

**UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST  
CONGREGATION OF CASTINE**

May 12, 2013

**James Fisher, PhD**

**WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**PRELUDE** Jesu Joy of Mans Desiring

**OPENING WORDS**

Come to this place of worship  
Not to escape the tumult of life  
But to bring it into focus

We share this time together  
A community of body and spirit  
To imagine forever

**CHALICE LIGHTING**

On his escape from Nazi Germany, Austrian artist Hans Deutsch met Rev. Charles Joy, a member of the Unitarian Service Committee that was working to help escaping Jews. At that time Deutsch created the image of the chalice and the flame as a Unitarian symbol.



He wrote to Joy:

There is something that urges me to tell you... how much I admire your utter self denial [and] readiness to serve, to sacrifice all, your time, your health, your well being, to help, help, help.

Deutsch felt that his flaming chalice symbolized sacrifice and love.

**COVENANT**

(in unison)

**We covenant with one another to listen to each other always with respect and empathy; to remain open to the views of others; to be attentive and attend without judgment; to provide an environment that allows each of us to be true to ourselves without fear of disapproval or reproach; to reach agreement in light of our shared expectations and experiences.**

**We covenant to support and sustain the spiritual, ethical, intellectual, and overall well being of our members.**

**Covenant is our practice with one another. We will each fall short at times, but we share the responsibility to bring us back into covenant gently when we stray.**

\* **HYMN:** Give Peace a Chance John Lennon

## Give Peace A Chance John Lennon

**C**

Ev'rybody's talking about Bagism, Shagism, Dragism, Madism  
Ragism, Tagism, Thisism, Thatism, Isn't it the most

Chorus:

**C**

**G**

**F**

**C**

All we are saying is give peace a chance (2x)

Ev'rybody's talking about Ministers, Sinisters, Banisters and Canisters,  
Bishops and Fishops, Rabbis and Popeyes Bye bye bye

Chorus:

Ev'rybody's talking about revolution, Evolution, Mastication, Flagelation,  
Regulations, Integrations, Meditations, United Nations, Congratulations

Chorus:

Ev'rybody's talking about John and Yoko, Timmy Leary, Rosemary,  
Tommy Smothers, Bobby Dylan, Tommy Cooper, Derek Taylor, Norman Mailer,  
Alan Ginsberg, Hare Krishna, Hare, Hare Krishna

Chorus:

Chorus:

Chorus:

**TIME FOR ALL AGES - THE BHAGAVAD-GITA For Children and Beginners <http://www.gita-society.com/>**

In ancient times there was a king who had two sons, Dhritarāshtra and Pāndu. The former was born blind; therefore, Pāndu inherited the kingdom. Pāndu had five sons. They were called the Pāndavas. Dhritarāshtra had one hundred sons. They were called the Kauravas. Duryodhana was the eldest of the Kauravas.

After the death of king Pāndu, his eldest son, Yudhisthira, became the lawful King. Duryodhana was very jealous. He also wanted the kingdom. The kingdom was divided into two halves between the Pāndavas and the Kauravas. Duryodhana was not satisfied with his share. He wanted the entire kingdom for himself. He tried several evil plots to kill the Pāndavas and take away their kingdom. Somehow he took over the entire kingdom of the Pāndavas and refused to give it back without a war. All peace talks by Lord Krishna and others failed, so the big war of Mahābhārata could not be avoided. The Pāndavas didn't want to fight, but they had only two choices: fight for their right because it was their duty or run away from war and accept defeat for the sake of peace and nonviolence.

Arjuna, one of the five Pāndava brothers, faced this choice in the battlefield. He had to choose between fighting the war and killing his most revered guru, who was on the other side; his very dear friends, close relatives, and many innocent warriors; or running away from the battlefield to be peaceful and nonviolent. The entire eighteen chapters of the Gita are the talk between confused Arjuna and his best friend, mentor and cousin, Lord Krishna---an incarnation of God---on the battlefield of Kurukshetra near New Delhi, India, about 5,100 years ago.

#### 1. Mr. Truthful

There once lived a great hermit, who was famous for telling the truth. He had taken a vow not to lie and was popularly known as "Mr. Truthful." No matter what he said, everyone believed him because he had earned a great reputation in the community where he lived and did his spiritual practices. One evening, a robber was chasing a merchant to rob and kill him. The merchant was running for his life. To escape from the robber, the merchant ran towards the forest where the hermit lived outside the village. The merchant felt very safe because there was no way the robber could find out where he was hiding in the jungle. But the hermit had seen the direction in which the merchant went.

The robber came to the hermit's cottage and paid his respects. The robber knew that the hermit would tell only the truth and could be trusted, so he asked him whether he had seen somebody running away. The hermit knew that the robber must be looking for somebody to rob and kill, so he faced a big problem. If he told the truth, the merchant would certainly be killed. If he lied, he would incur the sin of lying and lose his reputation.

Any immoral act that may harm others is called sin. Ahimsā (nonviolence) and truthfulness are two most important teachings of all religions that we must follow. If we have to choose between these two, which one should we choose? This is a very difficult choice.

Because of his habit of telling the truth, the hermit said: "Yes, I saw someone going that way." So the robber was able to find the merchant and kill him. The hermit could have saved a life by hiding the truth, but he did not think very carefully and made a wrong decision.

Lord Krishna's purpose in telling Arjuna this story was to teach Arjuna that sometimes we have to choose between a rock and a hard place. Lord Krishna told Arjuna that the hermit shared with the robber the sin of killing a life. The robber could not have found the merchant if the hermit had not told the truth. So when two noble principles conflict with each other, we have to know which one is the higher principle. Ahimsa has the highest priority, so the hermit should have lied in this situation to save a life. One may not tell a truth that harms a person in any way. It isn't easy to apply Dharma (or righteousness) to real life situations because what is Dharma and what is Adharma (or unrighteousness) can sometimes be very difficult to decide. In such a situation, expert advice should be sought.

## READINGS

I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent. [Mahatma Gandhi](#)

An individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for the law. [Martin Luther King, Jr](#)

One of the greatest dangers we face today is the risk that terrorists will obtain access to [weapons of mass destruction](#) as a result of the breakdown of the Non-Proliferation Regime. We in the U.S. are contributing to that breakdown. (Robert McNamara – Supplement to the Fog of War, Wikipedia - [http://www.erroldmorris.com/film/fow\\_transcript.html](http://www.erroldmorris.com/film/fow_transcript.html))

We all make mistakes. We know we make mistakes. I don't know any military commander, who is honest, who would say he has not made a mistake. There's a wonderful phrase: "the fog of war." What "the fog of war" means is: war is so complex it's beyond the ability of the human mind to comprehend all the variables. Our judgment, our understanding, are not adequate. And we kill people unnecessarily. ([http://www.erroldmorris.com/film/fow\\_transcript.html](http://www.erroldmorris.com/film/fow_transcript.html))

Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it. [Rumi](#)

### \* HYMN

95	There is More Love Somewhere
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## MEDITATION / PRAYER

Bodhisattva Prayer for Humanity

May I be a guard for those who need protection  
 A guide for those on the path  
 A boat, a raft, a bridge for those who wish to cross the flood  
 May I be a lamp in the darkness  
 A resting place for the weary  
 A healing medicine for all who are sick  
 A vase of plenty, a tree of miracles  
 And for the boundless multitudes of living beings  
 May I bring sustenance and awakening  
 Enduring like the earth and sky  
 Until all beings are freed from sorrow  
 And all are awakened.

- Shantideva, Indian Buddhist sage 700 A.D. Prayer performed each morning by His Holiness the Dalai Lama

## MUSICAL MEDITATION

### OFFERING

Autumn's reminder  
 Life is fleeting  
 The bounty, our gardens,  
 The harvest we're eating  
 The common ground frosted  
 The sun retreating

Mail boxes fill  
 with letters entreating  
 Each for a charity  
 A cause worth repeating  
 And in this fair church  
 There's no end of needing  
 The basket's we pass  
 It's like trick or treating.

The ushers will now accept  
 this morning's offering

### OFFERTORY

\* **DOXOLOGY** (sung twice, in unison)  
 From you I receive, to you I give  
 Together we share, and from this we live.

### SERMON

#### *Sticks and Stones*

James Fisher

### Introduction - Credo

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” This simple rhyme seems absurd on its face, yet also gives children an opportunity to de-escalate a situation fraught with the potential of serious physical violence. Reciting a mantra on the brink of battle may be the critical action that turns us around and gives us a graceful means for reducing conflict.

I'd like to take this time to consider these critical openings, or gaps, between violence in thought, in feeling and in action. We are a peaceful people, and yet most of us probably feel the impulse to anger in thought, word or action every day. Consider the dinner time phone calls of telemarketers and political pollsters.

### Words that Hurt

This topic, *Sticks and Stones*, has been roiling in my porous mental file-cabinet for a few years. It first took the form of a discussion about the latent consequences of political speech the draws on metaphors of war. My imagined title of my imagined sermon was “Words that Hurt”.

Even as we enjoy this moment of quiet contemplation, the political presses are grinding out messages intended to encourage some and discourage others from participating in November's very important election. The stakes are high and seemingly every attempt to limit campaign spending has been ducked, dodged or legally defeated.

Words intended to hurt may come from the candidates, but more likely they will come from essentially anonymous organizations backed by out-of state funds.

The party platforms provide enough coded language to support a range of media messages.

From the 2014 Republican Platform:

- (We) Prevented an expansion of welfare which would have resulted in 70,000 more people on the welfare rolls;
- Affirm English as the official language of the State of Maine.
- Marriage is defined as the union of one man and one woman;
- Defend the individual's right to keep and bear arms as guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions;

From the 2014 Democratic Platform (admittedly, finding coded speech is more of a challenge)

- Reinstitution of strong consumer protection, including protection from predatory practices in financial markets
- Opposes the legal concept of corporate personhood as it is applied to participation in the political process.

Implicit attacks on the poor, immigrants, gays on the one hand and implicit attacks on corporations and financially well to do on the other suggest that we are not coming together as a nation. Fortunately for most of us the battlefield is one of ideas and the battle fought with ballots, not bullets.

But I digress.

Of course words hurt. Words can cut, bruise, burn, humiliate, discriminate and denigrate. The pain caused by words has been the focus of many Unitarian Universalist sermons. My interest is sticks and stones, after all, and in that respect I see words as a very common point of departure from civil communication to violent acts.

Words can hurt so much that we, individually or as a collective enter a state of rage, an emotional blackout in which we slip away from our professed norms of behavior, lashing out, and not considering the consequences.

### **Escalation**

As Arjuna stood on the battlefield at the precipice of war, poised with a sword and a shield. I, standing toe-to-toe in Junior High School, with boys my age that for reasons I never understood, were determined to fight.

“You talking to me?”

No

“Say what?”

I don't want any trouble.

“Listen to him cry, cry baby” I don’t want to fight.  
 “Give me a dime” I’m not giving you anything. Leave me alone.

Unlike Arjuna, I had no divine guidance. I didn’t even have a willing guidance counselor to jump into the breach and put an end to this torment. Being the non-violent sorts, my “gang” tended to fade away when violence was in the offing.

I wish that I could slip back in time to see these confrontations with my very post-adolescent eyes. Would I be any more successful now in understanding these attacks than I was then? Would I find a way to turn the threatened fight into a meaningful dialogue?

- Were you talking to me?
  - Did my assailant imagine that I had said something? Had I been arrogant to him?
- Say what?
  - Had I walked into a social situation with rules understood by other, but about which I was ignorant?
- Listen to him cry, cry baby.
  - Did he enjoy my anguish? Was he climbing his own social ladder, proving himself to his friends?
- Give me a dime.
  - Was it about money? I had more money than him, surely. If I gave him a dime, would that stop the situation or make it a daily routine?

I found and continue to find stories from the street that reflect my experience, often making mine seem quite mild, but providing some insight into socialization in a violent society.

Geoffrey Canada – Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun (1995)

“The windows facing Union Avenue became the favorite place for my brothers and me. You could hear the street noise and see the nonstop action perfectly from this vantage point. It was not long before the other boys our age noticed that some new boys had moved in. My brother John and I were looking out the window shortly after moving on the block when we noticed some boys looking up at us. We couldn't wait to make some friends and go downstairs and play with them. We both waved. One of the boys, the biggest one, balled up his fist, placed it to his eye, pointed at us, and placed his balled up fist to his eye again. I looked behind me, sure that he must be pointing to someone else. I pointed to myself and mouthed the words "Me? Me?" with a quizzical look. The boy repeated the gestures. The message was clear. The reception we would receive downstairs would not be a friendly one.



[Skip]

We were on our own and we didn't know what to do. We practiced fighting for a day or two, thinking that would help prepare us. Then my brother John went outside. [skip] He went out to take his licks.

He had to fight Paul Henry. The older boys arranged the match. There were rules. You had to be the same age, approximately the same size, and you had to fight. The day my brother John went out to play on the block and had to fight Paul Henry there was plenty of wild swinging and a couple of blows landed, but they did no real damage. When no one got the better of the other after six or seven

minutes, the fight was broken up. John and Paul Henry were made to shake hands and became best of friends in no time.

John was free. He could go outside without fear. I was still trapped. I needed help figuring out what would happen when I went outside. John was not much help to me about how the block worked. He was proud that he could go out and play while we were still stuck in the house. I mentioned something about going downstairs and having Ma come down to watch over me and John laughed at me, called me a baby. He had changed, he had accepted the rules—no getting mothers to fight your battles. His only instructions to me were to fight back, don't let the boys your age hit you without hitting back.”

Geoffrey Canada’s book chronicles his struggle and emergence from the very rough streets of the Bronx. My own journey through the storm of adolescence was surely less dramatic, though my attackers began with fists and eventually displayed knives. Like Geoffrey, I practiced how to break bottles to use as knives in self defense. And, like Geoffrey, I emerged from this sometimes violent environment to attend Bowdoin College, an amazing institution where we got along well without the need for fists, sticks, knives nor guns.

I look now in awe at the ways that Geoffrey Canada has turned his life experience into a profound commitment through the Harlem Zone Project to promote social change on a community scale. His project combines compassion and discipline, currently serving more than 12,000 kids. He recently retired from decades of leading the Harlem Zone, but I’d like to imagine him standing in the field of battle as each boy confronts life’s enemies. He doesn’t tell them what to do. Like Krishna, he tests their resolve, tells parables and guides them through their crises. Ultimately it is up to the kids to find their answers.

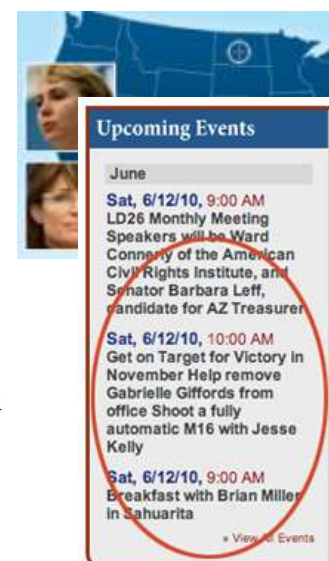
[Friedrich Nietzsche](#) is credited with saying “That which does not kill us makes us stronger.” It’s an appealing concept. We who have struggled through violent situations and emerged may gain some experience that strengthens us. More often the data suggest otherwise. Violence carried out against children begets violence. When a parent strikes his child, the consequence can be to teach the child that striking others is OK, it is normal. Violence is traumatizing and we should not assume that the victims will be stronger for it.

## Latent Consequences

Violent words, even those uttered without violent intent, may have latent consequences. We are a complex society with many actors. When words that hurt are uttered by our leaders, others may take those words to action.

“On January 8, 2011, [U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords](#) and eighteen others were shot during a constituent meeting held in a supermarket parking lot in [Casas Adobes, Arizona](#), in the [Tucson metropolitan area](#). Six people died, including [federal District Court Chief Judge John Roll](#); Gabe Zimmerman, one of Rep. Giffords' staffers; and a nine-year-old girl, Christina-Taylor Green. Jared Lee Loughner, a 22-year-old Tucson man who was fixated on Giffords, was arrested at the scene.” (Wikipedia)

The shooter, Jared Lee Laughner, was later found incompetent to stand trial with diagnoses of paranoia and schizophrenia. This might be the





whole story. A mentally unstable man with a gun killed people for no apparent reason.

Context sometimes matters and in this case the shooting occurred with an unfortunate political backdrop. Former Vice Presidential Candidate Sara Palin, an outspoken gun advocate had a map on her website [www.sarahpac.com](http://www.sarahpac.com) that featured gunsight targets on a map of the United States. Among the targeted districts was Gabe Gifford's district in Arizona.

This story hit close to home for me. My father wore many hats, including leadership of an environmental think tank, Resources for the Future, leadership in the Unitarian Universalist religion as a long-serving moderator for UU General Assemblies in the tumultuous 1960s and an elected leader in Arlington Virginia as well as the US House. He was an outspoken advocate for ending discrimination in housing, education and employment.

As a teenager I recall incidents when our house received telephone bomb threats and one incident where the front windows were broken by a shotgun blast from angry or perhaps person perhaps acting out a collective political view or perhaps intent on scaring or killing my father.

This is clearly another dimension of violence in American society. It raises the question of whether we bear some collective responsibility for violence committed by our least stable or most impulsive members. Do we bear a collective responsibility for the killings at Columbine, Sandy Hook, the Federal building in Little Rock, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, the Boston Marathon? What of the far more numerous gang killings so common that they go largely unexamined. Would it be sufficient if indeed it were possible to take away the guns and bomb making materials from mentally unstable aggressors? Can we harbor violent attitudes, use violent symbols in political speech, accept unimaginable violence in popular media, and yet behave in entirely peaceful ways? Are we prepared to stand at the gates of war indefinitely as we test our desire for peace in a violent world?

## **War**

The answer to this question came all too swiftly this late summer. We are once again at war.

I believe that President Barrack Obama was caught, like Arjuna, at the brink of war and that President Obama sought counsel from many advisors about how to deal with the simultaneous atrocities committed by Syrian President Bashar Hafez al-Assad and the invading forces of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. The underlying conflicts between Sunni and Shiite Muslims go back centuries.

This time nobody is expecting emergency relief, military advisors, drones and aerial bombing to resolve long-standing religious disputes and create a democratic utopia. Even so, the professed mission is extremely ambitious, to degrade ISIS, to stabilize or perhaps resuscitate a badly damaged national defense force in Iraq, to provide emergency relief for millions of internal and international refugees that have barely escaped, and ultimately to restore peace. It is difficult to see how we can succeed at this mission with the blunt force of war.

## **Our Better Angels**

I am a planner. I like solving problems, but I especially like preventing them from happening. I like to support my recommendations with data. Stephen Pinker's 2011 book, [The Better Angels of our Nature: Why Violence has Declined](#) does a good job of telling a story with numbers. Pinker's story is that of a world gradually coming to grips with violence.

In a nutshell, the process requires that we tame our inner demons of:

- Predatory or Practical Violence – where violence is used for material gain
- Dominance – where we seek to control others
- Revenge – where we react to violence with more violence
- Sadism – where we take pleasure in inflicting pain
- Ideology – where we are led by ideology to condone violence

We must also nurture our better angels.

- Empathy – where we feel the pain violence inflicts on others
- Self Control – where we manage our impulse to fight
- Moral Sense – where we build norms of compassion and non violence
- Reason – where we understand the full cost of violence and seek a better path.

Pinker's data suggests that we are making progress along a very jagged path.

I pray that he is right.

We must dedicate ourselves to peace.

\* **HYMN** Ho' opono pono

"Ho' opono pono" is defined in the *Hawaiian Dictionary*<sup>[11]</sup> as "mental cleansing: family conferences in which relationships were set right through prayer, discussion, confession, repentance, and mutual restitution and [forgiveness](#)." *Pono pono* is defined as "to put to rights; to put in order or shape, correct, revise, adjust, amend, regulate, arrange, rectify, tidy up, make orderly or neat".

<i>D</i> I am sorry	<i>D</i> Ho' opono pono
<i>Bm</i> Please forgive me	<i>Bm</i> Ho' opono pono
<i>Em</i> I love you	<i>Em</i> Ho' opono pono
<i>A</i> I thank you	<i>A</i> Ho' opono pono

**\* CLOSING WORDS**

T.S. Eliot: The Little Gidding (1942)

We shall not cease from exploration  
 And the end of all our exploring  
 Will be to arrive where we started  
 And know the place for the first time.

Through the unknown, unremembered gate  
 When the last of earth left to discover  
 Is that which was the beginning;  
 At the source of the longest river  
 The voice of the hidden waterfall  
 And the children in the apple-tree

Not known, because not looked for  
 But heard, half-heard, in the stillness  
 Between two waves of the sea.  
 Quick now, here, now, always--  
 A condition of complete simplicity  
 (Costing not less than everything)

And all shall be well and  
 All manner of thing shall be well  
 When the tongues of flames are in-folded  
 Into the crowned knot of fire  
 And the fire and the rose are one.

**POSTLUDE**

\*Please stand, if comfortable to do so.

Join us for coffee & conversation after the service!