

Order of Service
Being Peace
Sunday, February 15, 2009



Call to Worship and Chalice Lighting

We gather the spirit, we harvest the power.
Our separate fires kindle one flame.
We witness the mystery of this hour.
Our trials, in this light, appear all the same.
We gather in peace.
We gather in thanks.
We gather in sympathy now and then.
We gather in hope, compassion and strength.
We gather to celebrate, once again.

Meditation and Prayer from Ralph Waldo Emerson

Let us learn the revelation of all nature and thought;
That the Highest dwells within us,
That the sources of nature are in our own minds.
As there is no screen or ceiling
Between our heads and the infinite heavens,
So there is no bar or wall in the soul
Where we, the effect, cease,
And God, the cause begins.
Now in the silence, embracing the stillness...
Amen.

Reading

"Let Us Be at Peace," by Thich Nhat Hanh
Scott Harris

Let us be at peace with our bodies and our minds.

Let us return to ourselves and become wholly ourselves.

Let us be aware of the sources of being,

Common to us all and to all living things.

Evoking the presence of the Great Compassion,

Let us fill our hearts with our own compassion—

Towards ourselves and towards all living beings.

Let us pray that we ourselves cease to be

The cause of suffering to each other.

With humility, with awareness of the existence of life,

And of the sufferings that are going on around us,

Let us practice the establishment of peace

In our hearts and on earth.

The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace, by Jack
Kornfield
Bruce

Peace is not an absence

Of change or difficulty.

It should not be confused with

Withdrawal or indifference to life.

These are imitations of peace,

Ways of closing down based on fear.

We must see them for what they are.

Withdrawal removes us from connectedness,

From openness, from love.

When we withdraw out of fear, we run away.
We believe that by disconnecting from others
We will be safe.

Withdrawal is not true inner peace.

Indifference pretends to create peace,
But it is based on not caring, a silent resignation.

It is a movement away,
A separation fed by a subtle fear of the heart.

We pull back,
believing that what happens to others
Is not our concern.

Our courage leaves us.
Indifference is a misguided way
of defending ourselves.

The peace of the heart
Is not emotional resignation,
But an openness
That meets the ever-changing world
With compassion.
With equanimity
We can care for all things
Without trying to
Control them.

We can't talk about peace without paying attention to the reality of violence in our world and in our own daily lives. Using Eckhart Tolle's language, violence is the madness of the human situation at this horrendous time of history. It's how we as a species deal with conflict, with prejudice, with greed, and we do it on a massive scale. Violent means justify the ends of comfort and abundance for us and ours. We wonder, where amid the anger and the hurt is the potential for lasting peace?

The twentieth century saw more widespread and more deeply destructive violence than any time in human history so far. My hope is that we can do better in this our 21st century. We have squandered the gifts of technology to develop instruments of destruction and machines of war. And when you have a hammer, you'll look everywhere to find a nail to whack.

During the last hundred years we as a human species have engaged in more violent mega-atrocities than most of us can even remember. From time to time it is important to review the toll of the violence, and to attend to the extent of the suffering it has caused, in order to remind us of the value of peace in the world community that is our sixth Unitarian Universalist principle. We remember war so that we can find ways to wage peace. The following estimates of death tolls in the last century are based on several review articles .

- Congo Free State (1886-1908): 8 000 000
- Mexican Revolution (1910-20): 1 000 000
- First World War (1914-18): 40 000 000
- Russian Civil War (1917 -21): 7 000 000
- Armenian Massacres (1915-23): 1 500 000
- China, Warlord Era (1917-28): 800 000
- China, Nationalist Era (1928-37): 3 100 000
- Stalin's Reign of Terror (1932-38): 23 000 000
- Second World War (1937-1945): 50 000 000
- Korean War (1950-53): 2 800 000
- Rwanda and Burundi (1959-95): 1 350 000

- Second Indochina War (1960-75): 3 500 000
- Ethiopia (1962-92): 1 400 000
- Nigeria (1966-70): 1 000 000
- Bangladesh (1971): 1 250 000
- Cambodia, Khmer Rouge (1975-1978): 1 650 000
- Mozambique (1975-1992): 1 000 000
- Afghanistan (1979-2001): 1 800 000
- Iran-Iraq War (1980-88): 1 000 000
- Sudan (1983 et seq.): 1 900 000
- Bosnia (1992-95): 500 000
- Kinshasa Congo (1998 et seq.): 3 800 000

Together these violent deaths total 138 million men, women and children killed in the causes of war, ethnic cleansing, and other atrocities. Just in the last century! That's an average of more than a million people every year! And this does not include the massive personal devastation, dislocation, injury, rape, and pillage that is ever part of this sad story. The deaths alone total to half of the current US population!

I am shocked. Somehow I'd not let myself know about all this violence. Surely I'd never added up the death toll. Nor had I thought about the extent of suffering we humans have caused each other in this short period of time. Yes, Tolle is right. It's madness.

What can you say in the face of all that violence? The great Taoist sage, Lao Tzu, gives us a first step here. In his masterwork, the *Tao te Ching*, we read this poem:

If there is to be peace in the world,
 There must be peace in the nations.
 If there is to be peace in the nations,
 There must be peace in the cities.

If there is to be peace in the cities,
There must be peace between neighbors.
If there is to be peace between neighbors,
There must be peace in the home.
If there is to be peace in the home,
There must be peace in the heart.

In this poem we are drawn back to the place from which the violence springs—our own beating heart. First and foremost we must face into the violence within our selves, in a way that may transform it into peace. The hope we have for humanity lies in the fact that this transformation is possible, in each of us, if we are willing to do the work.

I'm not suggesting here that we divorce ourselves from that shadow-side out of which we may attack others in word or deed. Trying to suppress the shadow only increases its power over us and our destructive actions in our families and community. It's through growing awareness of the shadow within, acknowledging its value for our self-protection, that it may begin to lessen in its power over us, allowing the qualities of peace and compassion to come to the fore. The work of making peace within the heart is profoundly personal.

There's a woman who was my close friend when I was a young adult, named Joni. She was usually sweet, joyful, and radiated peace. I often felt myself to be more peaceful in her presence. That is, until her husband came around. Whenever he showed up, she seemed to shift inside to an underlying irritability. Even when he was not present, just the thought of him would cause this irritability to come up, causing Joni to strike out at others in ways that were mean and harmful.

What I'm wanting you to notice here is that Joni was an essentially peaceful person. And yet, at a deep level of her psyche she had this simmering irritability, this shadow, that would occasionally explode into a violent response towards others. Of course we could discount this behavior, saying something must be wrong with her personality. But in fact, I think that what she struggled with is true for me and for many of us. The more Joni tried to stop this behavior, the more it erupted.

With the support of a counselor, Joni figured out where this simmering irritation was coming from. Her father had been verbally abusive, and now her husband had, for several years, attacked her verbally whenever he was stressed. Since he was almost always stressed about something, he would blow up at her frequently. But he also tried to repress his anger. After a time of withdrawing or pouting he would blow up again. So Joni could never predict the attacks; when they happened she would be blind-sided and overwhelmed by their suddenness and their power. Without notice she would have to trump up her own anger to respond to his, usually too little, too late.

It's hard to go from peace and joy right into anger. Yet, if you carry an underlying simmering irritation, you're ready for action at a moment's notice. Joni realized that the irritability she always felt deep down was serving her ready defense against the attacks of her husband, as it had served her also with her father's attacks.

Two things came from this. One, she reframed the irritability, calling it her "pilot light." How can the fire in the furnace be ignited if the pilot light isn't burning all the time. She began to acknowledge the value of that pilot light, and stopped beating herself up about it. Accepting the shadow, rather than trying to suppress it, she knew it was there to help her when she needed it.

Second, and most importantly, she finally dumped her abusive husband. Within months, she found that she had little need for that pilot light. It wasn't gone. It just wasn't needed any more.

Does this mean we should run away from trouble in order to find peace? In the case of an abusive and unjust relationship, that may be a very healthy strategy. But avoiding conflict does not bring peace. Again from Jack Kornfield:

Peace is not an absence
Of change or difficulty.
It should not be confused with
Withdrawal or indifference to life.
These are imitations of peace,
Ways of closing down based on fear.
We must see them for what they are.

Withdrawal removes us from connectedness,
From openness, from love.
When we withdraw out of fear, we run away.
We believe that by disconnecting from others
We will be safe.
Withdrawal is not true inner peace.
Indifference pretends to create peace,
But it is based on not caring, a silent resignation.
It is a movement away,
A separation fed by a subtle fear of the heart.
We pull back, believing that what happens to others
Is not our concern.
Our courage leaves us.
Indifference is a misguided way of defending ourselves.

If we always run away from conflict in order to find peace, we will lose the creative edge of our relationships. We will lose the chance to love and to serve. Entering into conflict with courage and hope, we transform it into *dialog*. By entering into healthy dialog with other people in our lives, our substantial differences become the basis for learning and growth. Through effective dialog we begin to get our most essential life-needs met.

At the core of peace is justice, the ability and the opportunity to get our deepest needs met. We remember the profound words of Martin Luther King, Jr., who said, "There can be no peace without justice." A person or a nation that is constantly thwarted in fulfilling the basic needs, like the need for safety, for food, for shelter, and for health, will not be at peace. A person or a nation that cannot effectively advocate for itself in dialog with other persons or other nations will need the advocacy of others, first to get basic needs met, and then to find a measure of peace.

Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, offers a truly earth-shaking and transformative teaching that comes from his ancient tradition. It seems as if this teaching has two parts, but in the end we understand that it is one integrated approach to the world. On the one hand this simple monk realized, in the course of Zen practice, his own real nature as Being. What we call peace is very close to that state of “No-Mind” or “Pure Being” that Thich Naht Hanh knew as his very core, his very essence.

On the other hand, the Vietnam monk found violence and suffering in his homeland—wherever he turned and from the time of his earliest experiences. He was filled with compassion and was called into service for his suffering brothers and sisters, grandparents and children. Another way to say this is that he was acutely aware that their basic life needs were not being met, and that violent actions robbed them of all opportunity for justice. He knew that he must confront the powers of injustice. He calls the resulting approach “engaged Buddhism” because it brings the depth of Being into direct confrontation with injustice.

This sounds like two movements: finding deep peace and engaging the powers of injustice. But for the realized Zen practitioner, it is one, integrated movement. Being peace, this gentle monk has no choice but to confront non-peace. He teaches that only from that place of being peace can we work effectively for peace and justice in our human family. He says:

To work for peace, you must have a peaceful heart.... But many who work for peace are not at peace. They still have anger and frustration, and their work is not really peaceful.... To preserve peace, our hearts must be at peace with the world, with our brothers and our sisters. When we try to overcome evil with evil, we are not working for peace.... Trying to overcome evil with evil is not the way to make peace.

Being peace. Then going out in the world to face violence and injustice. Easy to say. But how to do it? The answer here is practice. And there are two profound spiritual practices that I would recommend.

First, you don't have to be a Zen monk to experience those moments of stillness and silence that the Buddhists talk about as Being or no-mind. Sure it takes practice, but just think of all the days for practice that stretch out before us in our long lives. Whether you sit to meditate, or walk in the woods in the stillness, or take in the

beauty of the Northwest beaches, you will become more and more grounded in Being. In the teachings of Tolle, peace, like beauty, joy, and compassion, are necessary and attendant aspects of the experience of Being. Sitting in practice, settling into no-mind, peace wells up like a rising tide. Not “trying to be peaceful” but instead “being the peace.” Peace is not an emotion. It is more accurately a quality of Being itself.

The second practice is dialog. Violence in our human actions is preceded by violence in our language, and violent language is preceded by violence in our thoughts. Learning dialog means learning to bring an intention into our thoughts, language, and actions that honors rather than harms the other person. I have shared the work of Marshall Rosenberg here before, and will again. The essence of this practice is that we all have deep needs. I’m not talking here about wanting a new car. I’m talking about those needs, which, if met, will confer beauty and fulfillment in our lives, independent of our lesser wants—such things as safety, inclusion, autonomy, acknowledgement, interdependence, nurture, appreciation, self-expression

What if you and I were to imagine a world in which our needs could co-exist, without being in competition, without the need to destroy each other? What if we entered into conversation about *helping* each other get fundamental needs met? What if families did this for each other? Or neighbors? Or communities? Or nations? What would that be like!? I’m reminded of Kurt Munnich’s article in the last Newsletter. What kind of world would it be if people asked, as he has done, “How can I help?”

Maybe it would look something like this:

I see trees of green, red roses too

I see them bloom for me and you

And I think to myself, what a wonderful world.

May it be so.