

Interdependence Day

Unitarian Universalists of San Mateo

3 July 2011

By Deanna Vandiver, Summer Minister

Story for All Ages

Useful Facts About Geese (attributed to Rev. Milton Olsen and adapted by Deanna Vandiver).

I would now like to invite forth the young and the young at heart to participate in a story for all ages. This is a multigenerational service – multigenerational means that people born in the nineteen-somethings and people born in the twenty-somethings share every part of this morning together. So, people born in the 19-somethings are also invited forward to play.

To tell this story, we will need five facts and a flock of geese. Who would like to be a fact? Thank you. Facts, please come up by the microphone. And now, dear flock of geese – are you ready to teach us some useful lessons?

Useful facts about geese

NARRATOR: It turns out that humans have a lot to learn about collectives (togetherness), particularly from GEESE. Okay flock- listen carefully and see if we can figure out how to act out these lessons! Fact Number One, will you begin?

Fact Number One: As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the birds following it. By flying in a V-formation, the whole flock adds 71 percent greater flying range than if the bird flew alone.

NARRATOR: 71% - that's a much longer journey together than alone. There's a lot that I can do by myself, but the power of what can get done with a collective is mega-powerful. It's a mega step, a mega movement. The lesson from this fact about geese: people who share a common direction and a sense of community can get where they're going quicker and easier because they're travelling on the uplift of one another. That's a universal collective lesson.

Flock, are you ready for the next fact?

Okay, Fact Number Two-

Fact Number Two: Whenever a goose falls out of formation it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to fly alone and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front.

NARRATOR: Lesson: When we have as much sense as a goose, we stay in formation with those that are headed where we want to go and are willing to accept their help, as well as give ours to others.

Fact Number Three: When the lead goose gets tired, it rotates back into the formation and another goose flies at the point position.

NARRATOR: An invaluable lesson for us to apply in all group work. It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks of sharing leadership. With people as with geese, we are interdependent on each others' skills and capabilities and unique arrangements of gifts, talents, resources, or what some indigenous societies call the "good, true and beautiful.

Fact Number four – get ready for this one flock!

Fact Number Four: The geese in formation honk from behind to encourage those in front to keep up their speed.

[honking]

NARRATOR: Lesson: We need to make sure that our honking from behind is encouraging. And not something else. In groups where there is greater encouragement against great odds, the production is much greater - the power of encouragement. Now I love the word encourage because it means "to stand by one's heart, to stand by one's core" - **that** quality of honking.

Fact Number Five: When a goose gets sick, or wounded, or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and protect it. They will stay with it until it is

able to fly again or dies. Then they launch out again with another formation or catch up with the flock.

NARRATOR: Lesson: To have as much sense as geese, we too must stand by each other in difficult times, as well as when we are strong. Who knew we could learn so much from the often belittled goose?

Thank you flock, thank you facts! I invite you to fly back and rejoin your family and friends in the pews now.

SERMON : “*Interdependence Day*”

Unitarian Universalists of San Mateo

3 July 2011

By Deanna Vandiver, Summer Minister

Happy Interdependence Day, beloveds! Today we worship together to celebrate a deeply joyful truth: you are not alone. You do not have to stand on your own by yourself— in fact, it is not, universally speaking, possible to do so! As Randy’s stories of UUSM leaders demonstrate, the historically celebrated American Individualism is a bit of a myth. If no one had shown up to worship in Marian Hemingway’s living room, there would be no UUSM, no Hemingway Lounge.

It is through collective work and shared leadership that our great transformations have occurred. Like geese, humans too can travel further when we are travelling on the uplift of each other. While great change in our history is often credited to one or two powerful individuals, the real stories are often much more complex and collaborative.

For instance, the story of the Declaration of Independence must be much larger than one man named Thomas Jefferson, famed for penning the Declaration. And it is.

Turns out, the *Declaration of Independence* was issued the same year as economist Adam Smith issued his capitalist manifesto, *The Wealth of Nations*. Two-thirds of the signers of the Declaration of Independence had held colonial office under England's rule of the American colonies.

As the people's historian Howard Zinn tells us, the "reality behind the words of the *Declaration of Independence* ([...]) was that a rising class of important people needed to enlist on their side enough Americans to defeat England, without disturbing **too much** the relations of wealth and power that had developed over 150 years of colonial history." At the time of the Revolutionary War, about 1/10th of the white population held nearly half of the emerging country's wealth and "held as slaves 1/7th of the country's people." Lots of people were left out of the Declaration of Independence for lots of reasons, including the cultural

racism and sexism endemic to the 18th century **and** to support an economic system dependent upon slavery.

Tomorrow this country will celebrate independence from a colonial power with fireworks and barbeques and, for the lucky, a day off from work. We may hear people talking about the role the economy played in the cancellation of some fireworks displays. Most of us will not be talking about the role economics played in the American Revolution.

Economics. Some people hear the word and start snoring. I invite us now to snore together for a moment.

[SNORING] 😊

{ring bell}

Wake up!

When understood as the study
of how humans work together
to sustain life,
economics can be downright
interesting.

Some of you may be surprised to learn that one of the most basic terms of economics is a concept we celebrate here today – *interdependence*. Economists define interdependence as “dependent on others for some needs,” an acknowledgement that few humans, if any, can

produce everything we need for life. Think about that for a moment. With few exceptions, someone else made the clothes you are wearing this morning, someone else made the bike or car or BART train you travelled on, someone else grew most of the food you eat.

One of our Unitarian Universalist principals, “respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part” is an integral part of economics. Okay, that’s not quite right. Any idea which part of our principal is sometimes left out of economic theory? That R-word: Respect.

(Anybody else itching to sing it? R-E-S-P-E-C-T...thank you, Aretha Franklin!)

That’s where our faith comes in. Not only do we recognize that we are all connected, depending on each other and our planet for our lives, we have a religious commitment to **respecting** that recognition of our interdependence. Do you think the world would look different if **this** understanding of interdependence was included in the economic system of this nation, this world?

Interdependence is, of course, an even bigger concept than its economic definition. It is a way to understand our very existence-the existence of everything.

In *The Universe Story*, mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme and geologist Thomas Berry tell us:

We are discovering anew our human capacity for entering into the larger community of life, something we have not experienced in any adequate manner since our Neolithic origins

[that's the time humans moved into villages and began our adventures with agricultural lifestyles]...

Indeed our individual being apart from the wider community of being is emptiness. Our individual self finds its most complete realization within our family self, our community self, our species self, our earthly self, and eventually our universe self.

There is eventually only one story, the story of the universe. Every form of being is integral to this comprehensive story. Nothing is itself without everything else.

This level of interdependence was alien and unknown to the select group of wealthy men we call the American forefathers. It is a relatively new insight for many Unitarian Universalists, for that matter.

Naming this reality is not to denigrate the work of the American Revolutionaries. As Howard Zinn explains, “the point of noting those outside the arc of human rights in the Declaration is not, centuries late and pointlessly, to lay impossible moral burdens on that time. It is to try to

understand the way in which the Declaration functioned to mobilize certain groups of Americans, ignoring others. Surely, inspirational language to create a secure consensus is still used, in our time, to cover up serious conflicts of interest in that consensus, and to cover up, also, the omission of large parts of the human race.”

Each peal of the bell during our speaking of names this morning echoes this warning, reminding us that real lives are destroyed when we omit the value of large parts of the human race – including American military veterans, People of Color in Arizona and Georgia, Afghanis, Libyans, Iraqis, Palestinians, Ugandans...

The rhetoric filling the radio, television, and internet, especially around what we call the patriotic holidays, invites us to forget our deep connection with all creation, banding together for perceived safety with policies that benefit only a few, denying respect to any one viewed as “other,” including our planet.

Now more than ever, dear Unitarian Universalists, we carry a saving message into this world. We are the universe emergent, deeply connected to each other and to all of creation.

The inherent worth and dignity of every person is a good start, just as the Declaration of Independence was, in its way, a good start. Now, our knowledge deeper, our vision

wider, Unitarian Universalists call on each other and the world to respect the interdependent web of all existence. We have discovered that we too can have as much sense as a goose. We proclaim relationship as the ultimate unit of being, the self-evident truth upon which we declare our interdependence.

Our economic systems and the stories we tell about them directly shape the privilege and oppression experienced by humans and our planet Earth. When we lift up interdependence as the primary value of our economic system and of our faith, we can turn the world around.

Happy Interdependence Day, beloveds! We no longer need to suffer from the illusion of disconnected independence. Today, we celebrate the universal gift of interdependence: the deeply joyful truth that we are not alone. Amen.

Sources:

Swimme, Brian & Berry, Thomas. *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era – A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos.*

HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.

Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States 1492-Present.* HarperPerennial, 1995.