

The Wisdom in Sharing (brief) – June 11, 2017

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Sharing is a relatively simple concept and a basic part of human life. As children, we're taught (and made) to share our toys, our crayons, and our rooms. As we age, our toys and our personal spaces become larger and more expensive, and we share them less and less, but we still value the idea of sharing. There are many ways to share resources as adults, including shared housing, transportation, gardens, food, and meals, shared jobs, caregivers, and many more. But, why do it? When resources are scarce, through fear of lack there is a tendency to pull back, isolate ourselves emotionally and shut others out. We begin to put all of our energy into self-preservation believing that hoarding resources will keep us safe.

Rabbi Harold Kushner theorizes that just as our bodies are made so that certain kinds of diets and activities are toxic, there are certain kinds of activities that are healthy for the soul. Just as selfishness, deceitfulness and envy are toxic, generosity, cheerfulness, and honesty strengthen our immune systems. Hoarding ideas, the energy of time and love through fear of vulnerability, and lack is also a reality. Moreover, the benefits of sharing are many, and can benefit us both personally and financially, and also make the world a much better place. Most of you are aware of recycling and probably do it at home and in the work place, just as we do here in the fellowship.

But there are so many other ways that sharing can help shrink our carbon footprint and make the world a better place. By becoming a part of the locavore Movement, which means only purchasing foods grown within a hundred miles of your city, creating a community garden, or joining a food co-operative. More importantly only buy from organizations that pay workers a fair wage. Many Unitarian Universalist congregations have been designated by our denomination as being Green Sanctuaries. And there's a real effort with new construction of Unitarian Universalist churches being totally green from the ground up.

However, it's not only logic that guides sharing, it's also emotion. Sharing our emotions enables us to bond with others, it releases our frustrations, gaining support and reassurance when we most need it. By sharing our emotions with others, we are accepting that we cannot provide all of the support and emotional nourishment we need for ourselves, and that we need to form relationships with others in order to have the happiest and healthiest life possible. A problem shared is a problem halved, which is why the order of service in most Unitarian Universalist congregations include verbally sharing our Joys and sorrows. This opens a small window into our lives that allows us the shared experience which creates an opportunity to bond with each other. New research has even found that putting feelings and emotions into words has a therapeutic effects on the brain, meaning that verbalizing our problems can actually make their pain of them seem less intense.

This is one reason 12 step programs have been around for so long, because it's the spiritual foundation of how people help each other with the simple association of commonly shared experiences. On American Psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs we can go beyond the physical and get up into the deep psychological and interpersonal needs such as friendship, family, and intimacy. According to Maslow, humans need to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance within their social spheres. Being listened to by others, and having them share their experiences with you

in return, is a great way to validate your place in the world and confirm that your thoughts and feelings are important and should be taken into account. Your feelings are often validated when they are shared with, and listened to by, an attentive friend, family member or another committee member. Bottling up emotions can have huge negative health impacts, so venting to release those emotions is essential for both mental and physical health. Moreover, it's important to remember it's wise to share your ideas, skills and talents, because they're also an integral part of the fabric of this community of faith.

But when we think of bonding and connecting through sharing with each other, we often tend to believe we can only learn adult to adult. However, wisdom doesn't only come from longevity. The old axiom "out of the mouths of babes" still holds true. I know that some of you are educators and I'm sure that over the years, you've learned as much from your students as they've learned from you. There's much to learn from sharing our time in conversation with the youth and young adults at the fellowship. They are tomorrow's keepers of the flame of Unitarian Universalism. It's their wisdom in word and deed that will keep the message of this faith alive. Through sharing emotions and experiences, we get to know each other better, and the relationship quality is strengthened, offering reciprocal benefits for the purposes of bonding. Moreover, in this strengthening and increasing connections to each other, ultimately we build the beloved community.

From my heart to yours, may it be so.