

First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, 405 Washington Ave. Albany, NY 12206

10.27.13 Sermon: "Celebrating the Wheel of Life"

Presenter: Rev. Sam Trumbore

Wheels and circles are very helpful. They give us a picture of what a cycle looks like. You start at one point. You follow the outline of the circle so that it continues to get further and further away and then it starts getting closer again until you get back to the beginning. Out and back. Out and back.

Life is full of these rhythms of moving away and returning again. If you feel your breath, it goes out and comes back in. Touch your wrist and you can feel your pulse as your heart beats. The blood goes out from your heart to the tips of your fingers and toes in your arteries then finds its way back again to your heart through your veins. Each day we get up, move around and do things. Towards the end of the day we get tired, crawl in bed and fall asleep.

The cycle of each day has many repeating parts. Every morning when I get up I go downstairs to the basement and sit quietly in meditation. I like to do some exercises then make a pot of tea and have breakfast. Just about every morning I sit for a little while with my wife Philomena on the couch as we watch a recorded episode of the Daily Show from the night before.

There are bigger cycles that happen every month. I pay the electric and gas bill every month. I pay my cell phone charges every month. I pay our mortgage and my car loan every month. I send a donation to FUUSA and some charities every month. I write my newsletter column every month too. For youth and adults with jobs, there is happiness at least once a month and usually twice a month when we get our paycheck.

We make our lives this way because we have great comfort with cycles and wheels. They help us remember that if there is a part of a cycle we don't like, it will end soon and we'll have a break from it until we have to do it again.

I do a lot to take care of my teeth beyond brushing them because I want to keep them for a long time. Every night before I go to bed, I floss them, brush them and clean between my teeth with a special tiny brush. Sometimes I don't want to do one of these things or use mouthwash to kill germs that try to sneak under my gums. Knowing that once its done I will not have to do again for a while makes it easier.

What causes us unhappiness is when cycles stop. If we get too much rain, we want the sun to come back. If we get too much sun and everything dries up, we want rain. When the wind is really strong, we desire calm. But if we are sailing, we don't want calm we want a brisk breeze. When gardeners plant their zucchinis, they get excited with the first flower turns into the first zucchini. Then there are suddenly many more zucchinis than one family can eat and they need to be given away.

When a puppy or kitten is born, we have great joy. Philomena and Andy and I visited my Aunt Lois who has two little kittens named Socks and Licorice. They are adorable and reminded me of

when our two cats Shakti and Bodhi were kittens. When we enjoy being with them, we don't think about the day when they will eventually get very old and die, as both Shakti and Bodhi have done. This is the sad part. When the cycle ends, almost like the wheel breaking.

Our minds don't want to believe that the cycles will come to an end. I didn't want Shakti and Bodhi to die but I couldn't stop that from happening. With birth there is joy and with death there is sadness and loss. The sadness I feel for Shakti and Bodhi remind me how much I loved them and cared about them. Yet that sadness didn't stop me from feeling joy when meeting Socks and Licorice. Knowing that someday I'll be sad when they die, didn't interfere with my joy.

I find comfort knowing that the joy I felt when Shakti and Bodhi were kittens didn't come to an end forever. I could feel it again for Socks and Licorice. Not exactly the same mind you. Shakti and Bodhi had different personalities than Socks and Licorice. But the feelings of joy were very similar.

All cycles operate in a similar way. Each day we live is different yet there are many things that are the same. Even each breath is different if we watch them carefully enough, which is what people do in meditation. Certainly the events of each month are very different but October of 2012 isn't at all like the October of 2013 and will be very different from the October of 2014. And each of those months started with green leaves on the trees and ended with brown leaves on the ground.

Even the biggest cycles we care about operate this way, the cycle of birth and death. There was a time when we were not. Then we were born. There will be a time when we are not. We will die. And for each of us, I hope that is a long time away. A man named Ernest Becker thought it is very important for our well being to think that way. The leaf shudders as it sees other leaves fall from the branches around it this time of year, not knowing that new leaves will appear next spring.

What helps a lot, if we do worry about dying, is accepting that we are part of cycles, circles if you will, that are much bigger than we are. A fundamental problem of how our brains work is worrying we are somehow separate from all the cycles and circles. It makes us think we are all alone.

Resolving that problem is what religion is all about. As Unitarian Universalists, we say there are many ways to fix this problem rather than just one. Each of us will discover some religious tools will work better than others. But no matter how we work out this problem, we believe that we all have goodness in us. We are part of a interdependent living process and belong in it. Each of us will work out our own solution to the problem of feeling separate and alone. Unitarian Universalism tells us that however we solve the problem, our lives have value and can be meaningful, even when we struggle and forget.

We are part of the circle of life. That circle didn't begin with birth. That circle will not end with death.

Let us be grateful that we are part of that endless circle.

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