
Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Santa Monica
A Dedicated Peace Site and Welcoming Congregation



Bulletin

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When deception prevails

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Special points of interest:

- *Faith in Action is the witness and advocacy program of the UUCCSM.*
- *Faith in Action speaks for the church only when the congregation has voted resoundingly to take an official position on an issue related to peace, civil liberties or social justice.*
- *The UUA Commission on Social Witness provides Study/Action Issues, Actions of Immediate Witness, and Statements of Conscience. These are important resources for our witness and advocacy program.*



By Rev. Ernie Pipes

"I came to bear witness to the truth," said Jesus to Pilate. "Truth?" said Pilate, "what is that?" If you want to address and respond to the plethora of deceitful statements by government officials, scientific researchers, writers of memoirs, etc., I think you have to start by making some distinctions. Pilate, to put it technically, was raising an epistemological issue: to bear witness to "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" is in the strict sense beyond human reach. Reality is too many-sided, our experience in any area is too limited, and our words and the concepts they seek to convey are inherently insufficient to capture the "whole truth" of any subject.

However, this philosophical subtlety has very little to do with our choices about whether to lie or speak honestly, about what to say and what

to hold back. Truthfulness, in the moral domain, is an issue settled by showing whether you INTEND your statement to mislead. A false person, a liar, is not one merely wrong or mistaken or incorrect, but one who is intentionally deceitful or treacherous. We must repudiate, therefore, from the countless ways in which we blunder misinformed through life, those efforts aimed at the purpose of deliberately misleading. And from the countless partial stabs at truth we humans struggle to make, we can honor those pronouncements which are designed to convey what is honestly believed to be correct and accurate. The moral mandate can be put this way: "Don't worry about being fallible; instead worry about being false."

What is at issue these days, especially in public life and particularly in government, is the willful manipulation of information. When we undertake to deceive, we communicate messages meant to mislead; to communicate what we ourselves know to be untrue or, at best, a partial truth. Deception is the larger category; lying forms a part of it. This manipulation can take various forms. Half-truths put a spin on a policy, program or event that emphasizes what the speaker wants you to

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hear and believe, hoping you will think or explore no farther to uncover all the other hidden ramifications and consequences. "Lowering taxes will bring jobs and prosperity!" "Government is the problem, not the solution!" These slogans have their modicum of truth, but ignore (and hope you will not notice) that such policies also gut social programs for those in need, leave gaps in the safety net, and benefit special interests that only a functional government can check.

Fairness compels the observation that among the forms of deception is self-deception, believing our own deceptions. We must assume that some in high places, foregoing extensive research, wide reading and careful introspection, actually believe the things they are saying. But the public must not let the wish to be fair lead to gullibility.

Truth telling, the intention to be honest, forthcoming and as accurate as possible, is hindered by a variety of factors. Ego aggrandizement, the wish to gain the approbation of others, peer pressures, personal gain, ideological and party loyalties, cultural biases and prejudices - can play a role in any of us leading to a particular shaping of "our" truth - not quite a conscious lie so much as putting our personal slant on it (or, in politics, our party's slant on it). In Washington, and in every capital, honesty in statement and rectitude in behavior are insidiously undermined by the enticements of money and power. In corporate life, competition and the almighty bottom line pull toward deception. As we have seen with executive greed at Enron. In too many places and institutions there can be seen an ingrained Culture of Deception, a pervasive shading or

hiding of actual intentions.

But the line in our church covenant that says "The quest of truth is {our} sacrament" is neither naive nor unrealistic. In every society trust rests on truthfulness. Trust is a precious resource, easily squandered and hard to regain. One of the principal tasks of Faith in Action is to work for a Culture of Trust and to continue the effort to strengthen communities based on the sacrament of truth. And one of the first steps in this challenge is to teach ourselves to see through those who seek to deceive and manipulate and, more than that, call out for all to hear the lies and deceit we perceive from whatever source. Eventually, truth prevails.

Does Torture Work?



By Max Epstein

With all the questions about torture, we hear little about the question, "Does it work?"

President Bush apparently

thinks it does. Bolstered by his Attorney General and former legal adviser, Alberto Gonzales, Bush argued that it was important not to announce that we will stop torturing. To do so, he said, would embolden our enemies, who want to hurt us. At the same time, he said that we do not use torture. This peculiar position ended when Senator John McCain forced the issue, and Bush backed down.

The McCain Amendment to the 2006 Defense bill outlawed torture by the U. S. Government, in any location, defining torture as

"cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." He tied his Amendment to the fifth, eighth, and 14th Amendments to our Constitution, as well as the 1984 UN Convention against torture.

The usual question about torture addresses moral or ethical issues. It runs something like this: If a prisoner is known to have information about a bomb set to explode in a crowded place, should we be allowed to extract that information using torture? This is a compelling question only if we assume that torture would give us a good chance of

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obtaining the information we need. In fact, the evidence suggests it would not.

Ben Saul, a law professor at New South Wales University, Australia, addresses this subject in "Counter Punch," a journal edited by Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair. Saul writes that experienced interrogators know torture produces misinformation because its victims will confess to anything to make it stop. His view is supported by, among many others, retired U.S. Air Force Col. John Rothbrock, who writes that he does not know "...any professional intelligence officer who would think this {torture} is a good idea." Rothrock learned in Viet Nam just how ineffective torture is. Another authority, U. S. Army Col. Stuart Herrington, is a military intelligence specialist who was sent by the Pentagon to assess interrogation in Iraq. He concluded "Torture is simply not a good way to get information."

The case of Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi is a stark example of the

peril we face when we rely on torture to obtain information. An Al Qaeda operative, al-Libi confessed, under extreme duress, to the falsehood that Al Qaeda had used Iraq as a source for knowledge about chemical and biological weapons. Colin Powell relied on this misinformation in his ill-advised speech to the UN, where he was seeking support for attacking Iraq.

John Mc Cain has provided us with yet another example of what happens when prisoners are tortured. When the Viet Cong tried to make him reveal the names of members of his flight squadron, he gave them the names of Green Bay Packers.

Interrogation experts know what methods do produce reliable information. They offer rewards, build trust, withhold privileges, use deception, and maintain psychological pressure. Returning to Col. Herrington, he says that "nine out of ten people can be persuaded to talk with no stress methods at all." Asked if this would apply to reli-

gious fanatics, he responded "The batting average might drop to six out of ten, but if you beat up the remaining four, they'll just tell you anything to get you to stop."

And finally, one blogger reminds us that in our early history, we tortured women until they confessed to being witches. Does that mean, he asks, that they were witches?

Torture has been tried since ancient times, and it has continually fallen into disuse, because it does not work. It reappears historically for a variety of reasons, including the illusion that it will serve to protect a country, the inherent sadism which haunts our species, and the rage against the enemy, where revenge may be a motive.

In banning torture, we have not lost a weapon against terrorists. We have, however, gained a great deal in the eyes of the world and in our sense of who we are.

What if the United States considered Osama Bin Laden's truce bid?



By Arvid Knudsen

Just the thought of considering Bin Laden's bid for a truce will bring out the FBI, CIA and NSA. In the current climate this idea is anti-patriotic. If we are not for the killing of every so called terrorist out there we are under suspicion. But what the hell! Let's think

it out.

First, what would make up the circumstances of where and how a truce could be considered and dealt with? Just who would do the negotiating? Who would represent the interests of the United States? Who would represent Bin Laden and Al Qaeda?

The Hague in the Nether-

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What if the United States considered Osama Bin Laden's truce bid? (continued from page 4)

lands might be a choice for a site. But the terms or foundation for the discussion of a truce are seemingly insurmountable. Does Bin Laden really speak for all of Al Qaeda? Are what our administration considers terrorists all of one stripe or are they made up of many disparate groups each with special antipathy to the United States and its coalition's values? And would each of these groups submit to any dictate of Bin Laden or his lieutenants? How could the U.S. trust whatever terms may be offered or approved? Who would verify?

This self-created war, the so called war on terrorism between the United States, its allies and Al Qaeda (and varied groups and insurgents throughout the world) is like no other war of the past. It is not a war of nation against nation or armies fighting armies. At best, the informed estimates suggest the terrorists number no more than 5,000 including the entire wild eyed, unredeemable and committed suicidal insurgent types. Of course, this does not include legitimate insurgencies and their adherent members which are operating in many countries of the world.

A truce with Bin Laden and his terrorist forces would not automatically halt the war in Iraq. The varied insurgents there appear to operate completely independent of Al Qaeda. It wouldn't halt Iran's well known support of terrorist organizations in the Middle East.

The Taliban in Afghanistan does not take orders from Bin

Laden, although its members may be sympathetic to him. Then those Al Qaeda adherents in Indonesia, Germany, Somalia, London, Madrid and other known locales are not known to take direct orders from him although their activities may have some coordination with higher up lieutenants based as yet in unknown hideouts.

But if a representative group of Al Qaeda leaders with the blessing of Bin Laden were gathered to meet at a place congenial to the U.S., what would be their requirements? For the hundreds of Al Qaeda leaders and followers plus the thousands of Taliban and assorted terrorists who have been killed would they now be asking for amnesty? For amnesty, would they be prepared to give up all acts of murder, suicide bombings, and their "death to America" mission if the U.S. military forces stood down and gave halt to its offensive chase and strikes?

A truce really would only be a time out for negotiations to attempt to end the war and not an offer of surrender by either side.

What terms would the U.S. require or demand for an amnesty? Would it demand the surrender of Bin Laden for trial? Would it demand that Al Qaeda members halt their activities or retreat from Iraq and Afghanistan as well? Can the U.S. demand that Al Qaeda commit to a restraint of terror worldwide while the talks go on?

The questions are only but a suggestion of the implications for a

truce. The real problem is that we have no understanding of the terms on how this war on terrorism may or can end. President Bush has vowed that this fight is to the death of the last of Al Qaeda, the Taliban and the assorted insurgent/terrorist groups. Is this the real goal of this war?

Will we ever know the final resolution, since terrorism has been used as a tactic by indigenous forces against ruling factions and its people in nations all over the world since recorded history?

While a real truce between warring parties at this time seems most unlikely, it is incumbent upon us to think about what it will take for this war to end. Most thoughtful analysts have concluded that defeating the terrorists cannot be done by military means. The U.S. and coalition armed forces could be withdrawn from their arbitrary battlefields. It should be the CIA, NSA, FBI, INTERPOL and other international secret service agencies or commissions to track down these terrorist organizations and deal with them. At a tenth or less of current costs in personnel and treasure this could be the way to call an end to the "war" and permit our international police agencies to dispose of these radical and murderous malcontents.

Why I'm proud of my VA service



By Charles Haskell

"Education never ends, Watson. It is a series of lessons with the greatest for the last." Sherlock Holmes in "The Adventure of the Red Circle," by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930)

When I was in my senior year of medical school in 1965, I considered the VA (now the Department of Veterans Affairs) to be the worst possible place to practice medicine. It had a reputation for bureaucratic inefficiency and ineptitude and I took pride in the fact that none of my clinical rotations had been to a VA facility. Later, while I was doing cancer research at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Maryland, my negative view of the VA was further reinforced by my peers and mentors.

In 1971, I was recruited by Dr. Donald Morton to be the medical oncologist for his new comprehensive oncology program in the Department of Surgery at the UCLA Medical Center. The VA at Sepulveda was an important component of his program, so I accepted an appointment there as well as at the UCLA Medical Center. After all, I said, I'm an academic physician and the patients at the VA aren't mine—they are the teaching pa-

tients of the residents in training. I was willing to accept the limitations of the VA in providing quality care because it occurred in a teaching environment.

I retired from the practice of medicine, both at UCLA and the VA, in February of 2003. As I look back on 35 years of government service, I'm proud to say that my assessment of the VA has undergone a dramatic transformation. I now consider it a model of how enlightened government can provide high quality health care. Understanding how and why this happened is an important part of our contemporary debate on how to improve health care access for all.

Paul Krugman, writing in the New York Times on January 27, 2006, summarized his perspective on why the VA has become an outstanding model for the provision of cost-effective medical care. He noted that the VA is a fully integrated, comprehensive health care system that is able to use its buying power to obtain cheaper drugs than is allowed under Medicare Part D. With the world's finest computerized medical record and a commitment to improving the quality of the system, medical care in this socialized system has improved dramatically. I would add that a great strength of the VA is its commitment to provide care irrespective of socioeconomic class, pre-existing conditions, and insurance status. All of this is true. What is missing from most descriptions of the VA is a description of how the medical staff has changed since the mid-1990s.

On a personal level, the VA changed for me when I came to recognize that the patients under my care at the VA were really my patients, not just the resident's patients. This transformation occurred in the early 1990s when I began to realize that there were problems in coordinating the care of VA patients that I would never allow to happen for my private patients at the UCLA Medical Center. It was about then that the VA began to aggressively promote its new computerized medical record system. This new tool allowed me to become deeply and personally involved in the care of my cancer patients at both institutions. It allowed me to have a hands-on approach to patient care at both places and I began to see both groups of patients as my personal responsibility.

In the mid-1990s, the VA leadership was struggling to overcome chronic budgetary shortfalls. A fateful decision was made that I believe was crucial to making the VA the cost-effective, highly accountable institution that it has become. The key decision was to start billing insurance companies for health care provided to veterans. Prior to that time, all of the VA's health care budget came from Congress. None of it came from billing patients or third party payers. Consequently, before that time, the VA was largely exempt from the standards of the health care industry in providing health care. In our market driven economy, the mere act of billing created a new kind of responsibility that the VA was completely

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unprepared to handle.

This became evident when a VA computerized billing program started billing the AARP for the insurance component of health care provided to veterans with AARP health insurance. Unfortunately, some VA clerks found it easier to say that patients who didn't show up for care in one of their clinics had actually been seen. This generated an automatic computerized bill that was then paid by the AARP. When AARP informed these VA patients they had paid for their VA clinic visits, the patients informed them that they had not been seen. AARP demanded an audit and the VA realized that it had been committing health care fraud. Under Federal law, fraud carries significant monetary penalties.

The AARP audit was a wake up call for the VA, and it promptly agreed to fix its billing system and to develop compliance programs in all of its facilities nationwide. I was named the Compliance Officer for the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System in September 1999 to oversee this process locally. Over the ensuing three years we worked hard to revamp the culture so that it fully conformed to the standards of patient care billing and resident supervision required by the healthcare industry and Medicare. A very practical consequence of this educational and regulatory program was to change how hospitalized inpatients were supervised. For example, on the Medical Service, senior attending physicians increased the frequency of their bed-

side visits with patients from once per admission before our compliance program to every other day after we had changed the rules and started monitoring their performance.

From my point of view, health care for veterans has been improved by changes in the behavior of individual providers as well as by changes in the system itself. Now that billing occurs in the name of individual physicians, they know they will be accountable for the care of those patients. I think it is ironic that the VA is now a model of cost-effective care at least in part because it now does a better job of holding its individual providers more accountable for the care they provide individual patients.

UUA Commission on Social Witness Study/Action Issue for 2005-2007: "Moral Values for a Pluralistic Society"

Issue

How might the moral and ethical grounding of Unitarian Universalism be given greater voice in the public square?

Background and Reasons for Study

Throughout the 1980s, religious conservatives have gained credibility in politics asserting their religious values should be incorporated into public policy development to the exclusion of other faith traditions. Their influence has only increased with the election of President George W. Bush in the 2000 election, and again in 2004. Their vision for the United States—indeed the world—is one that results in oppression, discrimination, and domi-

nation, reserving power for a small number of government and business elites. As the gap between rich and poor expands in the United States and the ill effects of globalization intensify, the exclusion of religious liberals from this civic dialogue is dangerous.

Significance to Unitarian Universalism

Theodore Parker, the 19th century Unitarian minister, proclaimed, "I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one...And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice." In the faith that we share, amid the pluralism that we celebrate, in the pluralistic society that we inhabit,

we are challenged to articulate the elements of that bend in the arc of which Parker spoke.

Unitarian Universalists exhibit a high degree of theological and philosophical diversity. Despite our differences, we have developed congregational communities and have covenanted to be institutionally associated, respecting and affirming our differences of belief. We also have a history of involvement in public witness. Our collective voice can be found in annual statements of public witness that date from the first General Assembly of the Association in 1961, and long before in statements adopted by the American Unitarian Association and

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Moral values for a pluralistic society (continued from page 6)

the Universalist Church of America. Within Unitarian Universalism, we are challenged to offer our message of public witness in a framework of moral values that is recognized with an affirmative nod within our own ranks and well beyond our own ranks if we are to be relevant at all. Yet Unitarian Universalists have been historically and theologically resistant, if not repulsed, by the notion of codifying a set of so-called moral values for ourselves and others or of having such a set of principles imposed upon us or other people. The dilemma is how to ensure our moral values are hard in the square of public opinion and in the halls of government?

The Reverend William Sinkford, President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, voiced his view on moral values in a November 9, 2004 statement: “Moral values are not just particular opinions on ‘hot button’ topics in a divisive election year. Moral values grow out of our calling as religious people to work to create the Beloved Community...Moral values instruct us to ‘love our neighbors as ourselves’ and always to ask the question, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ They are fundamentally inclusive rather than exclusive, and they call on generosity of spirit rather than mean spiritedness.” It is understandable the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke frequently of the Beloved Community and that he often quoted the Reverend Theodore Parker on the direction of that moral arc of the universe. As a community of liberal faith and equally liberal doubt, we have an historic opportunity to engage in interfaith and cross-cultural dialogue to discern a core morality that would bend the arc of our cur-

rent moral universe toward compassionate justice in our pluralistic global society.

Possible study questions

- What is the difference between “morality” and “ethics?” How do we understand morality? How do we understand it in a Unitarian Universalist and civic contexts? By what authority does our understanding of morality derive?
- Is it appropriate for Unitarian Universalist congregations to collectively speak out, as a faith community, on moral and ethical issues? How are dissenting voices within the congregation honored while allowing the majority to speak out?
- How do our actions move us to bend the arc of the moral universe toward or away from compassionate justice? How might we build ever more compassionate bridges across differences and avoid temptations to exploit these differences in the service of being “right?”
- How can we as Unitarian Universalists contribute most effectively to the public dialogue on the role of shared moral values in our changing, global, pluralistic society? On what basis do we evaluate our social witness efforts?

Possible Actions

- Form covenant groups and sponsor congregational forums for people to discuss morality, what it would mean for us to reclaim the word, and what the goals of congregationally-based social witness are.

- Establish a process that respectfully discerns the will of the majority within the congregation on issues of public witness and that enables the congregation to collectively voice its opinion while recognizing and honoring the views of those holding different opinions.
- Actively participate in the social witness process of the Unitarian Universalist Association by proposing Study/Action Issues, forming task forces to engage issues selected annually by the General Assembly for two years of congregational and district discernment, submitting comments on proposed Statements of Conscience of the Unitarian Universalist Association, and working to implement adopted public policy statements.
- Work collaboratively with neighboring Unitarian Universalist congregations on issues of public policy. Participate in district-wide advocacy efforts.
- Sponsor interfaith and civic discussions on the role of religion and morality in the public square. Sponsor meetings with other faith communities to explore and discern common values.

Related Prior Social Witness Statements

Beyond Religious Tolerance: The Challenges of Interfaith Cooperation Begin with Us (1999 Statement of Conscience).

For details, see:

[Http://www.uua.org/csw](http://www.uua.org/csw)



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