

Guilt—July 2014

UUFVB Covenant Groups

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings
but connected, in mystery and miracle,
to the universe, to this community, and to each other.

Check-in: How is your spirit right now?

Opening Reading

There's Catholic guilt; there's Jewish guilt. Many of us became Unitarian Universalists to get away from religious guilt. But after you've been UU awhile, you realize that Catholic and Jewish guilt have nothing on UU guilt. Catholic and Jewish guilt are merely about saving your immortal soul and maintaining charitable relations with your fellow humans. UU guilt is more. UU guilt is Green. UU guilt is about saving the entire planet for all future generations. Let's trace the opportunities for guilt in a UU's day. Our prototype UU starts the day with coffee, orange juice, toast, and eggs. Each of those menu items is fraught with guilt. The coffee. It wasn't local, but was it fair trade? Orange juice. Also not local but most made in the United States. Toast. Did our UU grow the wheat in her kitchen garden? Did she take the time to harvest it, thresh it, mill it, bake it? And then our UU has the temerity to use extra electricity to make toast. Most electricity is generated from coal. The process of extracting coal either buries miners alive or devastates environments. Those eggs. Were they bought at a co-op or farmers' market? Was the hen who laid the eggs veg-fed? Did she have the freedom to roam with her fellow hens? Was she content? For that matter, couldn't our UU raise chickens in the backyard and gather his own eggs? And that's just breakfast. (From blog *Clicking UU Life*, October 6, 2012)

Topic Exploration

The origins of guilt--as Dr. Willard Gaylin, noted psychiatrist and bioethicist, claims--is that it's a human emotion or sensation which we human beings developed, as just noted, for the sake of our survival and for the continuance of human community. At some point in human evolution we developed a conscience; that is to say, some internal mechanism for both keeping ourselves in check and for feeling some responsibility for the safety and well-being of others. Hand in hand with the evolution of conscience came our human awareness of our ability and capacity to inflict hurt and even great harm to one another. So we, as a human race, devised laws and codes of behavior, both to protect ourselves from our baser selves as well as to elevate our better selves. When persons are found in violation of certain of these codes and laws they are pronounced "guilty" through whatever justice processes their community has devised for establishing guilt or innocence, and for the punishment of guilty deeds. Gaylin is quite right, therefore, in maintaining that there is a rational basis for guilt that serves human good, just as he is right when he says, "the failure to feel guilt is the basic flaw in the psychopath." (From a sermon by the Rev. Steve Edington, UU Church of Nashua NH)

It is true that guilt feelings can tyrannize us and prevent our self-fulfillment. But the forces that tyrannize us are also the ones that humanize us, and feelings of guilt, if we deal well with them, can be pointers to a fuller life. It is much like physical pain, which is necessary as a warning and a motivation. When you put your hand on a hot stove, pain motivates you to move it...before too much damage is done. Guilt works the same way. Woe unto the one who never feels guilt; who has no care for what is hurting or wrong or unjust and thus never does anything to change. (From a sermon by the Rev. Christine Robinson)

Questions/Sharing

1. Wayne Dyer, in a book he published some years ago called *Your Erroneous Zones*, wrote a chapter entitled "The Useless Emotions: Guilt and Worry." Here's some of what he writes: "Throughout life the two most futile emotions are guilt for what has been done and worry about what might be done....It is by far the greatest waste of emotional energy (as it leaves you) feeling immobilized in the present over something that has already taken place and that no amount of guilt can change." How do we differentiate between the guilt that drives us to be our best selves and useless self-destructive guilt?
2. Some of us were raised in homes with traditions that instilled varying degrees of guilt; many of us have complained and suffered as a result. Ask yourself: Who made me feel guilty as a child? How did they do this? What were their motives? Do I still feel guilty about these things? (Should I still feel guilty for these things?)
3. How has your personal experience of guilt shaped your perceptions and/or behaviors? How has it kept you from being the person you want to be?
4. Describe an instance in which guilt served as a positive motivator in your life.

Check-out and reflection on today's session

Closing Reading

We've each been given a life to live; a life that needs care and feeding and nurture; a life that needs respect and affirmation; a life that should not be burdened by un-needed guilt. And it is also a life that needs to be called to responsibility; a life that reaches beyond the self to validate the worth, dignity, and self-respect of others; a life that is accountable, in some measure, for the well-being of others. Keeping all that in balance is not always easy, but it is one of the essential tasks of being human. (From a sermon by the Rev. Steve Edington, UU Church of Nashua NH)

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Housekeeping