

**“Mixed Motivations”**  
**October 29, 2006**  
**Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship**  
**Bruce A. Bode**

**Poetry for Bulletin**

Fear is a trick,  
A sham,  
A slight of hand.  
It is an illusion.  
The master magicians  
Are heartily at work  
In your world.  
Demand to see  
Up the sleeve,  
Behind the back  
And underneath the table.  
Expose the magician for what he is.  
(Candy Drollinger)

**Call to Worship**

This day is a new day that has been given to us.  
Let us then rejoice in it and be glad, and let us count our many blessings:  
Let us be grateful for the incredible gift of life, and for the capacity to see, to feel, to hear, and to understand.  
Let us be grateful for all occasions of festival and celebration.  
And let us then be especially grateful for the ties of love which bind us together, giving dignity, meaning, worth, and joy to all our days.

**Lighting the Chalice** (in unison)

We are travelers. We meet for a moment in this sacred place to love, to share, to serve. Let us use compassion, curiosity, reverence, and respect while seeking our truths. In this way we will support a just and joyful community, and this moment shall endure.

**Responsive Reading**

MINISTER: Every human experience can be expressed in terms of paradox. Day is comprehensible only in contrast to night; activity has meaning only in relation to rest.

CONGREGATION: Every single virtue in this world is made valid by its opposite. Light would mean nothing without dark; care would mean nothing without abandon.

MINISTER: Truths always come in pairs and one has to endure this to accord with reality, but for some incomprehensible reason we often refuse this paradoxical nature of

reality and think we can function outside it.

CONGREGATION: If we try to embrace one without paying tribute to the other, we degrade paradox into contradiction. When leisure is torn loose from work, both are spoiled.

MINISTER: Fanaticism is always a sign that one has adopted one of a pair of opposites at the expense of the other.

CONGREGATION: The high energy of fanaticism is a frantic effort to keep one half of the truth at bay while the other half takes control.

MINISTER: Both of a pair of opposites must be equally honored. If we endure the collision of opposing elements in full consciousness, we embrace paradox. To suffer one's confusion is the first step in healing.

CONGREGATION: Whenever you have a clash of opposites in your being and neither will give way to the other, you can be certain that God is present.

MINISTER: The religious faculty is the art of taking the opposites and binding them back together again, surmounting the split that has been causing so much suffering.

CONGREGATION: We must restore the word "religious" to its true meaning; then it will regain its healing power. To heal, to bond, to join, to bridge, to put back together again -- these are our sacred faculties.

MINISTER: The religious faculty helps us move from contradiction -- that painful condition where things oppose each other -- to the realm of paradox, where we are able to entertain simultaneously two contradictory notions and give them equal dignity.

CONGREGATION: Then, and only then, is there the possibility of grace -- the spiritual experience of contradictions brought into a coherent whole, giving us a unity greater than either one of them.

MINISTER: To stay loyal to paradox is to earn the right to unity.

CONGREGATION: Conflict to paradox to revelation: that is the divine progression.

(Statements from Owning Your Own Shadow, Robert A. Johnson)

## **Meditation**

Our lives are experienced in both joy and sorrow and in all those "pairs of opposites" that create the whole of our existence. Halloween is the time that marks the entrance into the darker part of the year. This has a corresponding psychological aspect -- an invitation to reflect on the "other side," the "yin side" of our existence.

Dr. Katy Ottaway, a physician and member of this congregation, has given a lot of thought to these “pairs of opposites” by which experience our lives. As we enter into our Period of Silence this morning, I will read a poem of hers related to this titled, “Creation.”

God created all things  
And they were good  
And dull  
She sighed  
Longing for passion  
And joy and ecstasy

Her most beloved Angel  
Lucifer  
Saw her sorrow  
Now what?  
Lucifer spoke to the other Angels  
Thought carefully  
And gave God her gift  
Hell was born

Without darkness  
There can be no light  
Without pain  
There can be no healing  
Without suffering  
There can be no joy  
Without death  
There can be no life  
Without hell  
There can be no heaven

Blessings on Lucifer  
Most generous of all the  
Angels.

## **Reading**

My reading today is a strange biblical passage, one with which I suspect you are not familiar, even those of you with a good bit of biblical knowledge. It’s a short passage on unclean spirits or demons from the Gospel of Matthew, a teaching attributed to Jesus, the spiritual and psychological master, that is, one who would know how to converse with demons and they with him.

Please listen carefully to these words that have to do with the psychology of demons,

because I will return to them in my sermon today. You may try to figure out what it means that the demon in this passage returns to the place from which it was apparently cast out, and how and why it was able to gather a larger company of fellow demons to live there with it. From the Gospel of Matthew 12:43-45:

When an unclean spirit goes out of a person [–say, some bad habit or obsession or addiction –] it wanders through waterless country looking for a place to rest, and cannot find one. Then it says, "I will return to the home I came from." But on arrival, finding it unoccupied, swept and tidied, it then goes off and collects seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and set up house there, so that the person ends up by being worse than before.

## “MIXED MOTIVATIONS”

### Introduction

I think most of you have probably listened to or at least heard of Dr. Laura Schlessinger. She's an advice counselor of the radio waves and also an author, who in recent years has been near the center of a number of storms because of some of her conservative, even reactionary, social and political views.

It's been a number of years since I've listened with any regularity to her program, but when she first came on the radio and I was in the car, I would make a point of listening to her program. She was direct, sometimes to the point of rudeness, and directive, sometimes to the point of being dictatorial. I wondered sometimes why anyone would call in, since you would likely get blasted. Yet I felt she was not without feeling for those willing to look at themselves.

One of the main reasons I would tune-in her program was because as a sometimes pastoral counselor myself I found her program interesting and sometimes instructive in terms of comparing notes as to how I might respond or address a similar issue or question that a caller asked.

Plus, I found her to be quite good at very quickly sorting out what parts of an issue belonged to whom and who needed to take responsibility for what – what you needed to own, what you needed to let go of, and what you might need to confront another person on.

### Adam's story

Anyway, one of the very first programs of Dr. Schlessinger's I ever heard – perhaps it was the very first – was on a Saturday afternoon as I was driving in my car. A young man called into the program distressed because he was not achieving his goal in life, which was that of becoming a police officer. Since his youth it had been his aspiration to become a police officer, but he wasn't making it. And why? Because he couldn't discipline himself with regard to his weight.

He was caught in a vicious cycle: he wanted to become a police officer, but couldn't because he was overweight. And the fact that he wasn't meeting his goal of becoming a police officer would make him anxious, and when he would get anxious he would stuff himself with food, particularly with sweets and other fattening fodder, so that he was working against himself.

So Dr. Schlessinger talked to him for a bit about the focus of his attention. She said, “If your attention is focused on the *goal* of being a police officer rather than the *process* which gets you there, then you've got your attention in the wrong place and you're setting yourself up to be anxious because you can't achieve any big goal all at once. A lot of people have a lot of things they'd like to be, but they never get anywhere because they

don't put forth the needed effort. They're attached to the goal, but they're not attached to the slow and sometimes difficult, step-by-step process that gets them to the goal. So pay attention to the process, then the goal will come in its own time and in its own way."

"And so," said Dr. Schlessinger, "you've got to get very clear on what you're doing while you're doing it. So the next time you're stuffing a sugar donut into your mouth with your right hand, I want you to wave good-bye to being a police officer with your left hand. That will help you become aware of what you're doing while you're doing it ... wave good-bye to being a police officer with your left hand, while you're eating that sugar donut with your right hand. Do you think you can remember to do that?"

"Yes," the young man replied.

Then Schlessinger hit upon another idea. "Adam" she said – I can't remember his actual name, but I'll call him Adam, for he will represent the person in conflict, the "man of flesh," as St. Paul would say – "Adam, I want you to try a little experiment with me. Put the phone down and go get one of your favorite fattening foods." (Now remember this is on live talk-radio, but she's willing to wait.)

So Adam lays down the phone, rustles around in the kitchen, and returns a short time later with one of his very favorite fattening foods. It's a squeeze bottle of soft chocolate, the kind, apparently, that you squirt on ice cream as a topping. However, this young man wasn't using the chocolate as a dessert topping, which would probably be bad enough, he was *mainlining* the stuff – squirting it directly into his mouth from the bottle. When he would get anxious, in order to comfort himself, he would suck the chocolate directly from the bottle – yuck!

Dr. Schlessinger expressed a little shock asking: "Do you really take it directly from the bottle?"

"Yes, I do," he replied sheepishly.

"Okay," she said, "let's do that now. I want you to suck some chocolate from this squeeze bottle. (Pause.) Have you done so?"

"Yes."

"Taste good?"

"Uh huh."

"All right, Adam, now I want you to get a piece of paper and a pen."

So Adam puts the phone down again, rustles around, finds a pen and paper, and returns.

"Now," says Dr. Schlessinger, "I want you to write the words 'police officer' on the paper.

(Pause) Have you done so?"

"Yes."

"Now," she says, "I want you to put the phone down again and do ten push-ups, counting out loud so I can hear you."

Once again, Adam puts the phone down and we hear him in the background doing the pushups – very quickly – 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10. He picks up the phone, and says, "Okay, I've done them."

"Hmm," says Dr. Schlessinger, somewhat surprised, "you're not even breathing hard; you're not in bad shape."

"Now," she says, "I want you to take the bottle of chocolate in your right hand. Do you have it in your right hand?"

"Yes."

"Adam, I'm going to give you a choice right now. Either you can do twenty-five pushups or you can take a swig of chocolate from your bottle. The choice is yours. What will it be?"

"Twenty-five pushups," says Adam without hesitation.

"Okay," says Schlessinger, "do 'em."

Again, Adam lays the phone down and in the background we hear him counting out the pushups: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-16-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-25. More slowly toward the end, but he definitely finished the pushups.

"Very good," says Dr. Schlessinger. "Now what I'd like to do for the future is this: I want you to take the piece of paper that says 'police officer' on it and I want you to put it right next to the bottle of chocolate in your cupboard. Each time you reach for that bottle of chocolate you will also see the paper that says 'police officer' on it, and you will know the choice you are making. Will you do that?"

"Yes, I will," the young man replied.

"And, Adam..."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Adam, I think you can make it."

End of conversation. Time for an advertisement.

## **“The good that I would, I do not”**

Adam is the person in conflict. He wants one thing, but does the very thing that undermines what he believes he wants.

A classic statement on this conflict comes from St. Paul, writing nearly two thousand years ago to the church in Rome. He wrote: "For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do." (Romans 7:19) For St. Paul, this was the condition, to use his terminology, of the "man of flesh," the "natural man" – persons in their "natural" and "unredeemed" condition.

So why this war against ourselves? Why these mixed motivations? Why do we so often undermine ourselves? Why aren't we more “rational” in our behavior – rational behavior being that behavior in which we follow through on what we plan and intend?

And why are we so often “irrational” in our behavior, to the point of doing the very opposite of what we think we want, of what we say we intend, and of what we know we ought to do?

## **The source of irrational behavior**

There are two principles with which I operate here:

First, the rational will and mind is the smaller part of our total being. It's a very important part, the part that makes us *human* beings, but nonetheless it's the smaller part. What we call "I" is only a part of us; the larger part is "not-I".

But this "I" part of us likes to imagine that it is the most important. It likes to dominate and think it is in control. The "not-I" part of us resists this domination. The more we insist on the way of the “I,” the stronger and fiercer grows the resistance of the powers of the “not-I.”

And so the second principle with which I operate, connected with the first, is this: Not only is the rational mind the smaller part of our total being, but the very nature of the rational mind and the process by which it works is such that it creates its own opposition – and in the following way:

The way the rational mind works is to divide things up, to differentiate, to separate out: "yes" and "no," good and evil, right and wrong, this and that. This is why we experience life in terms of “pairs of opposites.”

To differentiate and to choose, which is what the rational mind does, means that we cut into and cut apart the whole cloth of our existence. We cut out and we create a form. But there is cloth left over after the form is cut out. And that unused material, which is still fully a part of nature's energy, doesn't just disappear, it remains full of energy.

Or changing the analogy slightly: with any garment, there is an outer side and there is an underside. You can't create an outer side only.

Thus, every form we choose is held in relationship to the other potentials of our life that we've not chosen. And the principle and the dynamic that I'm working with here says that these unchosen potentials don't just evaporate into nothingness; rather, they also have to be recognized, appeased, honored, or grieved in some way, or they become more powerful and dangerous and won't let us alone to do what we think we want to do and have chosen to do.

Further: the more difficult the task we choose and the tighter the form, the greater will be the resistance. For example, to become a skilled professional or artisan, which requires long years of study, training, and discipline, means a mountain of resistance is building up which may one day erupt over a person if it isn't tended to.

Or, again, we can say that the more form-al the occasion – the more the occasion has form – the more we will feel the need to be loose from that form. Most people start to squirm pretty quickly at formal dinners or other occasions of high culture – a church service may be one of those. The more formal the occasion, the more quickly we tend to squirm.

Nevertheless, we have to hold to a form or we're nothing human. Without a form we just scatter and there's no culture, no civilization.

The form might be that of being a police officer, as with the young man in the story. But to choose to be a police officer also means choosing against a number of other possibilities and potentials in life. And these other sides have to be taken into us in some way or they will interfere with the life we are trying to create and build-up.

### **On the psychology of demons**

Now let me turn to the biblical passage I read today because I think it can be instructive in how the other side, the unchosen potentials of our life, manifests itself in our lives. Let me again read this unusual and strange passage:

When an unclean spirit goes out of a person it wanders through waterless country looking for a place to rest, and cannot find one. Then it says, "I will return to the home I came from." But on arrival, finding it unoccupied, swept and tidied, it then goes off and collects seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and set up house there, so that the person ends up by being worse than before.

(Matthew 12:43-45)

How shall we define a demon? How shall we bring demons into modern terminology?

In some ways I think it's more interesting to talk about demons because they have a

personal element to them, but let's modernize them for a moment to speak of demons as those autonomous, independent, unintegrated, and disruptive energies, both within and without, that interfere and raise havoc with the smooth functioning of our world. Demons are those energies and forces not subject to our rational will that mess up our lives, frustrating and irritating us at best, and, at worst, destroying us.

What do we learn about these autonomous forces from this biblical text?

- 1) We learn they don't just disappear when sent away.
- 2) We learn that they need a home like anyone else.
- 3) We learn that they like company like anyone else.
- 4) We learn that if the demons' host hasn't learned to get along with them, they'll go find some other like-minded friends and take the place over.

In the passage I read it said that when the unclean spirit, the demon, left its place and its host it wandered through waterless, arid country looking for a place to rest and couldn't find such a place. This means that our demons don't just disappear into thin air because we want them to or ask them to.

It's not easy, simple, or perhaps even possible to get rid of a demon, a bad habit, an obsession, an addiction, a despised enemy. Demons, like all natural forces or forms of energy, are subject to the laws of the conservation of energy and can neither be created nor destroyed. They can only take on different shapes or go to different places.

So why won't this demon in the Gospel passage cooperate and go to another place? And why can't it find a place to rest? And why does it want to go back to the same place even when it's not welcomed there?

Perhaps you've asked yourself the same question at various times in your life: "Why won't this bad habit just leave me? Why, year after year, decade after decade, do I keep wrestling and struggling with the same issues, falling into the same holes time and time again?"

Did the demon in the passage ever really leave the individual? Did this unclean spirit – this unwanted impulse and energy – really go out of the person as the passage literally says it did?

No, I'm afraid not. What happened is that the demon was just removed from the person's sight – *it never really left*.

The host wanted it gone, believed it was gone, tried to act as if it were gone, but, in reality, the demon was still there ... and now the situation is worse than before, because the demon is not even seen or acknowledged.

And so what happens? The dismissed demon goes underground. That is to say: it goes into your underground, wandering through *your* barren and waterless country, traveling

through the uncharted territory of *your* soul, hanging out in *your* secret, deep, dark, hidey hole where you dare not look and where other cut-off parts of *your* being have been previously dumped.

And now this dismissed, disgraced, disregarded, unwanted, and undeveloped energy that yet belongs to you, makes friends with other previously discarded parts of yourself. Sent away and wandering in your underground world, it meets and collects seven other demons more virulent than itself, then returns to the place that you thought you had made so neat, so clean, so tidy – you thought you had overcome and conquered that demon, had convinced yourself that that was so, and perhaps had even converted others to conquer similar demons; but, actually, you had only denied its reality and created a vacuum.

And now your situation is worse than it was before and the demon that returns to visit you, and with whom you now must now deal, is larger and angrier and more obstinate than the demon with whom you were originally acquainted.

Just this past Tuesday evening after the world series game, I saw a part of a program on the Oprah Winfrey Show in which Oprah was interviewing persons who had undergone stomach by-pass surgery to lose weight. And, indeed, these persons has lost the weight, but they now found that other addictions had emerged – alcohol, drug, and sexual addictions – and they found that they were in worse spiritual and psychological shape than before. Their families were saying: “Your situation now is much worse than before the weight loss.”

It would seem that symptoms, not causes, had been dealt with.

### **On the casting out of demons**

So how shall we deal with our demons: these demons that never allow us to get out of the box, as with the young man in our story; these demons that stop us in mid-life and turn everything upside down just when we think all is going smoothly; these demons that re-appear after we have been converted to a new life and think that the old life is entirely behind us; these demons that possess us in addictions, compulsions, anxieties, and obsessions; these demons that block us and suck the life, energy, and joy from us? How do we deal with these demons?

We begin by recognizing that they are part of us. They are those neglected elements of our being that are asking for a hearing by us.

These demons represent a larger life than our present circumscribed life. Thus, they challenge, resist, threaten, and even overthrow the life we think we want and are trying to plan. And the harder we push these demons away and the more we deny their reality, the fiercer and more demonic they become.

Thus, you can't just cast out your demons, because they are part of you and belong to you.

And so we must greet them ... humbly and politely, not arrogantly ... and also somewhat cautiously, for they have their power ... and, additionally, they may be very angry after being snubbed and disregarded for so long.

We greet them in order to get to know them, in order to see what *they* want and need, in order to see how we might somehow work together. Generally speaking, the face you turn toward them is the face they will turn toward you – a principle we might also consider applying in our current world situation.

And this is what Dr. Schlessinger did so nicely with the young man of the story: she helped him to greet one of his demons. The demon that had the young man tied up was the demon of gluttony in the shape of a squeeze bottle of chocolate.

So put that bottle of chocolate right out there where you can see it. Don't hide it and don't judge it, because this demon, this resistance, has also come from the ground of all being, and it has its power. So: greet it, recognize it, listen to it, learn from it, and speak to it. Say to it:

“I see you there. And I know you also have power, great power, power that has been greater than my own will, power that has many times thwarted me.

“And you have also been a comfort to me many times in the past, and I appreciate that.

“And now you help me to know what I want. You help me to find my way in life. Your presence there gives me definition, and it engages my strength and courage. You are a guardian for me, and I appreciate that as well.”

### **The story of a sticky-haired demon**

Let me conclude with a story that Joseph Campbell tells, a story that further elucidates how we deal with our demons. It's the story of “Sticky Hair” ([An Open Life](#), pp. 29-30), and has to do with one of the incarnations of the Buddha, two incarnations before his last one, when he was known as “Prince Five Weapons.”

The Buddha represents the Enlightened One within us, the one within us who has seen through the illusion of our separations and the illusion of our oppositions and conflicts. The Buddha knows – not just believes, but knows – that at bottom it is all one energy, it is all one reality. And here, in this story, he confronts a part of himself in the shape of a demon.

So the future Buddha, as a young triumphant warrior who had learned how to use five weapons – thus his name, “Prince Five Weapons” – is riding home through the forest one day, when suddenly out of the forest comes a great big demon, an horrific monster,\* by the name of “Sticky Hair.”

The future Buddha is threatened by this monster so he throws his javelin at him, but it sticks in the monster's hair. Then he takes his bow and sends arrow after arrow at the demon, but they also stick in his hair. Then he hurls his discus at the monster. That sticks in his hair. Then he slashes at the monster with his sword. The sword sticks in his hair. He takes out his last weapon, his club. He strikes at the demon, but the club also sticks in his hair.

Now he has used up all five of his weapons – all the normal means we use in trying to work through our problems and make our way in life – and he has only his body with which to fight. So this is getting rough now, pretty serious, and he's in trouble.

And so Prince Five Weapons hits Sticky Hair with his right fist; that sticks. He hits him with his left fist; that sticks. He kicks him with his right foot; that sticks. Then his left; and that, too, sticks. That leaves only his head, so he head-butts the sticky-haired monster, and now, of course, he is totally stuck. (This story, as Campbell says, is a variation of "Br'er Rabbit and the Tar Baby.")

The demon, who has the future Buddha totally tied up (as we all get tied up), says, "I'll bet you're scared now, aren't you, boy?"

But Prince Five Weapons, finally then, drawing from his religious insight, replies, "No, I'm not afraid, because I have within me a knowledge that will blow both of us to smithereens, and you're afraid of that, but I'm not."

And at that the demon says, "Okay, and releases him."

Thus, the Buddha had conquered Sticky Hair. But now what does the Buddha do? Does he destroy him, cast him away into outer darkness? Nothing of the sort. Instead he makes Sticky Hair the guardian and protector of that woods, just as the young man was to make the bottle of squeeze chocolate the protector of his aspiration to be a police officer. The future Buddha gives that demon a place, or recognizes the place he always had, and the monster becomes his protector.

And what was the knowledge that the Buddha had that could conquer the demon? He had the knowledge that the demon was ultimately an illusion because it was part of a larger reality to which they both belonged. The Buddha had knowledge of this larger reality and identified with it, but this knowledge frightened the demon, because it meant the loss of the demon's identity.

So the Buddha saw through the demonic conflict to a deeper reality – a reality that included that conflict. He saw his own face in the face of the demon, and he saw the demon's face in his own, and he saw both their faces together in a larger reality, a larger wholeness. Thus, the Buddha took the demon into himself, and the demon now served him, and together they served larger life.

\* At this point a mime in white-face accompanied by a number of younger goblins

slipped into the sanctuary and interrupted the story-teller, making known in no uncertain terms that the minister's time was up – no more stories or lessons on demons today, thank you. However, had the preacher been able to continue his sermon, he might have concluded it as it is printed here.

(NOTE: This is a manuscript version of the service given by The Reverend Bruce A. Bode on "Halloween Sunday," October 29, 2006, at the Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. The spoken service, available on audio cassette at the Fellowship, may differ slightly in phrasing and detail from this manuscript version.)