



The Spiritual Force to Combat Evil

BY JEN CROW, EXECUTIVE MINISTER, FIRST UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

It was six years into my time at a previous settlement that it happened. I'd fallen in love with the congregation, with its can-do attitude, its involvement in the community, its history of justice work and its music. The church had a choir full of talented, dedicated folks, and one couple in particular stood out.

He was a tall gentle man who played classical guitar. She was a petite spitfire of a person, active in environmental preservation, a photographer and writer with a gorgeous soprano voice. They sang together often, transporting all of us with beauty. Their dog, Riley, who they understood as their child, traveled with them just about everywhere. Married for nearly twenty years, they held hands in public and looked at each other with adoration.

And—I'm going to tell you some awful things now—one morning, Jeff strangled Alyssa in their suburban home, put her in the trunk of his car, and drove around all day and into the night, eventually settling on a hiking trail they had frequented together as a final resting place. Once arriving at the trail well after dark, Jeff took a rock and struck their beloved dog in the head over and over, trying to kill her. Drunk and exhausted, Jeff realized there was nothing else he could do. The car was stuck in the mud on the trail, the dog was dead, so he thought, and there he was, stranded. He called 911 and confessed, and is now in prison serving out his sentence for second-degree murder.

When news came to the congregation about Alyssa's murder, everyone was in shock. They were the golden couple, handsome and beautiful in the most traditional of ways, artistic and talented, beloved by many. What in the world had happened? A family member described the situation well: this murder was never a *whodunit*, she said, it was a *WHYdunit*. For days and weeks and months and years so many of us tried to make sense of what happened, tried to square our understanding of this seemingly gentle man with this tragic twist. Shock, anger, horror, sadness, grief—for her and for him—flooded our hearts.

Sitting in the chapel for Alyssa's memorial service, I overheard a church member whispering to another church member, "It's too bad Jeff can't be here," he said. "He loved her so much." This truth, this both/and, this disconnect between the violence that had occurred and the rest of the lives we knew, was beyond unsettling.

None of us saw Alyssa's murder coming, and as more facts came out about their relationship and the case, it seemed that Alyssa didn't either. There was no history of violence that could be discovered. Rather, the story that revealed itself could, perhaps, have happened to any of us. Jeff had been falling behind at work for years, he had secretly been accumulating debt to keep up their lifestyle, and after years of scrambling to hide his failures the curtains were about to be pulled back.

He couldn't bear the idea of his wife finding out the truth, and he says that he planned to end it for all of them, killing first her, then their beloved dog, and finally, himself. The idea of murder and death was easier to swallow than being found out, revealed, for the imperfect—or the perfectly imperfect—human being he was.

Soon after the murder, I found myself in the pulpit charged with the task of talking about evil. We were confused and hurting—angry and sad. The questions before us then were similar to the ones we hear following other surprising tragedies of that sort. Why would somebody do such a thing? What could possess a person to kill someone who had done nothing to them? And how had we missed it? How was it that someone could be thinking and planning such a horrific act without anyone

Quest

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The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.

—Aleksandr Solzhenitzyn

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT EVIL

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around them knowing it? How could evil have come to root right here, right next to us in our community?

It was a daunting task, not just because the topic was so close to home, but also because liberal religion and Unitarian Universalists have such a notoriously weak theology of evil. We hold tight to the part of Universalism that says that all are whole and holy and worthy, that everyone belongs inside the circle. And that feels good and easy until someone does something unkind, or scary, or downright evil that makes us really want to hold them *outside* the circle.

How do we push back with spiritual force?

We hold tight to the part of Unitarianism that has always claimed that, given the right social conditions, all minds and hearts will grow toward the good, onward and upward forever and ever. And that works okay, until the truth about the perpetuation of social conditions that oppress and degrade others is revealed, until we see people choose bad over good even though they've had every opportunity and a circle of love surrounding them.

We push away the creation story at the heart of Christianity that roots us in original sin, that says that we are inherently fallen and sinful creatures tempted by the forces of evil, separated from heaven and from God by our desires and our actions, redeemable not through our own choices or turns of heart, but only by the physical sacrifice of another. There are plenty of good reasons to push away that story, and yet when we push it away entirely, for many people in liberal religion, we push away the idea of sin and evil all together, too.

Yet, living in this world with eyes wide open, we cannot with integrity dismiss the existence of evil as a force that lives and breathes in this world, tempting and luring us into great harm. Evil, as defined by Paul Rasor, Unitarian Uni-

versalist minister and theologian, is an impersonal spiritual force that separates us from the good we seek.

Racism, Rasor explains, is an excellent example of evil. Racism is a cultural construct, a made-up system based on the made-up category of race, put in place to take resources and power away from people of color and indigenous people and give them to white people. This evil has been built into the white supremacy culture that dominates America; it's been built into our structures and institutions. It has become an impersonal force that separates us from the good we seek.

I understand Rasor to say that racism has come to have a power and a life of its own. It cannot be defeated by programs and policies alone because it has become a force that perpetuates itself, shifting shape and finding new ways to take root in our hearts, in our societal structures and institutions. So racism, like any evil, Rasor asserts, must be pushed back against not only with education and policies and programs, but also with spiritual force.

How do we push back with spiritual force? What can prepare and sustain us for the long-haul commitment to social change, to self-examination, to the resistance and re-creation that the rooting out of racism and evil requires?

Community, Rasor says, is essential to our resistance. Racism has created a fragmented society, a fragmented way of being in the world, and, ultimately, fragmented selves. Evil—whether it comes in the form of racism, or as physical violence or the lived experience of being treated as less than, year after year—evil in all of its forms creates fragmented selves and fragmented societies. It is in community that our fragmented, fractured selves can be healed. It is in community that our healing selves can heal the world.

We gain the spiritual force to combat evil when we remember that we ourselves are never disconnected from either the best or the worst. Whatever it

is, I'm that, too. In true community, when we really speak and listen to each other's deepest truths, the successes and failures and near misses, we understand that we hold both our best and our worst in common. We are not alone. And if we can forgive someone else, maybe we can forgive ourselves and be forgiven by others.

What is true at the personal level is true at the national level as well. The US is founded in a search for religious freedom, and we are founded in genocide. We live in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, and the wealth of this country is based on stolen land and built on the backs of slaves.

The last twenty years have seen a rise in mass shootings, and it is also true that violence has always been a part of who we are. The shooting in Las Vegas was the deadliest shooting in our history—if you don't count black and brown and indigenous people. A country can be a place of freedom and opportunity, and it can be a place of oppression, violence, and denial of reality.

The question, I believe, comes down to which direction we lean in. Will we lean into consciousness, into awareness and acceptance of *all* of who we are: the good *and* the bad, the racist *and* the anti-racist, the deep knowledge that I'm this truth *and* that truth? Or will we try to compartmentalize the pieces of who we are, denying the wholeness of our existence, and in doing so, hand over the power we might have had to push against the forces of evil?

We may not be able to eliminate evil. We may not be able to put an end to racism in our life. But we can, as UU theologian Sharon Welch says, "prevent our own capitulation to structured evil." We do this by participating in an extensive community comprised of both sameness and difference, a community where we tell the truth about who we are and what we've done and are doing, trusting in a circle of love that holds no one outside, that will not let us go, no matter what. ■



On the Origin and Nature of Good and Evil

BY DAVID PYLE,

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE STAFF

UUA-CENTRAL EAST REGION

We human beings are shaped and molded by the stories we tell one another, including those we tell our children. Some of those stories have been so foundational to our society that we sometimes do not see how deeply we are affected by them.

Take the story of a tree in the middle of a garden called Eden, with an order from God, a talking snake, and two rather normal, curious people. It is one of the most over-interpreted narratives in human history. Into this story has been read the belief that human nature is inherently evil, and the belief that woman is inherently more sinful than man—something my own experience denies. Into this story has been read a belief that sexuality is evil and sinful, and that humankind is a failed experiment, and needs to be fixed. Into this story has been read the belief that Good and Evil existed before humanity, that they are contending forces in the world, with us as the battlefield.

All of this, and more, in one short story from over 3000 years ago. But in this story there is a question that is not answered—or even asked. From where did Good and Evil come? Who created them? In the creation stories that precede this one, at no point does the author say, “And on the third day, God created both Good and Evil.” Both Good and Evil simply exist, an understood part of the universe.

It amazes me that in this foundational story, which has doubtlessly been rewritten time and again from its first telling, there is no mention of the origin and nature of Good and Evil. From that absence comes, I believe, the most profound implication of the story: Good and Evil simply are. There is nothing we can do about them but

notice them. Within this story I believe lies a call for a kind of social apathy, a resignation that Good and Evil are forces beyond us that we have no control over, that actually control us. It is one of the most damaging ideas I have ever come across, and yet it is foundational within our culture.

Our society has built into it the idea that Good and Evil have existed since the dawn of time, that they came into existence with the universe, and that we are trapped between them. Is it any wonder that the world created by this view stands in constant chaos? Is it a wonder that there has never been a time in which war is not being fought somewhere by someone (usually many someones by many someones)?

Now, intellectually I can say that I believe these are just stories, told not by God but by a pre-modern tribal people attempting to describe the reality they lived in. But even if I don't believe in the stories I am still a product of the cultural understandings produced by this world view.

Our society has built into it the idea that Good and Evil have existed since the dawn of time...and that we are trapped between them.

Our worldview was created by this understanding, one that is also found in many other cultural traditions besides Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. If we are going to change this understanding of our world as a battlefield between Good and Evil it will not be through science or rational argument, but rather through different stories, for it is through stories that we humans make meaning of our world.

My former Zen teacher, Joshin Roshi, tells a story of how he came to find the origin of Good and Evil. Let me first

explain a little about Joshin, and why he was my teacher. In the late 1960s and 1970s he was deeply involved in protesting the war in Vietnam. I can just imagine him, a young Buddhist monk, a westerner, sitting lotus style at a protest, with the police wondering just exactly what to do with him. Smiling and sitting, offering no aggression, he practiced his pacifism not only in his opposition to the war, but in how he encountered police.

When I was a seminarian, I brought him to discuss meditation with some of my fellow students at Meadville Lombard Theological School, and he told us the story of finding the origin of Good and Evil, although those are my words, not his.

He was part of a Buddhist meditation retreat held in the camps in Auschwitz, Germany, where millions had been executed in Hitler's gas chambers. The majority of those were Jews, but many on the religious margins also perished there, including a few Unitarians. For several days, these Buddhist monks and teachers sat in the former death camp in silent Buddhist meditation.

Through those days of meditation, Joshin said that he had a realization that profoundly shook his soul. He realized that, if the circumstances of his life had been different, if he had been born in a different time and place, with different experiences, ideals, and values, he could have become one of the guards at that camp, rather than a pacifist Buddhist teacher sitting meditation in it. He realized that he carried within him the ability to commit such evil—as well as the good he had chosen throughout his life. In that meditation, he had encountered the origin of both Good and Evil, within his own heart.

I fought with myself for many years about what the difference between Good and Evil might be, and in the end it has come down to perception. I will admit that it frightens me that the inherent difference between what is

Good and what is Evil is not some solid dividing line, or a set of commandments from God, but rather, that most murky of diagnostic tools: human perception. What values we hold and what judgments we make determine what is Good and what is Evil, so it really does matter what we believe. It matters deeply.

The origin of Good and Evil is the human heart. The nature of Good and Evil is human perception.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the board of the church I was serving as an administrator in Galveston Island, Texas “loaned” me to the American Red Cross for a few weeks to serve as the night manager for one of the shelters we set up on the island.

The origin of Good and Evil is the human heart.

For many, their perception of the storm itself was evil, for all the grief, destruction and suffering that had come with it. For many, the storm also brought forth such a tide of goodness, compassion and charity that it was a blessing to our community in Galveston, because it brought us together and let us learn to care for others. That storm broke our apathy, even if just for a little while.

One night, perhaps three days after the levees broke, the volunteers and many of our evacuees were sitting in the lobby watching broadcasted footage of waters in the 9th Ward, chaos at the Convention Center, and people everywhere trapped on rooftops. We were in two distinct viewing groups, with the evacuees watching in numbed horror, gathered close around the television, and the volunteers about twenty feet back, sitting at the registration table, not knowing what to say or do.

Into that silence among the volunteers, one woman who came from a rather conservative church on the island said,

“Well, it’s horrible, but what did New Orleans expect? I mean, eventually God had to destroy it, didn’t he? New Orleans was evil.”

What I thought had been silence before was nothing compared to the climate after that comment. I could see several of the evacuees turn towards us, with hurt, anger, and anguish in their eyes. This woman had just said that they deserved what they had gotten.

As I was trying to think of how to deal with this without yelling and screaming, an older African American woman from one of the island’s full gospel churches said, “Well, Lordy, I’m sure glad I don’t have to believe in your kind of God. The Jesus I know would love all of those people, and would never punish anyone like this. God is good, and a storm is a storm.”

It was like a wash of peace, love, and goodness swept through the room. As I pulled the first woman aside and told her it might be best if she went home, people began to smile. Several of the evacuees came over and sat with the volunteers, thanked the older woman for what she had said, and began to tell stories about the New Orleans they knew—a place of close-knit but poor communities, of families, and of love.

Several of the volunteers got up and stood with the evacuees. From that moment on, there was no longer the previous kind of separation. We were now just human beings, comforting one another. All of that good, sparked by one of the most evil things I have ever heard anyone say.

Why do I call that comment evil? Because my perception, based upon my values, says it is. I’m sure her perception of me sending her home might have been equally evil—in fact, she said as much to me as she slammed the door. I take responsibility for defining what she said as evil. And that is the major difference between the view of Good and Evil presented in the Garden of Eden story and what I am calling a

human-centered understanding of Good and Evil: responsibility.

I believe that the commitment to work for justice in the world is a part of our faith because we Unitarian Universalists hold to this kind of a human-centered understanding of the origin and nature of Good and Evil. We understand that, if each of us carries within us the capacity to do both Good and Evil, then that has certain implications for our lives. It means that the possibility of transformation exists for us all, that even someone who has done evil can learn to do good. And even someone who has done good has the capacity for evil.

It also means that the responsibility for what good and what evil exists in this world lies with us. There is not a devil we can blame evil upon, and there is not a God who takes care of making sure good occurs. When our values, principles and ideals tell us that something evil is occurring, it is up to us to speak out about it. And it is up to us to work for its resolution. When someone does something good in this world, it is up to us to hold up their example.

It also means that it matters what people believe, because those beliefs and values determine what they perceive to be good or evil. As important as I believe it is that we address the outward manifestations of Good and Evil that exist in this world, each of us must also continually look inward, and see the complex nature of our own hearts and perceptions—the true origin and nature of both Good and Evil. If we are ever to banish warfare from humankind, it must begin with banishing the conflict that exists within our own hearts. It will require us to forgive ourselves for the parts of ourselves we might not like, and learn to live in balance between our best and worst selves.

If we cannot depend upon a victory of a Good God over an Evil Devil, then we must find the balance of peace within ourselves. ■



Overcoming Evil

BY KAT LIU, OWNER
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I have always loved houses of worship, even when I was “unchurched,” so when I learned that the fourth largest Christian church in the world—the Cathedral of St. John the Divine—was in New York City, of course I had to visit. The cathedral itself was grand, gothic, and a little too dark, but my most striking memory about the place was not the building itself. Just outside was a sign inviting visitors to the adjacent “Children’s Peace Garden.”

Ending a visit to a house of worship with a nice stroll in a garden seemed perfect—or so I thought. Smack dab in the center, dominating the small space, was a very large statue of the Archangel Michael, with brow creased, wings unfurled, sword drawn, standing over the prone and nearly decapitated body of Satan, his horned head hanging over the edge of the platform by a single bronze ligament. Recoiling in horror I wondered, “Who in their right minds would put something this violent in a place meant for children? How could they think this represented peace?”

Upon reading the inscription, I understood. For the creators of this garden, peace comes when good vanquishes evil. In their theology, there are good people and bad people. If you are a good person, then goodness is inherent in you and evil is external to you. And if you are a bad person, then evil is inherent in you. Thus, violent actions such as killing aren’t necessarily evil. Killing an evil person is a good act because it reduces the amount of evil in the world. One could even argue that the more violently the better, to annihilate evil so that it never returns. According to that theology, Michael decapitating Satan is the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

This is the same thinking, regardless of religion, that motivates religious wars and attacks. It’s the thinking behind capital punishment. It’s the thinking behind most acts of violence, actually, when rightly or wrongly someone sees someone else as “evil,” so vile that their existence cannot be tolerated, so they must be driven out or terminated.

It would be easy to write this off as a “conservative” way of thinking, to think that it has nothing to do with me. But if I am honest, this is the same thinking that I revert to when someone hurts me and my first reaction is to hurt them back, even if it’s just verbally. My desire is to overwhelm the person so that they do not mess with me again. The scale is smaller, but the impulse is the same.

In those moments, I have to stop and remember that from a Buddhist perspective, overcoming evil doesn’t work that way. The Heart Sutra tells us that “All phenomena in their own-being are empty.” No thing, including each of us, is inherently anything. All things, including all of us, are conditional upon other things—that whole interdependent web of existence. So people are neither inherently good nor inherently evil. Whatever state each of us is in is the result of causes and conditions, past and present. Including ones that hurt you.

Some people argue that good and evil are “Christian concepts” and thus have no place in Buddhism. I tend to think that the people who make such arguments are ex-Christians who want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. There is still right and wrong—it isn’t “anything goes”—and thus the concepts of *good* and *evil* are still useful. When beings are harmed it is important to name that as evil. However, the evil is in the actions, not the people. Those actions that benefit beings are wholesome and can be considered good, and those that cause harm to beings are unwholesome and can be considered evil.

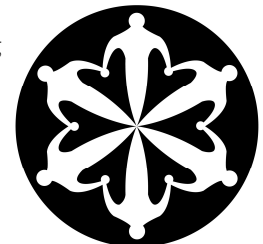
The focus is on actions, or karma. In common usage, karma is often interchangeable with punishment—sometimes, punishment and reward. In the original Sanskrit, however, the word “karma” literally means action. Karma is the consequences of our actions, of every action. We cannot take any action, good or bad, without it affecting both the wider world and ourselves.

**We cannot end evil
through violence,
because violence itself
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From a Buddhist perspective, even an angel of God such as Michael cannot kill someone, even the Devil himself, without that act of violence tainting their own being, making them more inclined to violence in the future. Because of karma, the means are the ends. We cannot end evil through violence, because violence itself increases the evil in the world.

Ultimately, the only way to overcome evil is not through force but through love, resisting harmful acts, but with compassion and understanding for the people who commit them, so that the cycle of violence is not perpetuated.

So much easier said than done. But then I remember that the good news is, if every action we take affects our being, then when we do kind things—even if we don’t *feel* particularly kind at the moment—it makes it easier for us to be kind in the future. Little by little, it makes us better people, who, if not overcoming evil, are at least pushing on the side of good. ■





From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
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I've attended ceremonies in a number of religious communities to welcome in new babies. In some Christian baptisms, I have been stunned to hear priests and ministers talk about exorcising evil from the babies through baptism, through bringing Christ into the baby and thus casting demons out. The first time it happened was at a Catholic baptism. I was aghast, and wanted to grab the precious baby from the priest and say, "He didn't do it!"

I looked around at the large extended family of this beloved baby to see if they were as disturbed as I was. They were talking to one another, smiling, pretty much ignoring the priest's words. Now, I'll say that until these words were spoken, I had been suffering from profound Catholic ritual envy. The oil, the holy water, the words and music had an ancient feel that stirred me deeply. I felt as if I were standing in thousands of years of birth and death and life.

And then, the demons were mentioned. Evil was in that baby, and could be cast out only by Jesus Christ. My envy dissolved in a heartbeat. For the extended family, evidently, words were not central to the occasion, as they were for me. The relationships, the ritual, the beauty of the tradition—that is what the family was there for. None of them seemed at all troubled by demons and exorcism.

We Unitarian Universalists are a very word-centered people, for better and for worse. So my attention to the words was well-honed. But UUs do have rituals of our own. At our baby dedications, we use water and flowers to proclaim the blessedness of this new life, to dedicate the baby to the community and the community to the baby, to

bring the baby into a sacred covenant of the gathered people to care for one another. There is nothing said about evil, or what a person must do to avoid being evil. Much is said about the potential of the baby to be a blessing in the world.

Holding up the potential to be a blessing in the world is not the same thing as *being* a blessing in the world, though. The old saying, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions" could be about any of us. We don't intend to be oppressive, or exclusive, and yet we often are.

We need rituals to acknowledge our complicity in evil systems, and to find ways to heal together.

In most UU congregations, the chosen flowers for baby dedications are roses from which the thorns have been carefully removed. This is explained to the community with words about our wish to prevent the young child from the pain that thorns inflict. Every parent wants to spare their children unnecessary pain. And of course no one wants to create bloody babies!

But I wonder what ritual we might develop to include naming the fact that, along with all of its blessings, the world is full of pain and struggle, oppression and greed. And that being a blessing means fighting forces that are large, and real, and aimed against our individual and collective humanity.

There are many days when I read about inhumane practices of individuals, or legislative bodies, or police unions, or courts, or school administrations, or prisons, and no word but evil comes to my mind. We humans are born completely vulnerable, dependent upon one another. Betraying one another's vulnerability, attacking those who are most undefended, is foundational to how I understand evil.

But evil is not rare or unusual; indeed, it is commonplace. So commonplace that most of us participate in systems that diminish collective humanity every day, whether by wearing clothes made in sweatshops, eating foods grown in conditions that diminish life for agricultural workers, using petroleum and water and other scarce resources without restraint, or using unearned privileges without awareness. It's hard to get self-righteous if we're honest about our impact on the world.

Somehow, our invitation to all people of all ages who choose to live in covenant that supports Unitarian Universalist principles and values must include ways to get back to right relationship when we have betrayed another's humanity, when we have betrayed our own values. As adults, we need to leave the thorns on the roses, and acknowledge the sharp pain that's right there with the beauty. We need practices of forgiveness and of accountability. We need rituals to acknowledge our complicity in evil systems, and to find ways to heal together.

All of us need to be healed from our own greed, from our lack of trust in our own espoused values. We can only do this through lived experience of something different from the culture at large. Our rituals cannot just be about words, though we need good words: they need to be grounded in relationships and beauty and the timelessness of the ancestors and the not-yet-born and a history of making brave choices.

I believe that together, even still, we can collectively hold the evil that has been created and continues to be created by people, including us. We won't cast demons out of one another, but we can leverage our collective power to tilt the world just a little bit more towards one that is reflective of our deepest longings. ■



REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

Not so terribly long ago the U.S. was shocked and horrified when a man used multiple high-powered rifles and vast quantities of ammunition to shoot out of his hotel window at the crowd below as they attended a country music festival. Dozens were killed, hundreds wounded and, horrifyingly, no one has been able to make any sense of why he did it. He did not, so far as we can tell, have a political agenda, a known history of mental illness, a grudge against any particular person, or against country music. No one who knew him had any inkling that he had been planning this terrible act for some time.

The president called it, "an act of pure evil." While I'm willing to argue with Trump on pretty much anything, it's hard to debate this. What could be more pure evil than setting out to destroy as many perfect strangers as you can, just because you can? Which brings us around to the crucial question that we UUs have to grapple with whenever we take on the subject of evil. When we say, in our first UU principle, that we affirm "the inherent worth and dignity of every person," do we really mean every person? How could you claim that someone who would go out and randomly slaughter people is inherently—built in from the beginning and inescapably—good?

But that's the thing. Our first principle doesn't claim that people are inherently good. It claims that people have inherent worth and dignity. In fact, I would say that it misses the point to say that people are either inherently good or inherently evil—as if good and evil were traits that people are simply born with, like curly hair or being able to touch your nose with your tongue. Every single person does things that are good and things that are bad. We don't even always



agree on whether particular actions are good or bad, but we know that every person does some of both.

It is, in fact, *actions* that are good or evil, not people. The action of shooting at defenseless people is unquestionably evil. The man who committed that unimaginably horrible crime probably did other stuff in his life that was unquestionably good.

There isn't a formula that lets you add and subtract good deeds versus evil ones and come to a sum that tells you whether someone is a Good Person or a Bad Person.

[Affirming inherent worth and dignity] isn't a statement about what human beings are like, it's a statement about what it means to be a UU.

We don't affirm that people are inherently good, any more than we say that people are inherently bad, cursed from the earliest days for disobeying God. We know that people can do a series of really bad things, but then turn their life around and bring a bunch of good into the world. And we know that someone who spent most of his life being pretty unremarkable could go and do something shockingly evil. So we're not in the business of predicting whether any given person will do a wonderful or a terrible thing next.

What we affirm is that humans are born with inherent worth and dignity. We say that people, all people without exception, matter. All people, without exception, deserve basic human rights. All people, without exception, belong to our human family. All people deserve to be seen, respected, counted. It doesn't say anything about who *other* people are, it says something about who *we* are, about our own commitment as to how we, as Unitarian Universalists, will be in the world. It isn't a statement about what

human beings are like, it's a statement about what it means to be a UU.

We affirm that no person should be considered suspect or lesser because of their race, gender, sexual orientation, ability/disability, age, ethnicity, immigration status, history of or present incarceration, or any other category a person might or might not belong to. Affirming inherent worth means that categories don't define people.

We affirm that because each life matters, each person should have access to the basic necessities of life so that they can grow into their human potential. We affirm that because each life has value, a system of justice and public safety should be focused on just that—promoting the safety of communities and building a more just society, rather than relying on punishment and revenge.

And we affirm that each and every person is a bundle of potential, whatever their age, whatever their history. We affirm possibility. We know that actions from the past matter, that history matters, but that history doesn't have to determine the future. If we are optimistic (and I think we are), our hope is not that people *are* good, but rather that people *can* be good, that we can build a world of goodness one small action at a time. ■



Inside each of us, there is the seed of both good and evil. It's a constant struggle as to which one will win. And one cannot exist without the other.

—Eric Burdon

Through dialogue, guidance, and compassion, CLF helps members grapple with questions as large as the inner struggle of evil and good. Please help us continue our mission by making a contribution. You can give online at www.clfuu.org/give, or mail a check in the enclosed envelope. ■



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The individual who wishes to have an answer to the problem of evil has need, first and foremost, of self-knowledge—that is, in the utmost possible knowledge of their own wholeness. They must know relentlessly how much good they can do, and what crimes they are capable of, and must beware of regarding the one as real and the other as illusion. Both are elements within their nature, and both are bound to come to light in them, should they wish—as they ought—to live without self-deception or self-delusion.

—Carl Jung

[Pronouns changed from original quote to reflect modern usage.]

