

*The 7 Last Words  
about Evolution and the Bible*

*A Worship Service by the Rev. JEFF BRIERE  
Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga  
February 15, 2009*

CONNECTIONS

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. My name is Matt Hoyt, and I am a member of this church. We begin each Sunday at this time with Connections. This is a time of community and contemplation, where we share the joys and the sorrows going on in our lives. This is not a time for announcements, politics or expressions of personal anger, but a time of deep sharing, where we are reminded that we are all human beings and we're all in this together.

Enjoy the experience of sitting in restorative silence until you are moved to speak. Please allow a breath of silence after each person speaks, so that we may focus our attention on what has been said. If you have something to share, please come forward, tell us your name and what's on your mind.



Spirit of Life, please meet us where we are, in our struggles, in our triumphs and in our setbacks. Be with us as we pause to remember those who need love and support; those who are hurting—either in body or in spirit; and those who are lonely or are suffering. Be with them now as we open our minds and hearts to a place of quiet, and offer a silent prayer for the healing of pain, and the soft, gentle coming of love. In this time of silence let our thoughts be with those who have spoken or been spoken about this morning.

Amen and Blessed Be.

Please rise now and greet your neighbors at the door. Welcome them into the sanctuary with a hand of warmth and a smile.

*HYMN 352, Find a Stillness*

GREETINGS

**Eric.** Good morning, my name is Eric Papendorp and I am the president–elect of the congregation. Thanks so much for joining us in worship today. We hope you find the service rewarding and that you leave here inspired and uplifted. Please note the emergency exit over here to my right, now is the time to put your cell phone in “Worship Mode,” childcare for the young and the restless is available downstairs in the nursery, and after the service today, please join us for coffee and conversation in the fellowship area right back there.

If you have a particular joy or sorrow or something you’d like added to the prayer of the people, please clearly write it on an index card and drop it in the basket back there. You may sign it or not, as you wish.

You may have noticed the screen is down. The responses and song titles will appear at the appropriate time and we’ll see several photos along with the story. We’d like to know your reaction to this, so please tell Jeff or any member of the board what you think.

The screen will be down Thursday night, too, when we host a screening of *Chocolat*, with Johnny Depp and Juliette Binoche. There is one modest bedroom scene, but it’s not gratuitous. The overwhelming message in this movie is that fear divides people and love unites them, and that theme is played out in several relationships. Maddie has made some chocolate tickets, but you don’t need one to see the movie. It’s free and the doors open at 6:30, the movie begins promptly at 7.

A complete listing of announcements is included with the bulletin and is available on our web site. The best way to find out what’s going on around here is to sign up for a weekly e–mail. To do that, please see Chris in the office.

Matt begins this morning with a very quick composition by CPE Bach.

*PRELUDE: Prestissimo*

*LIGHTING THE CHALICE*

In the light of truth and the warmth of love,  
we gather to seek, to sustain, and to share.

*STORY: Owen & Mzee*

Know what a hippopotamus is? Sometimes we say hippo. Ever seen a hippo? Here’s a mother hippo with here baby. Hippos live in Africa and when they grow up, they are about the size of a car. Very large and very heavy.

Do you know what a tortoise is? Ever seen a tortoise? A tortoise is like a giant turtle. Here’s one. A tortoise can live to be about 250 years old.

Now you would think that a tortoise and a hippo would not be friends, but strange things happen in this world. In Africa, about four years ago, a tortoise and a baby hippo became very good friends.

The hippo is Owen, but before he got that name, he was rescued from the ocean. In December 2004, Owen lived with his mother in a group, or pod, with about twenty other hippos. They lived in and around the Sabaki River in Kenya, a nation on the east coast of Africa.

When he was about one year old, very heavy rain storms flooded his river home. The racing water washed Owen and his family down the river, right to the coast of the Indian Ocean, near the small town of Malindi.

For days, the people of Malindi tried to chase the hippos back up the river. But the hippos enjoyed grazing the grasses along the shore. Since hippos can weigh as much as 8,000 pounds, there was little the people could do.

On the morning of December 26, 2004, a tsunami rushed onto the beaches, and surging waves pounded the shore. Remember what a tsunami is? A big wave in the ocean. And when it came ashore, it made a mess of everything. This was a frightening time for everybody. Boats were destroyed and people lost their houses. Even the hippos were gone—except for one: a baby without his mother, stranded on a sandy coral reef. Tired and frightened, he was unable to reach the shore on his own.

Soon, hundreds of people were working together to help the young hippo. They knew that he would become sick if he stayed in the seawater for long. They used ropes, boats, fishing nets, and even cars to try to rescue him and bring him ashore to safety.

It was soon clear that a rescue wouldn't be easy. Though the baby hippo was only about two feet tall, he weighed about 600 pounds and was slippery and strong. And he was scared by all the commotion. He broke through nets and escaped from ropes two times before they were able to catch him.

A man named Owen Sobien tackled him, stopping him long enough to let others secure the net. That is why, when it came time to choose a name for the young hippo, they called him Owen.

At last, the people wrapped Owen in the net, hoisted him into the back of a pickup truck and brought to a shady spot. But they weren't sure what they should do with Owen. They called Haller Park, a nearby animal sanctuary and Dr. Paula Kahumbu, the manager, offered Owen a place to live. Dr. Paula knew she would need help. She asked the chief caretaker, Stephen Tuei, and ecologist Sabine Baer for help and they prepared Haller Park for Owen.

They prepared a large enclosure for Owen. They chose a part of the park that had a pond and a mud wallow, as well as tall trees and brush—everything a hippo could want. But an animal already lived there—a giant tortoise called Mzee.

Mzee, whose name means “wise old man” in Swahili, was about 130 years old and he wasn't very friendly, except to his caretaker Stephen, who seemed to know just what he liked, such as getting tickled under the chin. Mzee was a loner and he liked it that way.

When they brought Owen to the park and untied him, Owen jumped off the truck and ran directly to Mzee, who was resting in a corner of the enclosure. Owen crouched behind Mzee, the way baby hippos often hide behind their mothers for protection. Mzee wasn't happy to see a hippo in his home. He hissed at Owen and crawled away. But Owen did not give up. Slowly, as the day and the night went on, Mzee began to accept his new companion. When the caretakers checked on them in the morning, Owen was snuggled up against Mzee. And Mzee didn't seem to mind at all.

Over the next few days, Mzee continued to crawl away, and Owen continued to follow him. But sometimes it was Owen who would walk away, and Mzee who would follow. Bit by bit, Mzee grew friendlier.

At first, Owen wouldn't eat any of the grass or leaves left out for him. Stephen and the other caretakers were worried because he wasn't eating. One day they noticed Owen eating right beside Mzee, as if Mzee were showing him how to eat. Or perhaps it was Mzee's friendship that helped Owen feel calm enough to eat. No one will ever know. But it was clear that the bond between Owen and Mzee was helping the young hippo to recover from being separated from his mother and stranded in the sea.

As the weeks went on, Owen and Mzee spent more and more time together. Their bond grew stronger every day. They swam together,

ate together, drank together, and slept next to each other. They rubbed noses. Owen led the way to different parts of the enclosure, then Mzee led the way. Owen nuzzled Mzee's neck, and Mzee stretched his neck forward asking for more, just as he did when Stephen tickled him under the chin. Though both animals could easily injure each other, they were gentle with one another. A sense of trust grew between them.

Their keepers are still puzzled about how this unlikely friendship came to be. No one ever heard of a mammal, like a hippo, and a reptile, like a tortoise, being friends.

It could be that Owen needed a mother and Mzee filled that role. Young hippos like Owen need their mothers in order to survive. An old, slow tortoise like Mzee can never protect Owen the way a mother hippo could. But since Mzee's coloring and rounded shape are similar to a hippo's, it's possible that to Owen, Mzee looks like the hippo mother he needs.

But it's even harder to explain the friendship that Mzee shows for Owen. Like most tortoises, Mzee had always wanted to be alone. But sometimes these tortoises live in groups, and perhaps Mzee sees Owen as a fellow tortoise, the first tortoise he is willing to spend time with. Or perhaps Mzee knows that Owen isn't a tortoise, but likes him anyway.

So for me the lesson that we can learn from Owen and Mzee is this: Our best friends may not look like we do and we can't always explain what our heart knows. Our best friends are sometimes those we least expect.

*CHILDREN'S RECESSIONAL*

We hold you in our love as you go, as you go  
May your heart be at peace as you go

To nurture the spark of your precious life  
We hold you in our love as you go.

*OFFERTORY: Untitled*

Do you have the conviction of your own beliefs?

An aerialist once walked a tightrope across Niagara Falls. His name was Zumbrati. Conditions were less than ideal. It was a windy day and Zumbrati was thankful to have made it safely across.

One of those waiting to congratulate him was a man with a wheelbarrow. "I believe that you could walk across pushing this wheelbarrow," the man told him. Zumbrati shook his head and said he felt fortunate to have accomplished the feat without a wheelbarrow.

The man urged him to try. "I believe that you can do it," he said. Zumbrati graciously declined, but the man kept after him.

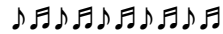
Finally, the performer said, "You really do believe that I can walk across a tightrope pushing that wheelbarrow, don't you?"

"Oh, I do," the man assured him.

"Okay, let's go." Zumbrati replied. "Get into the wheelbarrow."

We'll collect the offering now, for the support and ministry of this church and if you really believe in the health and wellness of this church, get in the wheelbarrow as the collection plate comes your way. If you write a check for your annual pledge, please mark it that way. As always, the Wood-Wilhoit Memorial Food Bank is happy to accept your donations of non-perishable food and household items for the Community Kitchen. The collection basket for that is by the front door. And thank you very much for your generosity.

If you wish to light a personal candle of joy or sorrow, you may step up here and Mary Hunter will assist you.



Eternal Spirit of life and love, we are profoundly thankful for the blessings we experience today. Would that we recognize our blessings every day and be thankful for them. Christina, please lead us in our Hymn of Thanksgiving.

*HYMN OF THANKSGIVING*

Oh, we give thanks, for this precious day,  
For all gathered here, and those far away,  
For this time we share, with love and care,  
Oh, we give thanks, for this precious day.

*ORISON*

*Dona Nobis Pacem. Give Us Peace. Dona Nobis Pacem.*

May I suggest that we offer our prayers today to the families and friends of the fifty people who died in a plane crash Thursday night at Clarence Center, just east of Buffalo, NY.

Thou, which are everywhere,  
Many are your names.  
May we always feel your presence,  
May your wisdom guide us,  
In our deeds as well as in our dreams.  
May we have what sustains our body and soul;  
Lead us first to forgive the mistakes of others  
Even as we hope our own mistakes will soon be forgiven.  
May we resist the temptation of the quick and easy,  
And be delivered from that which demeans and destroys life.

May we live purposefully and joyfully  
in every moment,  
in every encounter,  
now, and in the time to come.

In these few moments of silence, let our prayers rest gently on those who mourn the loss of loved ones and let us always remember those who suffer the fallout of war.

*Dona Nobis Pacem. Give Us Peace. Dona Nobis Pacem.*

*RESPONSE*

When our heart is in a holy place  
When our heart is in a holy place  
We are blessed with love and amazing grace  
When our heart is in a holy place

*SERMON*

*The 7 Last Words about Evolution ⊕ the Bible*

Thursday was the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of Charles Darwin. My sermon this morning reflects my opinion that we should accept the findings of Darwin and other scientists and still understand that the Bible is not a book of lies. We don't have to decide on one or the other; it's not a zero-sum game. The media—especially the Times-Free Press—often portray science and religion at odds with each other. That science and religion are fighting is an over-simplification, but it makes for a good read, so reporters and editors keep the trope alive. I aim to dispel that myth.

You know I like to tell stories. I'll begin and end my sermon with a story and the first is about Thomas Henry Huxley, a British biologist, philosopher, and paleontologist. He died in 1895.

The war between science and religion began at a debate sponsored by the British Association at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History. It happened in 1860, one year after Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*.

Samuel Wilberforce, the bishop of Oxford, was on the platform to support the religious viewpoint; Huxley was the spokesman for the Darwinian side. Wilberforce was a renowned speaker and was expected to smash the scientific forces. The room was packed to capacity.

His speech was a savage invective against Darwin and Huxley; at the end he asked Huxley, “If anyone were willing to trace his descent through an ape as his grandfather, would he be willing to trace his descent similarly on the side of his grandmother?” The audience greeted this with rapturous applause.

Although Huxley had come to the meeting hoping to avert a head-on clash between religion and science, Wilberforce’s arrogance and the inadequacy of his answer to the Darwinian position stung Huxley into fighting back. “A man has no reason to be ashamed of having an ape for his grandfather,” he said. “If there were an ancestor of whom I should feel shame, it would be a man who, not content with equivocal success in his own sphere of activity, plunges into scientific questions with which he has no real acquaintance.” At this slur on the clergy, bedlam broke out in the lecture room and several ladies fainted from shock.

With that as a starting point, it’s not hard to understand how the relationship between science and religion got to the point it is today. I should refine that statement somewhat. There are people who object to anything Darwin wrote and consider him to be an agent of Satan. On the other hand, many very devout people have no problem with the implications of Darwin’s theories. On the third hand, there are some who would like to have it both ways and only object when Darwin’s theories *are applied human beings*. Animals and plants,

can evolve, but not human beings. Humans are different; they’re special. Created by God in his image. And so forth.

It occurred to me that other day that some people might have a vested interest in keeping the argument going. In this group, are those who espouse “intelligent design,” and their opponents, like Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris. As long as they continue shouting at each other, they will have books to write and will appear on talk radio. It’s a living, I suppose.

One person who would like the arguments to cease is Michael Zimmerman. He’s a professor at Butler University in Indianapolis. He wishes that more people would accept both the findings of science and the revelations of religion. So he has composed an open letter on the Butler University website which harmonizes science and religion. It’s called the Clergy Letter Project and at present he has 11,834 Christian clergy signatories. In part it reads, “For too long, the misperception that science and religion are inevitably in conflict has created unnecessary division and confusion, especially concerning the teaching of evolution. Numerous clergy from most denominations have tremendous respect for evolutionary theory and have embraced it as a core component of human knowledge, fully harmonious with religious faith.”

The original letter, intended for Christian clergy, left out rabbis and many Unitarian Universalists. So he re-drafted the letter to fit the sensibilities of those groups and he now has 438 rabbis and 183 Unitarian Universalists on board. I was one of the early signers, way back in 2004, but I didn’t understand that he wanted only Christian clergy. So my name appears twice.

The Clergy Letter Project also sponsors Evolution Weekend each year on the Saturday and Sunday nearest Darwin’s birthday. It began in 2004 as Evolution Sunday, but Zimmerman re-wrote his Clergy Letter for Jews. Now it’s Evolution Weekend.

Evolution Weekend is an opportunity for discussion and reflection on the relationship between religion and science. One goal is to elevate the quality of the discussion beyond sound bites. A second goal is to demonstrate that many religious people understand that evolution is sound science and poses no problems for their faith. Evolution Weekend exposes the false dichotomy of a choice between religion and science.

There are 1,008 Congregations from all 50 States, the District of Columbia, US Virgin Islands and 15 Countries participating this year. In Chattanooga, only B'nai Zion Synagogue and the Unitarian Universalist Church are participating. In Tennessee, two other Unitarian Universalist congregations are participating along with one other synagogue, and eight Christian churches. I'd have to say that among religious people in Tennessee, the theory of evolution ain't a popular topic this weekend. I guess people are more interested in erecting competing billboards in Rhea County.

One thing that gets in people's way are words. Have you ever seen that bumper sticker that reads, "It's just a theory." As if it were little more than an educated guess. Yes, it is a theory of evolution, but it's not theoretical. I am not able to render for you the finer points of evolutionary science. Much of it is above my pay grade. But I do know that people who argue about it often stumble on the word *theory*.

According to the National Academy of Sciences, some scientific explanations are so well established that no new evidence is likely to alter them. Over time, the explanation becomes a scientific theory. In everyday language a theory means a hunch or speculation. Not so in science. In science, the word theory refers to a well-substantiated explanation of some aspect of the natural world, based on a body of facts that have been repeatedly confirmed through observation and experiment.

A theory is not a guess, but a reliable account of the real world. The

theory of biological evolution is more than "just a theory." It is as factual an explanation of the universe as the atomic theory of matter or the germ theory of disease. Our understanding of gravity is based on Newton's theories. But gravity, like evolution, is an accepted fact.

So we have scientists using theory to mean one thing and non-scientists using the word differently. No wonder they argue.

Another term that rubs some people the wrong way is "survival of the fittest." This phrase was coined in 1864 by British economist Herbert Spencer. Survival of the fittest evokes a rather unpleasant image implied by natural selection. Natural selection is Darwin's term, and preferred by scientists today.

Critics of evolution have argued that "survival of the fittest" provides justification for behavior that undermines moral standards because it implies that naturally the strong set standards to the detriment of the weak. It offends our sense of decency that people with power or resources run roughshod over the rest of us, and survival of the fittest justifies their actions. But it is too simplistic to suggest that evolution demands competition. In fact, we have a large body of evidence that indicates those who cooperate are more likely to survive. The fittest might be the friendliest.

Peter Kropotkin was a Russian writer on a variety of topics who died in 1921. He thought "survival of the fittest" supported co-operation rather than competition. After observing many animals practicing mutual aid, he applied it to humanity and wrote, "In the practice of mutual aid, which we can retrace to the earliest beginnings of evolution, we find the positive and undoubted origin of our ethical conceptions; and we can affirm that in the ethical progress of man, mutual support—not mutual struggle—has the leading part."

A third term that gets in the way of civil discourse is *Darwinism*. In this country, "Darwinism" is used by promoters of creationism to describe evolution. In this usage, the term has connotations of

atheism. Creationists use the term Darwinism, often pejoratively, to imply that the theory of evolution is believed only by Darwin and a core group of his followers, whom they cast as *dogmatic and inflexible in their belief*. Casting evolution as a doctrine or belief bolsters acceptance of religiously inspired creation stories by putting them both on the level of belief. In other words, if you support a doctrine, which is a belief, then simply refer to your opponent as a doctrine, and your arguments magically assume some legitimacy.

Aside from words, something else gets in people's way in discussing evolution and religion, and that is *Lombardi-ism*. *Lombardi-ism* is a religion started by the disciples of Vince Lombardi, the coach of the Green Bay Packers from 1959 to 1967. He is often quoted as saying, "Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing." And just like the disciples twisted the sayings of Jesus, *Lombardians* grabbed that quote and ran away with it. It's not only sportsmen and sportswomen, but ayatollahs and ministers, politicians and car dealers, even soccer moms and governors are now card-carrying members of the I've-gotta-win-and-you've-gotta-lose religion.

When *Lombardians* get involved in the discussion of religion and science, evolution and the Bible, I'll bet you can guess what they do. They frame the debate as a win-lose game; either this one or that one, one wins, the other loses. And that's really sad, because there is, according to the Buddha, a middle way.

The interesting thing about *Lombardi-ism* is that it's not permanent. If you decide that there might be some middle ground somewhere, if you realize that a zero-sum game is not what you want to play, you can un-install your Lombardi operating system and return to being a willing-to-compromise human being. You can accept the science of Darwin and still know that the Bible is not a book of lies. It's not one or the other; it's not winner-take-all. You *can have* your cake and eat it, too.

The title of my sermon is "The Seven Last Words about Evolution

and the Bible." Here they are: *Hey, y'all! Stop fighting! You're both right!*

Now grammarians will argue with me about the contraction, "y'all," condemning it as a non-word, or at least a regionalism. And writers of good English will take me to task for not establishing who is fighting. But those seven words pretty well sum up my thoughts about the matter.

I can't recall the time, but I think it must have been when I was a teenager, when I first became aware of the disagreement between scientists and religionists. At the time, I thought that maybe evolution is God's method of creating; God's way of making things the way they are. Everyone says God's ways are strange, so evolution would fit right in. Why couldn't that be accepted by everyone? Sadly, there were too many players on the field who had already converted to *Lombardi-ism*. To compromise, to admit that the other side might be right in some way, to realize the truth was bigger than what you conceived in your little human brain, well, that would be losing. And they couldn't lose. God forbid.

So how could it be that the book of Genesis and the book of Darwin are both right? The answer to that question is the same answer to this question: How is it that Grimm's Fairy Tales and the phone book are both right? One book tells you about human nature in a slanted fashion; tells you stories and implies that you might find stories like your own in it; teaches you how to be fully human, inspires you and uplifts you. And it does this because it points to something bigger than you, something beyond this life.

The other book tells you bald-faced facts about people, their numbers and their whereabouts. It shows you how to move about in the world with no rigamarole, no funny business. It points out everything in this life, and it does so with amazing precision.

One is the bricks, the other, mortar. And if the building is to stand,

both are critical.

As human beings with hearts, we need emotions, we need inspiration, we need *a story*. As human beings with brains, we need to *use* them. We are compelled to discover the how and the where and the when of our life on earth. We need to understand our existence, we need *the facts*.

We need *a story* and we need *the facts*. Together they bring us *the truth*.

I want to bring you the flavor of the work of Charles Darwin. He wrote before the mid-point of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so his English is rather cumbersome. Not only that, it was written to be read with the eye, not spoken. With that in mind, and with only slight editing, here are a couple passages from *On the Origin of the Species*.

*It may be said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinising, throughout the world, every variation, even the slightest; rejecting that which is bad, preserving and adding up all that is good; silently and insensibly working, whenever and wherever opportunity offers, at the improvement of each organic being in relation to its conditions of life. We see nothing of these slow changes in progress, until the hand of time has marked the long lapse of ages, and then so imperfect is our view into long past geological ages, that we only see that the forms of life are now different from what they formerly were.*

In 21<sup>st</sup> century American English, what he is saying is that natural selection is a 24–7 program that finds the best in life and lifts it up over everything else so that in time, only the best of every living thing is preserved in its descendants. And we can't see this mechanism at work, because it takes forever and a day to work its magic.

Here's another passage:

*To suppose that the eye, with all its inimitable contrivances for adjusting the focus to different distances, for admitting different amounts of light, and for the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration, could have been formed by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest possible degree. Yet reason tells me, that if numerous gradations from a perfect and complex eye to one very imperfect and simple, each grade being useful to its possessor, can be shown to exist; if further, the eye does vary ever so slightly, and the variations be inherited; and if any variation in the organ be ever useful to an animal under changing conditions of life, then the difficulty of believing that a perfect and complex eye could be formed by natural selection, though insuperable by our imagination, can hardly be considered real.*

In 21<sup>st</sup> century English, he says the eye is an amazing organ. It can perceive the natural world and render it intelligible to the brain. It seems crazy to assert that it was formed by natural selection. However, if I can demonstrate many levels of eyes, from the very simple to the very elegant, and each eye is useful to each animal and its characteristics passed on to its descendants, then I can reasonably believe that natural selection is the method by which the human eye came to be. Even though that is hard to swallow.

Darwin had doubts, as all good scientists must have. He thought deeply about every detail of his theory for more than twenty years before publishing *On the Origin of Species*, and for twelve years and he brought several intellectual virtues to the task at hand. Instead of brushing off objections to his theory, he thought about them obsessively until he had found a solution. Darwin also had the intellectual toughness to stick with the deeply discomfiting consequences of his theory, that natural selection has no goal or purpose.

From the perspective of 2009, Darwin's ideas are substantially correct. He did not get everything right. Because he didn't know about plate tectonics, his comments on the distribution of species are

not very useful. His theory of inheritance, conceived before genes or DNA were discovered, is beside the point. But his central concepts of natural selection and sexual selection are correct.

I said that I would end with a story and so I will. One day the zookeeper noticed that the orangutan was reading two books simultaneously. He had the Bible in one hand and Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in the other. He'd read a passage from King James and then a passage from Darwin. Then the Bible again.

The zookeeper didn't know that orangutans could read English, and he wondered if they could speak English too.

Drawing near to the ape, the zookeeper said, "Why are you reading both those books at once?"

"Well," said the orangutan, "I just wanted to know if I was my brother's keeper or my keeper's brother."

You see, the orangutan knew the secret. We need a story and we need the facts. We need both religion and science. With only one—either one—we wouldn't be human.

*HYMN 343, A Firemist and a Planet*

*BENEDICTION*

My benediction today is taken from the Hasidic tradition. A woman burst into the study of Rebbe Yerachmiel ben Israel. "Rebbe," she said breathlessly, "What is the way to God?"

The Rebbe looked up from his studies and answered, "There is no way to God, for God is always here and now."

"Then, Rebbe, tell me the essence of God."

"There is no essence of God, for God is everything and nothing."

"Then, Rebbe, tell me the secret of how I might know God."

"My friend," Reb Yerachmiel sighed, "There is no way, there is no essence, there is no secret. The truth you seek is not hidden from you. You are hiding from it."

*EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE*

We extinguish this flame,  
but not the light of its truth  
the warmth of this community  
nor the fire of our commitment.  
These we carry in our hearts  
and share with all the world.

*POSTLUDE: For Caroline*