



Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

The Reverend Alison Wilbur Eskildsen, Parish Minister
The Reverend Don Randall, Community Minister

“Like a River Flowing”

© by Myrna Adams West, Lay Minister for Spiritual Arts

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At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

Centering Thoughts

Rivers, ponds, lakes and streams—they all have different names, but they all contain water.
Just as religions do—they all contain truths. —*Muhammad Ali*

Forests, lakes, and rivers, clouds and winds, stars and flowers, stupendous glaciers
and crystal snowflakes—every form of animate or inanimate existence,
leaves its impress upon the soul of man. —*Orison Swett Marden*

Study how water flows in a valley stream, smoothly and freely between the rocks.
Also learn from holy books and wise people. Everything—even mountains, rivers,
plants and trees—should be your teacher. —*Morihei Ueshiba*

Reflection

Rivers have always been gathering places. Our earliest ancestors made their temporary and permanent homes near bodies of water so that they had an ample supply of that necessary commodity. Native peoples of every continent sought sources of fresh water that could provide food, transportation, and clean drinking water. Almost all of the earth’s largest cities have grown up around mighty rivers. Even our own small city of Athens grew up along the banks of the Oconee River near a trail where early Cherokee people crossed the river and where Daniel Easley established a mill in the early- to mid- 18th Century at a spot that became known as Cedar Shoals.

Rivers are also places where connections are made. Early in the 19th Century, Daniel Easley made connections with John Milledge, a close friend of U.S. president Thomas Jefferson and later a governor of Georgia. John Milledge just happened to be part of a committee who was looking for land on which to build the seminary that would become the first chartered state university in the nation, the University of Georgia (*from New Georgia Encyclopedia*).

And because of all that, we, here at UUFA, have an important connection to the Oconee River. Fast forward to 1954 when several University of Georgia professors, their spouses and friends founded what would soon become the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens. Obviously, if it weren’t for the Oconee River flowing by Daniel Easley’s mill, this Fellowship would not exist!!

This Fellowship is like a river. It is a gathering place. Members and friends and others from the greater Athens community come here, not just on Sunday mornings, but Sunday afternoons and evenings and on most days of the week. If you drop by almost any day or evening, you will find Fellowship and/or community meetings going on in the Fellowship Hall, the RE rooms, the sofa room or the youth room—maybe even on the playground.

This Fellowship is like a river. It is a place where connections are made. For example, I have formed many friendships and even discovered a long-lost cousin because of this Beloved Community. Our shared values, our concern for other people and the environment and especially for justice, our love of food and music and learning—these bring us together and keep us together. Why, even a few marriages have been made because of this Fellowship!! And through the worship experiences, the programs and activities, the meeting and working together, I have also deepened my connection to that spirit of love and compassion that is both within me and around me. Perhaps you have, too.

This Fellowship is like a river. It is interdependent. Just as any river, the Oconee included, is interdependent on the creeks and streams that flow into it to keep it flowing toward the ocean, so we are interdependent on each other and on the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations to keep us faithful to our shared values. We are interdependent on Athens and the surrounding counties to keep us supplied with people and resources and causes. We are interdependent on each other for the love and support that each of us needs to grow into the type of person we want to be. We are interdependent on the sharing of time, talent and treasure that takes us ever closer to our vision of being a beacon of liberal religion and spirituality in Northeast Georgia and to fulfilling our mission of promoting love and justice in our larger community and in the world.

And so it is that we are here this morning, like a river flowing, gathering in Beloved Community, connecting with those who share our UU values, recognizing that in so many amazing ways, we are interdependent on each other, on our beautiful water-covered planet and on the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. May we, like the river, keep flowing. May it be so.

Amen and Blessed Be.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Why do you think it is easier for some to acknowledge the interdependence of humans with the natural world than the interdependence of humans with other humans whose culture, lifestyle, skin color, religion, politics, etc. differ from their own? Explain.
2. Ever since the United States of America was born out of a war for independence from England, Americans have taken great pride in their independent spirit. How might we reconcile this independent spirit with the need, some might say “necessity,” for interdependence?