

WE, THE UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION, COVENANT TO  
AFFIRM AND PROMOTE:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person,  
Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations,  
Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual  
growth in our congregations;

A free and responsible search for truth and meaning:  
The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process  
within our congregations and in society at large;

The goal of world community  
with peace, liberty, and justice for all;  
Respect for the interdependent web of all existence  
of which we are a part.

THE LIVING TRADITION WE SHARE  
DRAWS FROM MANY RESOURCES:

Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder,  
Affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit  
and an openness to the forces that create and uphold life;  
Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge  
us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice,  
compassion, and the transforming power of love;

Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our  
ethical and spiritual life;

Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to  
God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;

Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of  
reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries  
of the mind and spirit.

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles  
our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and  
expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this  
covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and  
support.

“Resources for Living”

Lynn Ungar,  
(Minister for LIFESPAN LEARNING,  
Church of the Larger Fellowship)

What gives you a sense of abundance-a feeling that you have plenty, that you are satisfied, that there is enough to go around? I have to say that I get a certain sense of abundance from having paid my bills, and from having leftovers in the refrigerator, and from having a full tank of gas in my car. And I get a wonderful feeling of abundance when we have a good, soaking rain, and I know that the garden has been thoroughly watered.

Somehow, a sense of abundance has to do with a feeling of security, of knowing that there is enough. We feel safe in the presence of abundance, able to let go of some of our worries.

Where it gets tricky is that as often as not the things that make us feel safe are exactly the opposite of what will help us to experience abundance. When we avoid trying something new and challenging, we generally feel safer than if we branch out.

Staying home and watching TV feels a lot more secure than going out to try salsa dancing. Eating at a chain restaurant tends to feel much safer than going to a place where you can't read the menu. Talking only to people you know at a gathering is a lot more secure than going out of your way to introduce yourself to someone new, especially if that someone new looks or sounds different than the people you most often hang out with.

But that kind of security comes from a place of fear, not abundance. Those kinds of fears-of not looking right or sounding right or knowing the right moves-are inevitable. Nobody likes feeling ignorant or out of place. But when you choose the security that comes with sticking only with what you know, the walls of your little room can start to feel awfully close, and it's hard to stretch into a feeling of abundance.

You might also think that the best way to feel secure, that you have enough, would be to hang on to what you've got so that you don't have to worry about going without. But it turns out that what provides people with a genuine sense of abundance is, in fact, giving things away. This is scientific knowledge, with lots of experiments to back it up. Most people think that winning the lottery and having all kinds of money to buy the things they want will make them happy. But it turns out that people who do that tend to spend even more money than they have, and end up more broke and less happy.

Michael Norton, a social science researcher, discusses this in a talk called "How to Buy Happiness." He and his colleagues did a bunch of experiments in various countries, with various people and amounts of money. Some folks got money that they were instructed to spend on themselves, and others got money they were to spend on someone else. That was all the direction the people got. And the experimenters had the participants fill out a survey about their happiness level before and afterward.

It turns out that those who spent money on themselves were neither happier nor less happy than before they got the money. Nothing happened to their sense of abundance one way or the other. But the people who spent money on others—whether they were in Canada or Uganda, whether they bought a present for their mother or helped a neighbor whose child had malaria—the people who gave their money away became happier.

It seems odd, in a way. When you buy something for yourself you have more than you did before. You have a pair of earrings or a dessert that wasn't there before. When you buy something for another person, what do you get? Well, it turns out, quite a lot.

The Buddhist monk Thanissaro Bikkhu writes in an essay entitled "Generosity First": "When you give, you put yourself in a position of wealth. The gift is proof that you have more than enough. At the same time it gives you a sense of your worth as a person. You're able to help other people. The act of giving

also creates a sense of spaciousness in the mind, because the world we live in is created by our actions, and the act of giving creates a spacious world: a world where generosity is an operating principle, a world where people have more than enough, enough to share.

"A sense of spaciousness in the mind . . . A spacious world, where people have more than enough." That's a pretty good definition of abundance. When we step outside the boundaries of our own fears, when we give out of a conviction that there is enough to share, then we live in the spacious world of abundance.

Abundance is not wealth. It isn't even having the bills paid, gas in the car or leftovers in the refrigerator—although those things are pretty nice. Abundance is knowing that there is, by definition, enough soup in the pot to invite someone in for dinner, enough time to attend patiently to a child with a project or a friend who needs a listening ear, enough space in the mind to entertain ideas that come from an unexpected source.

Abundance is a world of spaciousness where we are all invited to dwell.

