

**“The ‘No’ in Every ‘Yes’”**  
**October 31, 2004**  
**Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship**  
**Bruce A. Bode**

**Poetry in Order of Service**

Half of any person is wrong and weak and off the path. Half!  
The other half is dancing and swimming and flying in the invisible joy.  
(Jelaluddin Rumi, tr., Coleman Barks)

**Call to Worship**

This is indeed a beautiful day that has been given unto us.  
Let us then rejoice in it and be glad.  
And let us count our many, 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.  
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.

**Congregational Covenant Statement**

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.

**Introduction to Responsive Reading**

I'm amazed as I look back in my life to see what Halloween has become for me. When I was a youngster it was the simple pleasure of making Jack-o'-lanterns and going trick-or-treating. In the Protestant church in which I grew up it was a celebration of Reformation Day, remembering when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the cathedral door of Wittenberg, Germany in protest of abuses in the Church.

In more recent years Halloween has taken on many more dimensions and has become for me a major religious festival with a whole host of themes that come forward: themes of the shadow and the demonic, themes of inversion and reversal, themes of polarity and paradox, themes of the fool and the trickster, of masks and magicians.

Of course, Halloween also has to do with the change of seasons, with the preparation for winter and the entrance into the darker, colder, leafless half of the year. You can imagine in earlier times that this was a deadly serious time, not knowing if provisions were enough to get you through. So at Halloween the theme of death is present with all kinds of images of death. We remember as well all the souls who have made the passage into death.

Please join me in our responsive reading relating to this occasion.

**Responsive Reading**

MINISTER: Now the veil between the worlds is thinnest; now the living visit the graveyards and the graveyards visit the living.

CONGREGATION: Like a snake devouring its own tail, the opposites of life turn upon themselves forming a circle.

MINISTER: Says the physicist: "Nothing is true unless its opposite is also true."<sup>1</sup>

CONGREGATION: Says the poet: "When one has come as far as I in pointlessness, each word is once more fascinating."<sup>2</sup>

MINISTER: Says the Lord: "I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I am the Lord, who do all these things."<sup>3</sup>

CONGREGATION: Says the proverb: "A person must have two pockets in which to reach. In one pocket are contained the words, 'For me the world was made;' and in the other, 'I am dust and ashes.'"<sup>4</sup>

MINISTER: The position you hold creates and invites its opposite. Let it in. Let it in.

CONGREGATION: Life is of infinite meaning, value, and purpose.

MINISTER: Life is entirely accidental, random, and arbitrary.

CONGREGATION: "O world, I cannot hold thee close enough."<sup>5</sup>

MINISTER: "Is that all there is?"<sup>6</sup>

CONGREGATION: Make your mark.

MINISTER: Leave no trace.<sup>7</sup>

CONGREGATION: Yes!

MINISTER: No!

ALL: We make our human journey, not in a straight line, but forward and backward, right and left, this way and that way.

(<sup>1</sup>Niels Bohr; <sup>2</sup>Gunnar Ekelof, from Friends, You Drank Some Darkness, tr. Robert Bly; <sup>3</sup>Isaiah 45:7; <sup>4</sup>Jewish proverb; <sup>5</sup>Edna St. Vincent Millay, "God's World;" <sup>6</sup>Peggy Lee; <sup>7</sup>Taoist saying)

### **Presentation to Kathy Walker**

Before Kathy Walker, our Director of Religious Education, comes forward to lead us in "A Time for All Ages," I'd like to recognize her for an important accomplishment.

In the last five years the Unitarian Universalist Association has been developing a structure to assess and certify religious educators in our association of religiously liberal congregations. Up to this time there has been no clear way to assess the training and skills or to recognize the accomplishments of persons in this position.

Last weekend Kathy was in Chicago for the final phase of this assessment and successfully completed the interview that qualified her to be a "Credentialed Religious Educator." She is the first person in our Pacific Northwest District to complete such a program, which involves a great deal of reading, study, and attendance of workshops and conferences.

At this time we'd like to present Kathy with a bouquet of flowers, the last of the season from the farm of Andy Driscoll, and then I'd like Kathy to say at least a little bit about what she was aiming at in this credentialing program, the process she went through, and what this might mean for this congregation.

## Introduction to reading

My reading today is one of the most familiar passages from the Bible, a reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Hebrew Scriptures.

On the surface it's a very simple reading just cataloguing the different times and seasons of a life. But it's a reading that is meaningful for at least two reasons:

First, it's a passage of large acceptance, embracing life in its many dimensions, seeing that there's a time for everything, that everything in life has a place and contributes in some way to the whole. It calls us not to judge but to observe, to take in, to become larger than we are. Thus, it's a passage of great acceptance, challenging our limited view of things.

Secondly, it's a passage that speaks of life as being experienced by us in terms of pairs of opposites – polar opposites, opposites that belong to each other like the negative and positive poles of an electric battery. You need both poles for the energy.

What gives life its very being and movement is that it is birth *and* death, joy *and* sorrow, pleasure *and* pain, laughter *and* mourning. These things are part and parcel of each other. They create each other. You don't know one without the other. We cannot be fully acquainted with the glory of life unless we are also acquainted with its limitation. The glory and the beauty are attached to limitation, to finitude, to pain and sorrow.

Listen then to this simple yet complex ancient reading from Ecclesiastes 3:

For everything there is a season, and a time for every activity under heaven:

A time to be born and a time to die;

A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted;

A time to kill and a time to heal;

A time to break down and a time to build up;

A time to weep and a time to laugh;

A time to mourn and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together;

A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to seek and a time to lose;

A time to keep and a time to cast away;

A time to tear and a time to mend;

A time to keep silent and a time to speak;

A time to love and a time to hate;

A time for war and a time for peace.

## “THE ‘NO’ IN EVERY ‘YES’”

### Introduction

My subject this “Halloween Sunday” is one I can never see all the way through, yet it is a subject I believe well worth looking at. It's the place of resistance and opposition in our lives: what that resistance is and how we relate to it.

I have titled this “The ‘No’ in Every ‘Yes,’” suggesting that seeds of opposition are present and stirring in any affirmation we make and any position we take.

A thing is never simply and purely one thing. Rather, its identity is always in relationship to what it is not.

Thus, we are defined not only by what we stand for but by what we stand against.

It's this opposition in life that brings interest and energy, movement and balance, to our life.

At one level we understand this and agree to it. We understand that a thing can only go in one direction so long before it is pulled back, like a rubber band being stretched. We understand that the further it stretches in one direction the more opposition and resistance it will meet and the greater will be the tendency to snap back.

When you inhale air into your lungs you can only hold it so long. The longer you hold it the stronger becomes the desire to exhale. You need to expel it. And visa versa: the longer you remain in a position of exhale, the stronger becomes the desire to inhale.

We say, "What goes up must come down." We say, "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction."

Everything has resistance built into it. A thing would not be identified as that thing without that resistance and without standing against that resistance.

So in one way we understand that the rhythmic movement back and forth between opposing poles is what keeps life going producing both its energy and its equilibrium. There is no good or bad in this opposition any more than we would think to call inhalation "good" and exhalation "evil." The tide comes in, the tide goes out. This is nature and there is no good or bad in it. It is the resistance of the opposites that keeps things going.

### **Human culture**

The situation, however, is more complicated when we come to humans and to human nature because for us there is "good" and "bad," acceptable and unacceptable. This is necessarily so if we want culture, if we want to be "civilized."

We have desired culture, cultivation, the forming and shaping of raw nature. This involves the choosing of one thing over another. The parts we choose and the shapes we desire we call "good." The parts we reject and the shapes we do not desire we call "bad" or "evil."

Versions of the good and the bad, the acceptable and unacceptable, vary somewhat from culture to culture but the human characteristic of dividing our nature into "good" and "bad" is a universal one.

We have picked from the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, a symbol of the beginning of culture. The process of picking that fruit, of knowing good and evil, is a process that casts us out of the Garden of Eden, out of the original innocence. And once out there is no return. We may be able in some way to transcend the categories of good and evil but we will never lose the knowledge of the categories of good and evil.

Thus, we have divided our nature and our original, pre-ethical wholeness. We are a species that does not live purely by instinct. Paradoxically, nature has formed us to divide nature.

Every child goes through this process of splitting the original wholeness and becoming "civilized." Every child, depending on its particular culture, has to learn how to curb certain appetites and put aside certain desires.

It's true we permit young children to live out a large portion of their "natural" and instinctual range. Young children can pretty much do and say what moves them. We adults put up with it, even marvel at it. Often we envy young children their freedom and wholeness, their wide range of emotion and interest. We wish we could say and do some of the things they say and do.

But at some point the process of civilizing them and thus of splitting their wholeness begins to take place. Parents and teachers do this through inspiring and encouraging children, through disciplining and training them. Thus we form a *human* being, a civilized and cultured person with manners, morals, values, ideals, skills, and sensitivities.

It's a painful process for both children and adults – this formation of a *human* being. But the fruit of this painful process is culture. Yet there is no culture without this process of splitting, choosing, sorting, disciplining, and even repressing.

Author Robert Johnson, who writes as interestingly as anyone I know on this topic, says that we never entirely forgive the persons who civilized us. As much as we may love and appreciate our parents and teachers, they were still the ones who cast us out of the Garden of Eden. They were the ones who set in motion the process that cost us the original wholeness of our nature. (See his book, Owning Your Own Shadow)

Make no mistake: to produce a culture and a cultured person it is necessary to exile certain aspects of our instinct and interest. We have to mold; we can't just let blow. We can do this molding more or less gently, more or less wisely, more or less intelligently; but we will and we must select and reject, choose and refuse, encourage and discipline.

There's no culture without this process. The “higher” the culture, the more “civilized” an individual, the more of our instinctual nature we have to discipline and exile.

In a conversation with Robert Johnson I recall him saying something to this effect, “I just assume that anyone who has gone through a prolonged period of disciplined study and professional training is wounded in some part of his or her natural life.”

I feel the truth of those words in my body and being. I know I am wounded. I know my original wholeness, my instinctual nature, has received such injuries that sometimes it is difficult to identify specific wounds.

So what happens to that part of our nature that we as a culture and as individuals reject and exile in becoming “civilized?” What happens to those urges and appetites that have been labeled “bad,” “evil,” or “undesirable,” first by others and then by ourselves as we become “cultured,” “civilized” persons?” Do you think these urges and appetites just evaporate? Can anything in nature just disappear?

I think not. I think that like matter-energy our instincts and desires can neither be created nor destroyed. They can take different shapes and forms but they don't just disappear or evaporate.

### **Clues to the presence of the other side**

We have some clues to indicate that the exiled, rejected, neglected, unused, and unwanted parts of our instinctual nature don't just evaporate but are rather very much alive and that we are related to them.

- 1) The newspaper brings us daily reports of where the resistance to the cultural good has broken through. Our reporters comb the planet in search of such news. To a large extent, it *is* the news.
- 2) Does not most gossip relate to situations in which persons have crossed the line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior, or are suspected of having crossed the line? The more a person has been an upholder of the cultural good, the louder the sound of the crash at the fall and the more exciting and delicious the news.

Whose ears don't perk up at a fine piece of gossip?! We are hearing news of a place where the resistance has breached the walls of someone's defense system. Ah, but our defense system is still in tact! Perhaps a warning to us. Perhaps a kind of vicarious atonement for now we don't have to live out that possibility; someone else has lived that side out for us.

- 3) This brings up the subject of temptation, another clue to the existence of the other side. What is temptation but the pull of the other side, the lure of the forbidden, the attraction to what we have tried to throw away or to turn our back on.

The "forbidden" is the opposition that resists the form to which we're attached. Such temptation tells us that what we reject still has power. May we say then that yielding to temptation is an underground attempt to bring balance and equilibrium to our lives?

- 4) Yet another clue to the continued existence of the other side and its presence and power is our tendency to dump on others, what can be called "the projection of the shadow," piling on others the parts of ourselves that we have rejected and not lived out.

Scapegoating is an example of this, laying the "sins" we dare not commit or deny have committed on others, laying the rejected and despised parts of our nature on others – another person, another group, another nation.

A lot of it is currently going on as our national election draws nears with each party gathering so tightly around its own pole and scapegoating the other side so that we wonder whether the center can hold. Destructive as it is, in the phenomenon of scapegoating we can nevertheless recognize the power of what is rejected.

- 5) A fifth and final clue to the power and presence of the other side is in ceremonies of inversion. The Mardi Gras and Halloween are ceremonies of this sort.

In these instances we turn things on their head, turn things upside down, which means we know there's another side that exists in opposition to our normal civilized ideal. We know we're holding our form in relationship to reality that we are rejecting. Through these ceremonies of inversion we give recognition to this opposition and resistance.

Clowns, tricksters, court jesters, comics, cynics – they are all representatives of this power of opposition. They attempt a relationship and reconciliation with the power of opposition, and thus a balance so that our civilization is not destroyed by what it has turned its back on.

### **Underground power that disrupts and destroys cultural form**

If we don't make some effort to at least recognize and honor the potentials we are not using, these powers will build up a head of steam and smash the life we are trying to lead.

- 1) You see this in relationships like marriage. How many divorces are due to the fact that the persons couldn't get at the resistances in their relationship? The couples didn't know how to explore the opposition that was in the union. It all comes boiling out at divorce, often both parties wondering how they could ever had lived with the other person and what they could ever have found that was attractive.
- 2) You see the opposition emerging in the "mid-life crisis" where the neglected parts of our nature can no longer stay out anymore. The whole form we've been holding, the whole life we've built up, comes into question.

- 3) Again, you see it in religious conversion experiences where the underground doubt rises up and smashes the chosen faith so that the former “no” becomes the present “yes.”

### **How to maintain a cultural existence**

So what to do? How do we maintain a cultural existence and civilized life that has vitality and energy and is not in constant danger of being destroyed by what has been driven into exile?

Somehow we have to take in the other side: to recognize the legitimate place of resistance and opposition in our lives and to honor it, to develop a relationship with it, to converse with it.

We need to talk with the demon that stands on the other side. Somehow we have to say, "Who are you? I know you're there. But who are you? May I see a little of your face? Tell me who you are and what you need. Perhaps you can even help me a little. I need some help. I'm not doing so well on my own. My life has dried up and I feel like I'm pushing a heavy stone up a high hill."

Joseph Campbell said, perhaps quoting someone else, “Your demons will turn the same face toward you as you turn toward them.” And why? Because they are not intrinsically evil; they are simply the unused and neglected parts of the whole. They become disastrous and demonic when they are totally shut out.

The other side often has the solution for what has us stuck or bored on this side. And it will work with us if we honor it. If we don't, it may smash us. Healing is found by going to the other side.

### **A miracle healing story**

In this regard let me tell you about a little healing miracle in which I was involved this summer that had to do with going to the other side. The healing took place in the following manner:

I was taking a chaplaincy course at St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital, one of Houston's large hospitals, part of a group of eleven chaplaincy students, most of them Catholic and Episcopalian. I was the only Unitarian Universalist and so I felt it was important to prove myself my worthiness as a healer early in the program.

An opportunity for healing came already on the second day as I recall. I entered the gift shop to buy a holder for my identification badges. There were two clerks behind the counter, one an older woman, the other younger.

The younger woman, perhaps around age twenty, had the hiccups. I shopped around a bit looking for what I needed. Meanwhile, the hiccupping continued. As I was about to leave I made a bold decision. I asked the woman if she would like to be healed of her hiccups. She looked puzzled. “Yes,” I said, “I am prepared to cure you of your hiccups.”

Since she was still hiccupping away the other clerk, who was being driven to distraction by her partner, encouraged her to undergo this potential cure. So, puzzled as she was, the hiccupping clerk agreed that she would be willing to give it a try.

“Okay,” I said, “are you ready to be cured?”

“Yes,” she hiccupped.

“All right,” I said, “I will give you a dollar bill if you can hiccup just one more time in the next minute. Do you understand me? If you hiccup one more time in the next minute I will give you a dollar.”

I held the dollar bill in front of her and began counting down the seconds.

Could she hiccup? Not at all. She tried; she tried mightily. She stretched her neck. She tried to induce even a little hiccup from her throat. But nothing.

How come she couldn't hiccup? Just a few seconds ago she had been hiccupping regularly. Now when she needed just a little hiccup, nothing.

"Sorry," I said, "time's up. I keep the dollar, but you have your health back."

And, unlike most faith-healers, just to make certain this was a complete cure, I checked again several hours later, then several days later, and again several weeks later. No hiccups during that entire time. A complete cure.

Further, I reported this healing miracle to my chaplaincy colleagues. Of course their estimation of Unitarians was immeasurably enhanced, to the point that one of the Roman Catholic chaplains performed a similar healing of the curing of hiccups a couple of days later.

### **Untapped power on the other side**

My explanation for the cure, of course, is based on the principle about which I am speaking this morning, the "no" in the "yes." Healing occurs when you go to the other side, reverse the energy, trick and divert the conscious will.

At a more profound level, healing occurs, as Alcoholics Anonymous knows, when you, as they say, "Let go and let God." That's the psychological trick they perform – trick and divert the conscious will.

The will that is pushing, pushing, pushing won't do it. The resistance on the other side just gets stronger, too strong for the conscious will that is trying to control things.

Healing occurs when you can get the conscious will to quit, when you admit your weakness, when you go to the other side – "You are powerless in the face of this energy field, now give up *and* quit drinking." That is to say, a new infusion of power comes in from the other side that enables you to change your behavior when you knock out the conscious will that has been blocking it.

Thinking on this theme of reversal and of going to the other side, I thought of an artist whose work Flossie and I came upon on a trip to Europe a couple of years ago, stunning paintings by a Russian artist named Alexandr Onishenko.

His paintings emerge out a black background because he begins by painting the entire canvas black. But in many cases it's not that the figures that are the subject matter emerge out of the background, they are the background! Many of the figures are nothing in themselves, but exclusively the black background that is given shape because of painting in around it. Here is an example of his art. [Example shown]

In talking to artist Karen Page about this, she commented that this was a very unusual style and a reversal of what a painter typically does. I can only think how interesting this must be for the artist to work this way, to continually be in conversation with the other side. How creative a venture this must be!

When you have the courage to begin to look at the other side, the "negative space" in your life, the "no" in the "yes," you can start to play with it. It will bring energy and vitality. Some of your wholeness will be restored – not perfection, but wholeness, bringing the two sides together into the center.

Such wholeness is related to holiness. As Robert Johnson points out, wholeness is related to holiness, and holiness is properly at the messy center of things, not at the extreme of purity, as is so often thought. True holiness is found by moving toward the center, holding the polar opposites together, not splitting or separating them. It's feeling and experiencing the whole of life: the joy and the sorrow, the love and the hate, the "no" within the "yes," and the "yes" within the "no."

\* Robert Johnson writes:

"The religious process, which is the highest accomplishment of humans, consists of restoring the wholeness of the personality. The word "religion" means to re-relate, to put back together again, to heal the wounds of separation. It is absolutely necessary to engage in the cultural process to redeem us from our animal state; equally, it is absolutely necessary to accomplish the religious task of putting our fractured, alienated world back together again. One must break the Garden of Eden paradise, but equally one must restore the Heavenly Jerusalem.

"Thus, it is clear that one must make a shadow, or there would be no culture; then one must restore the wholeness of the personality which was lost in the cultural process or one will live in a state of dividedness which grows more and more painful to mankind at this point in our evolution.... One might complain that this is a senseless round-trip, except that the wholeness at the end is conscious while it was unconscious and childlike at the beginning. This evolution, though it seems a round-trip, is worth all the pain and suffering that it costs. The only disaster would be getting lost halfway through the process and not finding its completion. Unfortunately, many Westerners are caught in just this difficult place."

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\* As the minister was beginning to quote Robert Johnson a mime sauntered down the center aisle coming from the rear of the sanctuary. When the minister finally noticed the mime, a "dialogue" of the following sort took place between the minister and the mime:

"Not you again. I thought I had left you behind in Michigan." [Mime indicates not so]

"Well, what do you want now?" [Mime indicates to quit talking and leave]

"You want me to shut up and get out of the pulpit?" [Mime affirms]

"But this is good stuff. This is from Robert Johnson. Can't I keep going? The congregation will want to hear this." [Mime indicates minister may proceed, however shortly becomes bored, then exasperated, and picks up the notes and throws them off the podium]

"That wasn't very nice. Besides, the service isn't over yet. For example, we need to extinguish the chalice." [Mime lights up with an idea and unceremoniously blows out the candle in the chalice]

"That was a holy ritual you just messed with." [Mime shrugs]

"Can we at least sing a closing hymn? I think we have one you'll like. It's titled, "Let It Be a Dance." [Mime does like it and immediately directs the pianist to play and the congregation to stand. Minister and mime then dance together down the center aisle of the sanctuary.]

(NOTE: This is a manuscript version of the sermon preached by The Reverend Bruce A. Bode at the Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship on "Halloween Sunday," October 31, 2004. The spoken sermon, available on audio cassette at the Fellowship, may differ slightly in phrasing and detail from this manuscript version.)