So I wonder, to what extent do these Principles resonate with you? And if they do, could they perhaps offer common ground for us too? Sandra has decided to celebrate Chalica this coming week, and is inviting people to join her on Zoom to share responses and experiences. Do contact her if you're interested. Or, of course, you could do the practice by yourself or with a friend, if you prefer, simply by reading one of the principles each morning and contemplating what it means to you and how you might bring it to life. We Unitarians are good at agreeing to differ, but sometimes it's also nice to find things we can agree to agree on. May it be so.

**HYMN 147** (in the spirit of the 7<sup>th</sup> Principle)

Spirit of earth, root, stone and tree,

Water of life, flowing in me,

Keeping me stable, nourishing me,

O fill me with living energy!

*Spirit of nature, healing and free,*

*Spirit of love, expanding in me,*

*Spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,*

*Inspire me with living energy!*

Spirit of love, softly draw near,

Open my heart, lessen my fear,

Sing of compassion, help me to hear,

O fill me with loving energy!

*Spirit of nature, healing and free,*

*Spirit of love, expanding in me,*

*Spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,*

*Inspire me with living energy!*

Spirit of life, you are my song,  
Sing in my soul, all my life long,  
Gladden and guide me, keep me from wrong,  
O fill me with sacred energy!  
*Spirit of nature, healing and free,*  
*Spirit of love, expanding in me,*  
*Spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,*  
*Inspire me with living energy.*

**CLOSING WORDS** The first spark has led to this place, Henry Normal

All stories are universal

all told from a unique point of view.

This is the universe at this moment  
from this perspective.

Whether you want to or not  
you represent life.

You are what life looks like at this instant  
from this vantage  
from inside the vast array.

A story of life

a story of creation, witnessed

- from the first spark to the disintegration of the very last cell -  
is one story  
our story.

Whether you are interested enough to engage or not  
or brave enough to contribute further  
you are already part of the narrative.

At this pulse

from a collusion of all that has gone before  
you are life.

You are the universe.

You are the story.

**CLOSING MUSIC** Guiding light, Foy Vance

<https://youtu.be/p4MSFhIbAJA>