

Did you ever wonder why? Why do we say certain things? Where it came from, how it became a part of our lives. Did you know our normal routines are filled with things that have been transferred to us. Some of those things have been gladly received and others we may wish we had never heard of.

And yet it is present, in the things we eat, and how we prepare it, if we are more boisterous when around particular groups than others. All of these things have been shared with us and we partook of them.

We were exposed...

Exposure to other people, places and things are the impetus to why we do what we do. Let me give you an example, people who travel frequently are exposed to differences more so than others who do not.

As a result their conception of the world changes they are recipients of different mannerism and cultures reflected in the places they have encountered while traveling.

I have witnessed people from the north here in this country, spent time in the south and returned home having developed a slight southern accent that takes quite some time to let go of.

There are many things that can help define a culture I believe food is a deeply cultural thing...so let's talk food for a few minutes, after all no matter where we've come from this we have in common if we do not eat we will die.

So everybody eats.

We are approaching gratitude day aka Thanksgiving here in this country and the numerous cultures and ethnicities plan to celebrate and prepare a meal or feast.

And most often turkey and or ham are the main dishes, however the sides are culturally different.

In one household there may be pasta, in another there may be rice and yet another may have stuffing. I know in my household if I am the chef for the day, we will have collard greens and cornbread, for at least one side dish.

Now as a daughter of the northeast, it may seem strange to include collard greens and cornbread since these two dishes are associated with southern cuisine.

However, cultural influence has impacted my cooking hence greens and cornbread. Why because the food migrated to the north along with my family.

Just as many of your family members brought along cultural foods and ways of Being with them during migrations from other countries to the Americas.

Let me give you an example, tell a joke about the pork butt.

As we begin to acknowledge these cultural norms, we realize there has been a transference, a lending if you will, of our past to our present.

That is observable in multifaceted ways, like clothing, regional accents, foods, and mannerism to name a few. We also witness transference via political systems, religion, spirituality, even caste systems are transferred.

Today we will briefly talk about Historical and Cultural Transference to Self-Awareness. A few weeks ago I attended the RET meeting and was intrigued as I heard and shared stories of how racism has unintended cultural transference. The stories and emotions stirred assisted us as we in the group move towards cohesiveness. We now sit in circle and use a talking piece when we wish to speak. Each participant is both a leader and participant. Although this is new to the group they are in the development stages of creating a new norm for themselves. I find it fascinating and have witnessed how it strengthening the group dynamics already.

As I sat and listened to the stories of those who were not aware of the heavy burden of racism on our society and how we all are unintended victims of it my heart was gladdened by their willingness and courage to be vulnerable.

But not all of history is unfortunate, not all history carries the curse of supremacy, classism and misogyny. This we can see in some of the simple examples regarding food and travel. But what about spirituality and religion?

I for one have traveled and have found the older the known history of a place the more churches, mosques, temples and so forth are present within various geographical regions throughout the world.

And this includes America even up to today are we not congregating right now. Each to his own but we are here celebrating and creating our norms our culture.

We witnessed earlier during the service, recognition and gratitude for those who as the youth would say, "held it down," during the last year when All Faiths was without a minister.

You did not refrain from the call and purpose of UUism. Instead you shared your gifts, talents and abilities with AF's you held firm to your commitment. Clap and Thank You...

Some came boldly, and others hesitant but each of you made your way to the chancel, stepped up to the pulpit and shared your truth to the best of your ability. While others were working diligently in the background, to ensure that All Faiths would continue to serve its members and the community of Fort Myers, as the beacon we are.

Many had never been so busy and yet they showed up, even when weary, some wrote messages, others visited the sick, the elderly and those unable to be here.

There was knowledge and love demonstrated although we were without a minister. Because everyone has gifts, talents and abilities to share. And that is what happened, the congregation, you all made it happen.

Unitarian Universalism is not an easy religious/spiritual association, in fact it is our diversity that is most challenging, it is our diversity of beliefs and desire to remain in Beloved Community that makes us who we are, regardless of our plurality of faith. Another something we should be proud of, our pluralistic faith causes us to mature in our love for one another so we can continue in Beloved Community together.

Looking back at 2022, it was August 28 when Rev. CJ McGregor shared his last sermon here in 2022 and we did not have anyone to step into that role until September 2023. This resulted in the need for the congregation to take the reigns and indeed you all did.

You took up the call, to Lean on and Lean in.

Just as the song said, Lean on me, CJ left... when you are not strong and I'll be your friend and help you to carry on.

You all found strength and fortitude of character to remain by leaning on each other.

And trusting each other enough to not let the other fall. Give examples of trust and teamwork conferences. Stand in front of someone with your back to them and allow yourself to release your balance and fall backwards...

There is literally and clearly a visible transference of the history and culture of All Faiths that has been imparted to its members. Most of which is dependent on love and trust. We know this because of the various people who did not waiver in their commitment to AF and when called upon to act.

Indeed, action occurred, and you all continued to hold the mission and purpose of AF up and successfully witness to the world who you are.

Today, as I conclude, let me share with you how the impact of your commitment and witness has made a difference.

There is a vulnerability that comes with the work of individuals when they are called upon to serve and share. And that can be from the pulpit, to the parking lot to finding that perfect cord, that perfect harmony, that perfect balance to open yourself up to service.

Sometimes it is not well received and people just park where they choose, sometimes it is not well received because you may talk too much or not enough during a meeting and some are highly opinionated. While other times our well prepared notes get away from us and we have to wing it, because we lost our place.

And Self awareness kicks in strong. But self awareness is not the enemy because it is that self that is tantamount to our work whether volunteering or being compensated. Who and what we do is a reflection of who and what we are or the self.

No matter who, what, where, when or how you all managed to serve each other and our community. Those little voices of fear, and anxiety did not stop you from the mission. No matter how aware you were of the fear and or anxiety, you did it, and the entire AF congregation is better because you did it.

You studied, prepared and shared to the best of your ability, you pushed, ignored, brushed off negativity and became the glue that held us together.

Today I am honored to be in your presence and marvel at what you did, even enduring the aftermath of the hurricane where many of us became homeless and many are still displaced. You carried on.

Every Sunday, we congregate here at AF and enjoy each other's company while we learning, growing and serving together, modeling our motto.

Take a look, Directly behind me, we have a large glass sculpture, called, "We Are Each Other's Keeper," that's our motto.

I can remember while studying ministry, an aha moment when I realized that according to the Hebrew bible Adam and Eve's second son Cain was apparently so comfortable in the presence of G-d that when questioned about the whereabouts of his brother Abel whom Cain had murdered actually maybe a little...got smart with G-d.

So here is the story: Cain killed Abel because he was jealous of him. And when G-d questioned Cain about his brother Abel's whereabouts because he was missing, Cain said in Genesis 4, I don't know, am I my brother's keeper?

I was taken aback, and surprised that he had the courage to question G-d instead of answering truthfully. He lied and asked his own question.

This response was in part his way of saying Abel is not my responsibility, he is yours, G-d. A complete and utterly selfish response in addition to flat out lying.

It is reminiscent of the extreme individuality we are faced with today in America, empathy is something that is tolerated, no longer a way of Being. It is in fact independence instead of interdependence. Both/and is not impossible.

As I close today, I rejoice as I have been a witness of the mindfulness demonstrated here at AF. Your care and support of one another regarding the welfare of our members, friends and family is a testament of your commitment to one another and our faith.

I am grateful to be reminded every Sunday, as I see the sculptures' rings, a symbol of infinity, the cosmos and spirit, along with the images of people caught up in spirals symbolically representing the interconnected life force we all share.

I am encouraged when I see it. It reminds me...to never forget, "We Are Each Other's Keeper."

Let not us not become so comfortable here that we no longer see and or forget our own motto,

Say it with me..."We Are Each Other's Keeper," May it be so, Amen and Ashe.

OFFERTORY: Well it is now time when we all can participate, oh what can that be some of you may be wondering...it is offering time and I have a Joke, because laughter makes us more generous so here is the funny....

The creator is busy creating and talking with one of his angels and says, "Do you know what I have just done? I have just created 24 hours of alternating light and dark on Earth. Isn't that good?"

The angel says, "Yes, but what will you do now?"

The creator says, "Well, I think I'll call it a Day."

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