

Rabbi Laurie Zimmerman
First Unitarian Society
Service Sunday
August, 2012

Planting for the Future

A story from the Talmud:

There was once a great sage by the name of Honi. One day Honi was out walking when he saw an old man planting a carob tree. Surprised, Honi yelled out to him, "How long do you think it will take for this tree to bear fruit?"

The old man replied, "Seventy years."

"Seventy years," Honi thought to himself, slightly puzzled. He turned to the old man, "Why do you bother? Are you really going to live another seventy years so you can eat the fruit from this tree?"

"No," he responded slowly. "I know that I am old, and I will not live to eat from the fruit of this tree. But just as my father and grandfather planted trees for me, I plant for my children and for my children's children."

We come here today to plant for our children and for our children's children. We will pick up paint brushes, visit the sick, transport furniture for the homeless, clean carpets for the elderly, remove invasive plants, distribute school supplies, and march in the gay pride parade. We will contribute our time to community organizations that are the lifeline for so many people in Dane County.

We do this out of generosity to the needy among us, out of a belief that we have a responsibility to our neighbors and our neighborhoods, and out of a commitment to our own communities. We are here to connect with each other as we work side by side, and to teach ourselves, our children, and each other the *mitzvah* – the sacred obligation – of making the world just a bit less broken.

Just as the old man planted for the future, we too plant for the future. We may never see the fruits of our labors, but our actions matter. Judaism teaches: *mitzvah goreret mitzvah* – every good deed leads to another good deed.

We cannot know what kind of ripple effects will come of our work. Our actions may change the world for better in ways that are unimaginable to us.

Let this be a day where we join together with generosity and kindness for the good of our community.

Let this be a day where we commit ourselves to making the world a better place 365 days a year, heeding the words of the great Rabbi Tarfon: *“Lo alecha hamlachah ligmor. V’lo atah ben chorin l’hibatel mimena* – It is not your duty to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.”

Let this be a day where we plant for the future.

And let us say, Amen.

Social Action Blessings

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְרַדּוֹף צֶדֶק.

*Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu
b'mitz'votav v'tzivanu lir'dof tzedek.*

Praised are You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the
universe, who hallows us with Your mitzvot
and commands us to pursue justice.