



# Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

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## “Cross My Heart: Keeping Our Promises”

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A sermon reflection delivered on January 21, 2018

At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

### Centering Thoughts:

*If anything is worth doing, do it with all your heart [undertake it firmly].* Buddha, DHAMMAPADA-313

*Commitment is what transforms a promise into reality.* Abraham Lincoln

*I meant what I said and I said what I meant, an elephant's faithful one hundred percent!*

HORTON HATCHES THE EGG by Dr. Seuss (Theodore S. Geisel)

*What is a promise if not your hand in mine?* Alice Walker, A POEM TRAVELLED DOWN MY ARM

**Story:** A live-acted retelling of *Horton Hatches the Egg*, by Dr. Seuss

**Reflection:** (text approximate from an interactive all-ages service)

Thank you, storytellers!

How would you describe Horton the elephant? What characteristics did he have?

Yes...Gentle, faithful, kind, trustworthy, loyal, and more.

Horton sympathized with Mayzie's need for a vacation and he trusted her promise not to be gone long. So he promised Mayzie to be faithful, to sit on her egg until she returned. Despite his own boredom, being bullied and laughed at by friends, threatened by hunters, and becoming a circus side-show, he did not break his promise. He stayed true to his word in the face of winter's snow and sleet, and the danger posed by heartless hunters. /

Is Horton someone to admire? Yes...for his courage and integrity.

What about Mayzie? No...we don't admire her.

She had little integrity. She deceived Horton by saying she'd return in just a short time. While Mayzie was off having fun, she decided never to return. Mayzie was irresponsible, shirking

her duties to love and care for the hatchling growing inside the egg. If the circus hadn't arrived near her beach, she wouldn't have been present when the egg hatched. Selfishly, she wouldn't have thought to take it back, thus treating the hatchling more like a thing than a living creature.

Is Mayzie to be admired? No.

But I think there's one thing worse than even all these things. I believe Mayzie violated Unitarian Universalism's First Principle – that we should treat each person or living thing with respect.

Can you tell me how Mayzie disrespected Horton?

Is it respectful to lie or break promises to someone helping you out? No. She would show respect by being honest and keeping her promises, values we UUs affirm.

Mayzie used Horton for her own ends. She didn't respect that Horton had his own needs and wants. She put Horton in danger in her quest for an easy, free life. Mayzie. She didn't give Horton a chance to make his own decision about whether to allow Mayzie to take a long vacation or even adopt her egg. He might have said yes.

Sadly, Mayzie's behavior might look like ours when we consider our own needs above and beyond anyone else's. It's easy to think selfishly that our needs are more important. Yes, our individual needs matter, but if we give no thought to the needs of other people or beings, we'll be disrespectful and we actually might harm others unknowingly.

Also, if we are so concerned about our own fun, comfort, or fragility, we may never respond to big challenges that help us learn and grow or require us to work with others who may differ from ourselves. As our 7<sup>th</sup> Principle affirms, our lives are interconnected and interdependent. Our actions affect others.

Do you trust Mayzie? Is she someone you'd like to become friends with?

No, because Mayzie is selfish and untrustworthy. Good relationships depend on trust and mutual respect. People like Mayzie are difficult to befriend.

Do you trust Horton? Do you want Horton to be your friend?

Yes, because Horton is dependable. He means what he says, 100 percent. /

Horton's behavior raises a question about how far we should go to keep a promise? Must all promises be kept, no matter what?

Do we keep our promises when it gets difficult or threatens our life? Do you think Horton should have abandoned the egg?

How much inconvenience we're willing to put up with may depend on the promise. Keeping a New Year's resolution to forgo candy may not be worth it. Keeping a marriage vow

typically is worth some inconvenience, even worth risking one's life. But everyday promises usually lie between those extreme promises, such as completing homework assignments, raising children, and fulfilling expectations here.

May our UU Principles and this community help guide us in knowing when to make, how to keep, and even when to break promises.

May it be so.

### **Questions for Reflection & Discussion**

1. Has someone failed to fulfill a promise to you? If so, how did that make you feel? Have you broken a promise? How did that make you feel?
2. What helps you keep your promises, even in the face of challenges? What promises have you found most difficult to keep?
3. Do you feel you've made a promise to UUFA or Unitarian Universalism? Is there a personal 'cost' or expectation to be a UU? Have you received unexpected rewards for being UU? Share.