

Evil

**Doestoevski underlined the idea that evil is not just one more mystery.
It is so central to our lives that if reason stumbles there, it must give way to faith.
If you cannot understand why children are tortured,
Nothing else you understand really matters.**

—Anne Lamott

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The word *evil*, like the word *God*, is often rejected outright in our postmodern world for its supposed association with the supernatural. My theology of God is wholly natural with an infusion of a natural mysticism. My theology of evil is also wholly natural. You don't need to believe in the Devil to define the nature of nor understand the terrible power of evil.

Of late when Unitarian Universalist ministers gather and begin postulating, pondering, and profusely "profounding," we nearly always announce the necessity for (and current absence of) a shared theology of evil. We seem to have a shared notion of what is good, meaningful, or worthy of our devotion. Even if we don't all use the same words in our definitions, we give ourselves in our varied ministries to connecting people, encouraging spiritual and intellectual deepening, serving those most in need, and giving voice to the voiceless. In its most basic form, we maintain at our collective core a call to do good by defending, honoring, and celebrating the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

Why then do we struggle, as ministers and lay members, with the opposite notion; why do we have such a difficult time describing our call to prevent, obstruct, or correct evil?

As I said at the outset, we may wrestle with the word's supernatural association—but that hasn't stopped us from incorporating the language of reverence into our repertoire, with words like *grace*, *divinity*, or even *redemption*. Perhaps we are worried that the word *evil* can be used in dangerous and wholly un-good ways, especially when it is used to demonize a whole population or segment thereof. Or perhaps we

realize that we don't have the chops to define evil in a satisfactory manner—that we don't have the wisdom to explain the terrible force that moves through our lives and our world, abusing children, murdering mothers, and denying those deemed "lesser" their basic human rights.

These are all good reasons to be afeared of the project, but I beg us to go forward. This quote by the ethicist and theologian Susan Neiman is, for me, provocation enough: "Doestoevski underlined the idea that evil is not just one more mystery. It is so central to our lives that if reason stumbles there, it must give way to faith. If you cannot understand why children are tortured, nothing else you understand really matters."

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Examining Evil



Rev. Anya
Sammler-Michael

Neiman is right: we need faith to progress in the work of understanding evil—faith to go forward when all the stories of human failure and all the vistas of human wreckage will bring us to our knees.

Here's my basic definition: evil is the force moving in and among and through us that separates us one from one another and from our collective and embodied conscious, destroying the creative capacity of life in all its various

forms. A definition is a start—we will deepen in this work on February second in the sharing of our worship service "How We Hurt—A Reflection on Evil." And if you are moved to study more, consider Susan Neiman's book *Theology From a Fractured Vista* or Lance Morrow's *Evil, an Investigation*.

So let us gather ourselves and move forward together, faithfully.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Evil Thrives When We Look Away

What is evil? The Devil could be considered evil if you believe in this spirit and it does have the word *evil* in it. Speaking of the Devil, I still get chills every time I watch the movie *The Exorcist*. But the belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; humans alone are quite capable of being morally bad.



Bob Brown,
Board President

And again, how do we define evil? Something may be said to be evil when it takes human life, or if it causes humans to suffer in an inhumane way. Enslaving people against their will would be inhumane and evil. The massive killings of wars are an evil. One person killing another innocent person is evil.

Take the massive killings of wars. People are diverse in customs, judgment, and what is disagreeable to reason. The people on each opposing side may think that they are in the right (on the side of good) and that the other side is wrong (evil). However, I do believe there is a moral compass in everyone that should not be compromised by anyone.

A long stretch back, I took the time to read all 1,600 pages of *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* by William L. Shirer because I wanted to understand how a nation could allow the atrocities of Adolph Hitler's plan to exterminate an entire race. I understand the restrictions and economic challenges facing Germany after WWI and the very harsh terms they were given in Treaty of Versailles. But the blame on a race and the ensuing genocide is another matter. To this point, and not specific to the Nazis and WWII, I believe the evil in this world is made possible by the sanction we give it. All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to compromise their basic moral principles and do nothing.



Yvonne participates in January's fire ceremony

RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION

Responding With Love

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

—Rev Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Ancient stories, as well as the words of recent leaders, such as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., have encouraged us to answer hate and cruelty with love and kindness. For instance, in a Sufi story some of our children heard last year, a man yelled after people who nearly ran over him, "May all of your deepest desires be satisfied!" When asked why he did this, he answered, "If they were happy, would they be so thoughtless and cruel as to nearly run down an old man and his student?" This story* recognizes that evil, whether actual or apparent, is rooted in desire, pain, or fear, which can only be reduced by love and kindness.



Linda Weaver,
Director of
Religious Exploration

This is the idea behind Thirty Days of Love, which began on January 19 and ends on February 16. Thirty Days of Love is a time for developing greater compassion, getting to know other people better, learning about social justice issues, and acting on a commitment to compassion and justice. The theme for the week beginning February 2 is "Building Bridges of Love." During this week, consider reaching out to new people or visiting somewhere you would not normally go. Think about ways you can practice radical inclusion and loving kindness, and encourage others to do the same.

The theme of the final week, beginning February 9, is "Pause, Reflect, and Celebrate." This is a time to reflect on how the journey affected your life, even if you only participated in one activity. Share your experience with a family member, a friend, or me, or email love@uua.org. For more information about Thirty Days of Love, check out <http://standingonthesideoflove.org/30days2014/>. This website includes daily meditations and interesting activities for all ages. You can sign up for daily emails at <http://standingonthesideoflove.org/2014-30daysoflove/>. We hope you will join with us in considering ways to respond with love.

* You can read the story, "Dervish in the Ditch," at www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/loveguide/session13/sessionplan/stories/168951.shtml.

Children's Religious Education topics and a list of programs and events for children and families is on the calendar at the UUCS website, www.uusterling.org.

THIRTY DAYS OF LOVE

Have you been looking for a uniquely Unitarian Universalist holiday? Want to join with others as you further develop your compassion and act on your commitment to justice? Consider celebrating Thirty Days of Love, ending February 16. The Thirty Days of Love is a period of intentional action, service, education, and reflection. It is rooted in the belief that love is the ultimate guiding force of our world and that love calls us to speak and act against oppression.

The theme of the week beginning February 2 is “Building Bridges of Love.” It is a time to reach out past walls, barriers, or borders and engage in places you don’t usually go, encouraging ourselves and others to practice radical love and inclusion. The theme of the final week, beginning February 9, is “Pause, Reflect, and Celebrate.” Reflect on how this journey has affected your life, even if you only participated in one activity. Share your experience with a family member, friend, Linda Weaver, or the UUCS newsletter team, or email your story to love@uua.org. For more information about Thirty Days of Love and for activity ideas, check out <http://standingonthesideoflove.org/30days2014/>.

GA SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarships are available to support members interested in attending the Unitarian Universalist Association’s General Assembly this summer (June 25–29, 2014, in Providence, RI). There are scholarships available specifically for Young Adults and Youth and for Lay Leaders. Scholarship applications will be available at www.uua.org/ga/registration/financialaid/ beginning March 1. General registration for GA also opens on March 1.

WATER FOR WEST VIRGINIANS

The UU Congregation in Charleston, WV, needs additional donations to support those affected by the Freedom Industries chemical spill (Elk River chemical spill). Residents are now paying for both bottled water and tap water that may not be safe even to bathe in. Not everyone can afford bottled water, and the water company’s recommended process for flushing the plumbing in homes increases the residents’ water bills. It is unclear whether the tap water is safe yet or when it will be safe. Those who can afford it purchase bottled water. Others are forced to use their tap water unless help for purchasing water is available.

The UU congregation has been organizing donations to provide direct aid to service industry workers who cannot work when restaurants are closed. The congregation is also working with the United Way, businesses, and union groups to have an area-wide fundraising campaign for help with water and utility bill payments. The Charleston congregation is committed to using your donation well and thanks you for your care and support. Any checks should be made out to Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Charleston (UUC) with the notation “Water Relief” and sent to UU Congregation of Charleston, 520 Kanawha Boulevard W., Charleston, WV 25302.

STANDING ON THE SIDE OF LOVE: *Voting Rights Rally*

UUSJ, UUA President Peter Morales, and Standing on the Side of Love (SSL) encourage UUs to attend the Mass Moral March rally on Saturday, February 8, in Raleigh, NC, to demonstrate opposition to the most draconian voter identification laws in the nation. Information about the UU contingent schedule of events and links to register are available at <http://standingonthesideoflove.org/mass-moral-march-saturday-february-8th-2014-raleigh-nc/>.



UUCS taking part in immigration reform

A MONTH OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

February: Evil

Members of our congregation are invited to engage the practice of *Lectio Divina*. *Lectio Divina* is Latin for divine reading, spiritual reading, or holy reading, and represents a traditional practice of scriptural reading intended to promote communion with that which is ultimately meaningful. It is a way of praying or meditating with sacred words that calls one to study, ponder, listen and, finally, rejoice within the soul. Unitarian Universalists embrace a wide-reaching definition of scripture, finding words of profound meaning in the works of the world religions, scientists, poets, and the experiences of our own lives.

Find the time in your day to read each piece every day. Read, pause, read again, pause, and then reflect. You may choose to write each quote in a journal and add notes from your reflections. You may choose to read each piece to your family at the dinner table. You may choose to read in the morning or before sleep. You may choose to use the piece to gather your spirit for prayer or meditation.

January 30—February 5

The world is a dangerous place to live, not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it.

—Albert Einstein

February 6—12

I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent.

—Mahatma Gandhi,

quoted in *The Essential Gandhi: An Anthology of His Writings on His Life, Work, and Ideas*

February 13—19

It is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succor of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till. What weather they shall have is not ours to rule.

—Gandalf, in J.R.R. Tolkien,
The Lord of the Rings

February 20—26

If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn,
The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956

February 27—March 5

*Looks like what drives me crazy
Don't have no effect on you—
But I'm gonna keep on at it
Till it drives you crazy, too.*

—Langston Hughes, *Selected Poems*

WITNESS FOR LOVE!

End Marriage Discrimination in Virginia

Join your faith community and Interfaith partners supporting People of Faith for Equality in VA (POFEV, www.POFEV.org) and give all Virginians the right to marry.

Virginia is telling the court that not being able to get married doesn't hurt lesbian and gay people and that lesbian and gay people don't want to get married anyway. If we want marriage equality in Virginia, then it's time to step up and make it happen.

Our witness event will be held at noon on February 14, 2014, at the Loudoun County courthouse in Leesburg (18 E Market St, Leesburg, VA 20176). If you are a married same-sex couple whose marriage is not legally recognized in Virginia, come to the event and be blessed by a group of diverse interfaith clergy.

Want to share something in the March newsletter?

- ✓ Reflections or articles related to the March liturgical theme, *redemption*
- ✓ Announcements (including those related to events that will take place in March and the first two weeks in April)
- ✓ Group or committee updates (what you accomplished, what's planned coming up, etc.)
- ✓ Recent photos taken at UUS or during UUS events

Please send anything you'd like to include to newsletter@uusterling.org by February 15.

SACRED STORY FOR ALL AGES

The Story of Two Wolves: A Cherokee Legend

An old Cherokee chief was teaching his grandson about life. “A fight is going on inside me,” he told the young boy, “a terrible fight between two wolves. One is evil—full of anger, sorrow, regret, greed, self-pity, and false pride. The other is good—full of joy, peace, love, humility, kindness, and faith. This same fight is going on inside of you, grandson...and inside of every other person on this earth.”

The grandson pondered this for a moment and then asked, “Grandfather, which wolf will win?”

The old man smiled and simply said, “The one you feed.”

Family Discussion

How would you define evil? Can a person be evil, or are only actions evil? Can an animal or animal’s actions be evil? How about an object or naturally occurring event?

How do you feed the good within you? How can you keep from feeding the evil within you?

When you have been confronted by evil, how have you responded? How would you like to respond in the future?



We light this chalice
For the light of truth
The warmth of love
The energy of action

CALENDAR

Stay Up to Date With UUCS Events

F E B R U A R Y	
Saturday, 2/1	9:30—10:30 am <i>New to UU Class at UUCS.</i> All newcomers are welcome. Breakfast and lunch will be provided.
Sunday, 2/2	10:30 am—<i>Worship service: “How We Hurt—A Reflection on Evil”</i> We may be reluctant to engage the difficult topic of evil, but engagement is one step toward healing our hurting world. We will move together from mourning to hope. Our choir will sing. Noon—<i>Inquirer’s Class in Rev. Anya’s office</i>
Friday, 2/7	6:30 pm—7:30 pm — <i>Art Opening and Mosaic Making Workshop</i> Come celebrate Denise Ditmar’s works of art while sharing in fellowship. The mosaic making workshop is open to all ages. Potluck meal items, wine, and other beverages are welcome.
Sunday, 2/9	10:30 am — <i>Worship service: “Standing on the Side of Love—Action Sunday”</i> We bring the work of justice to our sanctuary for a service replete with acts of service as we honor the inherent worth and dignity of all people. Special music provide by youth, Natalie Corbo, and Noah Scher. This is an intergenerational service that will encourage movement and making joyful noise.
Sunday, 2/16	10:30 am — <i>Worship service: “Beautiful Souls”</i> The Hebrew notion yafeh nefesh (beautiful soul) connotes naiveté, but it is colloquially used to describe the Israeli citizens that refuse military service, or aspects of the service that conflict with the rules of their conscience. Our service will explore the lives of “Beautiful Souls,” those individuals from all over the world who, for diverse reasons, acted for good when faced with ethical quandaries.
Sunday 2/23	10:30 am — <i>Worship service: “Transformation”</i> Join in welcoming special guest minister Kristin Rohm. Our lives are full of change at an ever-accelerating pace. How do we open ourselves to change in ways that grow our spirits? What might it take to find a place of curiosity rather than resistance to change? Let’s explore together the spiritual nature of change and the inner resources that make transformation possible.
M A R C H	
Sunday, 3/2	10:30 am — <i>Worship service</i> Noon — <i>Inquirer’s Class in Rev. Anya’s office</i>
Sunday, 3/9	10:30 am — <i>Worship service</i>