

Respect for the Interdependent Web of All Existence of Which We are a Part.

This is our beloved 7th principle. I call it our beloved principle because perhaps more than any of our other principles, including the first, “the inherent worth and dignity of every person,” this principle seems to resonate with a wide cross section of UUs, regardless of the particular theologies they hold as individuals.

Our beloved seventh principle evokes images of the sacred, interconnected, interdependent balance of nature; something worthy of respect and care. UUs might summarize, or explain, this principle to others as “love and respect for nature;” and although it is that, the language of our 7th principle implies much more. It implies that all existence is an interdependent web; that all existence is interdependent upon...well, all existence...everything else. For us, it implies that all that we do, affects everything else. It implies that each of our actions cannot not affect this interdependent web; that each of our actions, by definition, cannot not create karmic ripples on the pond of all existence. And although I’ve mentioned this before, this implies that we are, in a sense, responsible for everything that happens...that everything we do matters.

Although this may sound nice, neat and buttoned up, do we actually believe this...because believing this has some deep philosophical implications?

Is a woman, who is being beaten by her husband, in some way responsible for being beaten? Is a person of color, in some way responsible for the racism they experience?

Ok, this might be a problem. I’ve been wrestling with this for quite some time. And I feel the shifting sands under my feet. Do I actually believe this? What do you actually believe? When push comes to shove, is this nothing more than Kumbaya, new-agey BS? I’ve been thinking a lot about responsibility and blame, etc., ...and whether what I believe passes the BS test.

Let’s look at blaming. Might blaming be a form of emotional denial? Looking for someone to blame, looking for someone to cancel, might it arise from one’s own sense of guilt, contamination, stain; something we wish to dispel from our houses using any means necessary?

Blaming often brings with it a sense of “better you than me” because sometimes we know, deep down, in some way, that we are, or could be, guilty too; that we, too, have the capability to cause harm, damage; and offloading blame onto others makes us feel better about ourselves.

The consequences of group blaming and group emotional denial can be disastrous. When the German people were saddled with much of the blame of WW I, the Nazis saw an opportunity to then offload this blame onto someone else – the Jews. “It’s not your fault, they’re to blame.

You've done nothing wrong, they've brought us down. We're a master race, all we need to do is get rid of them."

Now, let's turn the tables and talk of a make-believe, fictitious blameless white person living in the height of Jim Crow South. Let's make this fictitious white person completely, ideally non-racist. They've never had a racist thought. They don't have a racist bone in their body. They are, by definition, incapable of being racist. Yet they are a white person living in Jim Crow South; and although this entitles them to a life of privileges not entitled to people of color, let's say that they've realized no such benefit from such privilege. So, does this, and does this person's blamelessness absolve them from any responsibility for the existence of Jim Crow South, or absolve them from any responsibility for the dismantling of it?

Christians believe that Jesus was a blameless individual, yet he was responsible, through his actions, words, all that was; for the dismantling of the injustices of his community.

The woman abused by her husband gets no blame, but what does it mean if we merely blame her abuser, and leave it at that? Are we absolving ourselves of the responsibility to look deeper into what might be a systemic oppression of women that we refuse to dismantle?

Those who stormed the Capitol on January 6th have it in their minds that someone is to blame for their suffering...(and they are suffering). They blame the government, Democrats, Nancy Pelosi, Mike Pence, moderate Republicans, etc. This is their misplaced emotional denial. Yet, do we think that we can merely blame those who stormed the Capitol; charge, arrest, convict and sentence them; call that justice and leave it at that? They all came from somewhere; and by leaving it at that, might our blameless selves be in emotional denial, absolving ourselves of a dysfunctional culture where systemic violence is just part of the canvas upon which we paint our lives?

I don't know, as I said, I'm wrestling with this. I'd like to believe, it'd be easy for me to believe that Y causes Z and that therefore Y is solely responsible, and can therefore be solely blamed for, everything Y does to Z. Yet the Tao Te Ching says, "If you blame someone else, there is no end to the blame (Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, 79)."

It calls us to look more deeply, and for me, upon further examination, it looks as if everything A through X does, affects Y and Z, and each other, in some way, and it gets complicated; and I can't help feeling contaminated in some way with a stain that can't simply can't be flung out of the house.

Yet, I must also understand, I must also see, that amongst the stain, there is also beauty; and Taoism maintains that each contains the other; and rather than trying to fling anything out of the house, we realize that we can't, because it's all caught up in everything else; that it's

actually not stain and beauty, it's what we might call the interconnected web of all existence, of which we are a part. That it's not stain and beauty...but it just is.

From the Tao Te Ching....

The brightest path seems dark

The way leading forward seems backward

The smoothest path seems rough

The highest virtue low

The whitest white pitch-black

The greatest virtue wanting

The staunchest virtue timid

The perfect square without corners

The perfect tool without uses

The perfect sound hushed

The perfect image without form

(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, 41)

See the world as your self

Have faith in the way things are,

Love the world as yourself

Then you can care for all things

(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, 13)