



THE JOURNEY: A Guide for Reflection

Interdependence

(April 2024 | Volume 3, Issue 8)

“When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe,” wrote conservationist, John Muir, in the mid nineteenth century.

In the century or more since Muir co-founded the Sierra Club and advocated for the preservation of Yosemite, science has continually revealed more and more of the processes underlying his observations and intuition as a devoted naturalist.

I like to imagine how it would have tickled Muir to know that trees share resources and communicate with each other by way of subterranean fungal networks called the mycorrhiza, through which carbon, water, nutrients, alarm signals and hormones can pass. Linking nearly every tree in a forest, including those of different species, through this network even a tree on the brink of death can sometimes bequeath a substantial share of its carbon to its neighbours. Similarly, trillions of microbes living in and on our own bodies form the microbiome which plays a key role in alerting our immune system to harmful bacteria and viruses, in breaking down nutrients from food that we can't otherwise access and in stabilizing our circadian rhythms.

In every living process we find “the interdependent web of all existence” affirmed in UUism's 7th Principle.

So much more than simply an environmental ethic, keeping interdependence squarely in our sights can help us to resist temptation toward hyper-individualism and spur us onward in our work for the collective good in the knowledge that “all flourishing is mutual.” It's not always easy, but the embrace of interdependence is a source of meaning to which we can whole-heartedly dedicate our lives.

Infinite Spirit – Instill in us the will to recognize and resist attitudes and behaviors that do not serve the whole. Fill us with reverence for a universe in which we are inextricably “hitched to everything else” in ways beyond our human capacity to comprehend.

In faith and love,

Angela

Questions to Live With



Photo by Brandon Griggs, on Unsplash

1. Have you struggled with feeling too dependent? Or too independent? Have you wondered what it would be like to allow yourself to rely more on others?
2. If you were more aware of/awake to the interdependence of all existence, how might you live your life differently?
3. What aspect of nature did you connect with most meaningfully as a child? A dog? A horse? A tree? The ocean? Lightning bugs? The rain? A path in the woods?
4. Do you think age impacts the way we *care for* and/or *connect with* the interdependent web?
5. Do you feel that “sacrifice” has a central role to play in addressing the climate crisis?
6. If these questions don't address how you need to explore interdependence this month, what is your question?

For Inspiration

The indigenous understanding has its basis of spirituality in a recognition of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living things, a holistic and balanced view of the world. All things are bound together. All things connect. What happens to the Earth happens to the children of the earth. Humankind has not woven the web of life; we are but one thread. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.

- Rebecca Adamson, Founder, First Nations Development Institute

If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together.

- African proverb



Photo by Clay Banks, on Unsplash

Alone

Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.
Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.
There are some millionaires
With money they can't use
Their wives run round like banshees
Their children sing the blues
They've got expensive doctors
To cure their hearts of stone.
But nobody
No, nobody
Can make it out here alone.
Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.
Now if you listen closely
I'll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
'Cause nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.
Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

- Maya Angelou

Humanity is like an enormous spider web, so that if you touch it anywhere, you set the whole thing trembling... As we move around this world and as we act with kindness, perhaps, or with indifference, or with hostility, toward the people we meet, we too are setting the great spider web a-tremble. The life that I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place and time my touch will be felt. Our lives are linked together. No one is an island.

- Frederick Buechner

In some Native languages the term for plants translates to "those who take care of us."

- Robin Wall Kimmerer

As long as there is poverty in the world I can never be rich, even if I have a billion dollars. As long as diseases are rampant and millions of people in this world cannot expect to live more than twenty-eight or thirty years, I can never be totally healthy even if I just got a good checkup at Mayo Clinic. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the way our world is made. No individual or nation can stand out boasting of being independent. We are interdependent.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.



Photo by Torbjørn Helgesen, on Unsplash

All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. . . The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.

- Aldo Leopold

We take different paths in life, but no matter where we go, we take a little of each other everywhere.

- Tim McGraw



Photo by Joris Voeten, on Unsplash

Things derive their being and nature by mutual dependence and are nothing in themselves.

- Akkineni Nagarjuna

Was it you or I who stumbled first? It does not matter. The one of us who finds the strength to get up first, must help the other.

- Vera Nazarian

We need one another when we would be comforted.

We need one another when we are in trouble and afraid.

We need one another when we are in despair, in temptation, and need to be recalled to our best selves again.

We need one another when we would accomplish some great purpose, and cannot do it alone.

We need one another in the hour of success, when we look for someone to share our triumphs.

We need one another in the hour of defeat, when with encouragement we might endure, and stand again.

We need one another when we come to die, and would have gentle hands prepare us for the journey.

All our lives we are in need, and others are in need of us.

- George E. Odell, *Singing the Living Tradition* #468

Trees are extraordinary revelations of the spirit in nature. And, given the multitude of ways that trees and their products benefit and enrich human culture, they are an especially appropriate symbol of the interdependence of spirit and nature.

- Steven Clark Rockefeller

I am becoming the people I love.

- Carlos Santana

The telling and hearing of stories is a bonding ritual that breaks through illusions of separateness and activates a deep sense of our collective interdependence.

- Annette Simmons

All things and all people, though we have our own individual gifts and special place, are dependent on and share in the growth and work of everything and everyone else. We believe that beings thrive when there is a web of inter-connectedness between the individual and the community, and between the community and nature.

Everything we do, every decision we make, affects our family, our community. It affects the air we breathe, the animals, the plants, the water in some way. Each of us is totally dependent on everything else.

- Evelyn Steinhauer



Photo courtesy of Quora

I have an interesting perspective on depending on others. I think it gives people a chance to serve. And I'm not so much big on independence, as I am on interdependence. I'm not talking about co-dependency, I'm talking about giving people the opportunity to practice love with its sleeves rolled up.

- Joni Eareckson Tada

There's an interdependence between flowers and bees. Where there are no flowers there are no bees, and where there are no bees, there are no flowers. They are really one organism. And so in the same way, everything in nature depends on everything else.

- Alan Watts

Boundaries

The universe does not revolve around you.

The stars and planets spinning through the ballroom of space dance with one another quite outside of your small life. You cannot hold gravity or seasons; even air and water inevitably evade your grasp. Why not, then, let go?

You could move through time like a shark through water, neither restless nor ceasing, absorbed in and absorbing the native element.

Why pretend you can do otherwise?

The world comes in at every pore, mixes in your blood before breath releases you into the world again. Did you think the fragile boundary of your skin could build a wall?

Listen. Every molecule is humming its particular pitch.

Of course you are a symphony.

Whose tune do you think the planets are signing as they dance?

- Lynn Ungar

To accept responsibility for your own feelings, your own triggers, and your own experience does not mean to stop communicating with others about how their words and actions affect you. You can own your emotions by not blaming others, and still give the people in your life gentle, loving feedback about how they can treat you in a way that helps your healing and happiness. Creating safe spaces

is an interdependent process. It's not ever all about you and it's not ever all about the other person. It's about you coming together and working on the dynamics of your relationship together, taking responsibility for your own part and doing what you can to contribute to the well-being of the other.

- Vironika Tugaleva

Optional Spiritual Exercise

Name the gift of being bound in friendship

Our friendships shape, save and inspire us in ways too many to count. This form of interdependence is among our most treasured. But we rarely tell our friends how much being bound to them means.

So this month, tell them! Yes, it will be awkward. Yes, it will feel incomplete and imperfect. But do it anyway. Our friends deserve to know what a gift they are to us.

If telling them off the cuff is too intimidating, consider writing it out and reading it to them. [Watch this video to get inspired.](#)

Join Us

Join a Journey Group

Journey Groups are a great way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with small group of people for a couple of hours each month. Groups meet online on Zoom and are scheduled at different times during the month.

For more information, visit our website firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/ or look for the link in *First Light*.

Upcoming Themes

May – Pluralism

The Journey Team

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