

The Seeds are Planted: Tending the Garden

by

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Introduction

I don't know when I should seriously start blaming my mental lapses on aging; or if I should just keep chalking things up to me being me. This year's theme is "Diversity and Spirituality in the Fabric of Life"; but for some reason I had it in my head that it included the word "daily". I've got to start reading the big print. Anyway, I hope you will agree that today's presentation eventually gets around to some bearing on how we UU's choose to weave ourselves into the fabric of life.

Before we go any further, I'd like to confirm something from the fellowship, and while I have a suspicion about the outcome, I don't want to presume anything. Keep in mind there are no right answers (we are UUs after all), so be brutally honest. So, how many of you know how many UU Principles there are? Raise your hand if you think you know. Ok, keep your hand up if you were thinking 7. And next question, how many could recite them? It's impressive that so many kept their hands up, but I'm glad not everyone knows them by heart because this presentation is one of those occasional visits to our 7 Principles. Or a visit to the seeds in the garden if you will.

Gardening as a metaphor for spirituality is incredibly common, as a Google search will show you, but the metaphor of UU principles as seeds in the garden of spirituality seems so elegant in its simplicity and utility, I just had to do it. Besides, I'm still me, and you're just not going to get a lot of complexity. However, if you crave complexity and subtlety, take the time to Google "gardening as metaphor for spirituality" and you'll probably find some satisfying sites. Some of them are pretty interesting. But I wanted to try to make this our own gardening exploration, and not rely on "experts". And I think we'll more or less get to many of the same places many of the sites do. It really is a simple, comfortable, user friendly metaphor.

For example, consider these few simple ideas as we metaphorically explore UU principles as seeds in a garden: Did all the seeds make it into the garden? Have all your seeds sprouted. Any weeds in the garden. Are you happy with the seeds, have they

grown, and borne fruit? Does the garden produce enough to sustain you every day? Did some seeds sprout but the plants withered? Is it time to replant some seeds? Are there other seeds that your garden needs? Will anybody else help you with your garden? Have the fruits of your garden nourished and enriched your life? See, isn't this fertile ground?

Notwithstanding Roger's promise to ask lots of questions about gopher control, what's the best kind of string to mark garden rows with, and what can be done about pinner potatoes, I hope today will be a fun and productive visit to all of our individual UU gardens, and that we can share some time thinking and talking about how the 7 UU principles have and might relate to the fabric of our lives.

Body

Here is the scary part for me. I'm going to take a risk and stand naked before you. Figuratively, I'm not *always* literal. I'm going to show you what I think my UU garden looks like, and talk a little about how I think of it, and what it means to me. You can make fun of it, judge it, appreciate it, comment on it, compare it to your own, make suggestions for improvement, do whatever you want;all I ask is that you reflect on your own garden a little bit too.

One of the first things I noticed when I drew my UU garden is that most of the rows or plants were not independent of each other. My garden is actually kind of messy and uncertain, and intertwined. I originally drew it with all straight rows, but the more I thought about it, the less appropriate that seemed.

Row 1 The inherent worth and dignity of every person

These started as Big giant Watermelon sized seeds in my garden & have long been one of my favorites, even before I knew about Unitarian gardens: In San Francisco years ago, on the field trip I met Michelle on, I stopped to visit with a street person while the rest of the group moved up the street; Michelle has always said she liked that about me, but I'm not sure which garden that came from. So this is a fruit I've always liked.

But I've tried to nurture this row a lot and over time I think it has at least occasionally produced for me, though not always proportionate to the effort I devote to it, and not necessarily in proportion to the amount of foliage it has.

As I've paid attention to this part of the garden, I've become aware of how unpleasant I feel when I catch myself judging others (or myself for that matter). I've come to view

that as a very dehumanizing thing to do and quite undignified, and something that only reflects on me, no one and nothing else (Don Miguel Ruiz reinforces this idea in *The Four Agreements* and seeds from his packet appear to have hybridized with my seeds).

I guess there's a little more evidence of hybridization here, because some of the plants appear influenced by Bruce's discussion about empathic communication from several years ago, and some similar spirit-based Steven Covey training I received even longer ago. Both outside influences seem to have melded nicely with the original seeds planted here. Together they reinforce the notion that real communication is a very respectful thing to engage in with someone and a skill to practice (actually Toastmasters seeds probably blew in from somewhere too). This is also something I try hard to pay attention to.

Bob Example, we had our professional disagreements over years, nobody wanted to take on his retirement party, I reflected on my part in our "troubles" and thought he deserved better, so I organized it. A lot of people showed up, Bob had a great time, and our relationship was changed for the better. He really isn't the bad person I thought he was and there was no reason to think it. The whole thing was actually pretty cathartic for me and I think Bob and I are on the best terms we ever have been. While there are probably other things at work, I'm convinced that having Row 1 in my garden was at play.

This is such a lush part of my garden, that I probably spend too much time on it at the expense of other seeds and plants, but it just seems to affect all the other rows, and so much flows from it, that I have a hard time ignoring it. It's just nice to hang out in this part, even though I know the whole garden needs my attention.

Rows 2 and 3 Intertwined with #1

These two rows seem to grow well when row 1 thrives in my garden. It's almost as if by paying attention to Row 1, I'm fertilizing Rows 2 and 3.

Row 2, Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations

I just cannot comprehend treating people unjustly, unequally, or without compassion if I believe in their worth and dignity; hence the branches growing into Row 1

And of course sometimes I forget, and a branch breaks off, but they can be made to grow back, as can all the stalks, tendrils, runners, and branches in my garden.

Row 3, Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations

And again, you can see how this row has tendrils to plants in row 1, which in my garden simply means that if I profess to recognize the worth and dignity of all people, I should accept, encourage, and support them as they try to improve their own lives or the lives of others. That's why I'm standing up here today.

a look at some other gardens would reveal that some people have incredibly greener thumbs for these seeds.

Row 4 A free and responsible search for truth and meaning

These seeds actually sprout nicely, but for some reason they don't all survive well in my garden. I think they are getting enough of the free part, but may be suffering from a lack of responsible searching, so that too much of what passes for truth and meaning, is really lazy thinking and following the crowd. But I try to keep this one alive. However, now that I see that some compost, weeding, or tilling might be needed, perhaps I can make an improvement. It really does deserve to flourish.

Row 5 The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and society at large

This is an important part of my garden and as you can see, it also grows best under the influence of Row 1. The basket of goods harvested from this part of the garden, nourishes my efforts to contribute honorably at work, here in our fellowship, and on the school board. While some of the plants are doing well, some need a little TLC, and I've recently committed to providing them with that.

Row 6 The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all

As you can see, all the seeds were planted, but only a few sprouted, and most have not grown well. Only a few localized plants have thrived. This probably reflects my belief that I can have the greatest positive impact on the most people by nourishing Rows 1,2, 3, 4, and 5 in my local environment. I'm open to suggestions about improving this part of the garden, however, as what I believe may not be what's best for this part of the garden.

Row 7 Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part

This is God in my garden. It is everybody and everything; good, bad, evil, and indifferent. It's the Isness of life, the cosmic currents, or the metaphor for everything that can't be intellectualized as Joseph Campbell put it. This is what I pray about.

Conclusion

Well now you've all seen my UU garden, or at least how I think it looks. It might look a little odd to some, it's maybe not planted in the most logical way, and parts appear under tended. But it's my garden and I nurture it the best I can, as I can, as do we all. So I don't apologize for it, and in fact believe it has made me a better person, if not always, at least occasionally. And for that, I'm grateful to this fellowship and what it provides.

Some people have incredibly luxuriant and productive gardens, and we should be happy for them, happy but not envious, for we need to tend to our own gardens first, and as we hone our own skills, maybe ours will also become luxurious by our own efforts. On the other hand, the master gardeners among us have always happily and thoughtfully shared their secrets and energy, as have all the gardeners. This may be our fellowships greatest strength, and of course helps us all be better gardeners.

Ok, so maybe the metaphor was beaten into the dirt, but it was a fun way for me to think about the UU principles and how they relate to my life (or perhaps in some cases, not so much), and I hope it was for you too. Regardless of how anyone does it, it's really up to each of us to grow our own Unitarian gardens, as no one will do it for us. It's our challenge and our adventure I suppose. We have the seeds, so Happy Gardening.

With that we can have some discussion if people are inclined, or maybe someone would like to come up and draw their garden? Or Roger can ask his questions about gophers and potato beetles now.

After Discussion: Irene Hause is coordinating the presentation for right after Christmas that has to do with spiritual goal setting. So bring a picture of your garden.