

Living the Questions
Live the questions...love the questions .

Theme for October: Good and Evil —*the practice of discernment*

Questions for contemplation and conversation
on your own, around the dinner table, in your journal, with each other

1. What informs your discernment between good and evil (intuition, empirical facts, etc.)?
2. How does your understanding of “good and evil” relate to our principle of the *inherent worth and dignity of every person*?
3. Are the dividing lines between good and evil clear or hazy? Are they in society at large or within each person?
4. What power do humans have for creating or perpetuating good or evil?
5. Given your experience, what is more powerful – good, or evil?

See the website for readings and resources—www.whitebearunitarian.org under Living the Questions.

Quotes:

“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 I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* 1918-1956

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase each other
doesn't make any sense.” – Rumi

Evil is lack of direction. —Martin Buber

There is a strange interdependence between thoughtlessness and evil.

—Hannah Arendt

“There is no good and evil; only power and those too weak to see it.”

—J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter & the Philosopher’s Stone

“When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time, they can seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall. Think of it--always.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant.”

— Martin Luther King Jr.

Shakespeare:

Henry V.... There is some soul of goodness in things evil,
Would men observingly distill it out.

Readings:

"...an old Chinese farmer lost his best stallion one day and his neighbor came around to express his regrets, but the farmer just said, "Who knows what is good and what is bad." The next day the stallion returned bringing with him 3 wild mares. The neighbor rushed back to celebrate with the farmer, but the old farmer simply said, "Who knows what is good and what is bad." The following day, the farmer's son fell from one of the wild mares while trying to break her in and broke his arm and injured his leg. The neighbor came by to check on the son and give his condolences, but the old farmer just said, "Who knows what is good and what is bad." The next day the army came to the farm to conscript the farmer's son for the war, but found him invalid and left him with his father. The neighbor thought to himself, "Who knows what is good and what is bad."

- Taoist parable

Unitarian Universalists and other religious liberals have always emphasized the positive aspects of the divine and human nature. As a result, critics sometimes charge that liberals don't truly understand the reality of evil. Yet liberals are not naïve about evil; they just have a different framework for understanding it.

For religious liberals, evil is not a supernatural force locked in a cosmic struggle against the forces of good. Liberals also do not worry much about the traditional "theodicy" problem—how evil can exist if God is both all-loving and all-powerful. For liberals, evil is neither a demonic spirit nor a philosophical dilemma, but a reality to respond to and confront.

Unitarian Universalists are fully aware of the profound evil we face today, including unnecessary human suffering, rampant environmental degradation, and destructive systemic structures such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and violence. Yet none of these are inevitable. Religious liberals live with hope grounded in the belief that the world can be nudged toward the good. Our choices matter: We can either enable (or ignore) the evil around us, or we can help overcome it.

—Paul Razor

FROM Unitarian Universalist Views of Evil, Paul Razor, Editor:

Sometimes I use a very subjective, almost subconscious barometer when reading the news of the day and deciding whether some action bears the weight of the word evil. It's not the magnitude of an event, nor the cold-heartedness of those involved, nor even the historical impact. It's the degree of heartbreak that I feel: beyond sorrow or horror, a sense that something has been blasted apart, a shattering of hope, the collapse of what I thought or wished were true about the world and human nature. There are some truths, some news, that break the heart—not permanently, but utterly, for a while, as the realization forms perhaps for the thousandth time: this, too, is part of our humanity.

Evil is the capacity, within us and among us, to break sacred bonds with our own souls, with one another, and with the holy. Further, it is the willingness to excuse or justify this damage, to deny it, or to call it virtue. The soil in which it flourishes is a rich compost of ignorance, arrogance, fear, and delusion—mostly self-delusion—all mingled with the sparkling dust of our original, human being.

—Victoria Safford

POETRY/LYRICS

Everything is Broken

Broken lines, broken strings, broken threads, broken springs
Broken idols, broken heads, people sleeping in broken beds
Ain't no use jivin', ain't no use jokin', everything is broken

Broken bottles, broken plates, broken switches, broken gates
Broken dishes, broken parts, streets are filled with broken hearts
Broken words are never meant to be spoken, everything is broken

Seems like every time you stop and turn around
Someone else has just hit the ground

Broken cutters, broken saws, broken buckles, broken laws
Broken bodies, broken bones, broken voices on broken phones
Take a deep breath, feel like you're chokin', everything is broken

Every time you leave and go off some place
Things fall to pieces in my face

Broken hands on broken plows, broken treaties, broken vows
Broken pipes, broken tools, people bending broken rules
Hound dog howlin', bullfrog croakin', everything is broken

—Bob Dylan