



"I need to chill. Wanna go to Interlude with me?"

(Not So Strange) Interlude
A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE
Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga
February 8, 2009

CONNECTIONS

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. My name is Jeff Briere, I am the minister 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 346, Come Sing a Song with Me

GREETINGS

Maddie. 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.

I remind you of the special concert by Tom Neilson, which happens right here this Saturday night. "Love and Satire" is his theme and even though that might be an unusual combination, Tom is happy and excited to help us raise funds for green causes. It turns out that Tom and Kate sang in the same chorale group in college and he asked her to sing a duet in Saturday's concert.

AND the men in our choir will sing with Tom in a special number that is sure to bring down the house. Kate and her men have graciously agreed to give us a sneak preview of the number. This used to be called "There Is Nothin' Like a Dame," when Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote it for *South Pacific*. Tom re-wrote the lyrics and now it's called "There Is Nothin' Like a War."

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. An appropriately-named prelude, now. This is "Morning," by Sergei Prokoviev.

PRELUDE: Morning

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

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

STORY: Intentions

Who knows what an intention is?

Do you have any intentions?

Lemme tell you about intentions. First I have to tell you about jet engines. Have you ever wondered what makes an airplane go? The plane is on the runway. The tower tells the pilot, "Cleared for takeoff," and the pilot pushes the throttle forward. The engines roar, and the plane moves.

Why?

When the pilot opens the throttle, part of the roar you hear is the sound of huge blades spinning, like giant fans. They push air backward, and the plane moves forward. Isaac Newton was the person who discovered this principle. He never saw a jet airplane, but he realized, 300 years ago, that when something pushes against something else, the thing that gets pushed pushes back. The harder it is pushed, the harder it pushes back.

Jet engines push air. If you don't think so, try standing behind one. The air pushes back. If a fan could push air hard enough, it would blow itself across the room. That is what jet engines do—push air so hard that when the air pushes back, the plane moves down the runway.

Now, think of your intentions as the engines. You are a big jet airplane and your intentions are your engines. They get you from one place to another. You may think that airplanes move people around but it's really your intentions. Airplanes take off everyday, but unless you are on one, you won't go anywhere.

Intentions are like jet engines. An jet engine pushes air that way and the plane moves this way. When you fire up your intentions, they move you through your life.

An intention is not a wish. A wish does not make anything happen. An intention does. An intention pushes against the way things are in

your life. Those things push back exactly the same way. And intentions don't work only for jet engines. They work for your emotions and other aspects of your life, too.

If you intend to have a happy life, you will have that happy life. If you intend to have an angry life, that is what you will have. Your intentions move you through life. Your intentions create everything that you experience.

Here's another example: If you play soccer, your intentions, not the game, determine what you experience. If you intend to win, you will be anxious before each game and you'll be miserable if you lose. You will worry about yourself, your teammates, the other team, the coaches, the fans and the score. But, if you intend to have fun and do your best, your experience will be very different. You will look forward to playing. You will be relaxed and ready for anything. You may even be grateful to the other team for giving you the chance to play and do your best.

One last example of intentions. Here's a bowl of chocolate kisses. Now if I say that you may have a piece, your intention is to take one, right? You intend to have a piece of chocolate, so you get up and move to the bowl, reach out with your hand and take a piece. Your intention to have a piece of chocolate makes it happen.

Well, what's your intention?

CHILDREN'S RECESSONAL

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.

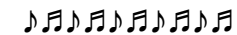
OFFERTORY: Sonatina

This morning we'll double the plate, with a matching grant from a generous member of the church. This mystery man has agreed to match, dollar-for-dollar, the amount of the collection, up to a maximum of three hundred dollars. This is for real; not a gimmick, and the donor won't give the church \$300 if we only raise \$271. And pledge payments do not count.

So we'll collect the offering now, for the support and ministry of this church. If you write a check for your annual pledge, please mark it that way. Otherwise, all gifts will be matched up to three hundred dollars.

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. The words are in your program.

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.

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

We're very glad to learn that Ron Pasch did not have to undergo as extensive a surgery as he expected. And Marge reports that he is making a very quick recovery. Les Kertay's mother is now in hospice care, and Les himself injured his back a week ago. As you might expect, this adds a level of complexity to Maddie's already complex life, so give her a call if you are able to assist her with anything. Ken Nickerson is due for a one-day surgery on Tuesday to remove a melanoma. He's upbeat and pretty well organized for this, but I'm sure he'd appreciate hearing from you.

A plea agreement has been reached between Knox County prosecutors and Jim David Adkisson. Adkisson is the man who killed two people and injured several others during a Sunday worship service at the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church last July.

The agreement calls for six 25-year sentences and two sentences of life without parole, all concurrent, in exchange for a guilty plea from Adkisson. This agreement relieves witnesses and survivors from testifying at a trial.

The Rev. Chris Buice, the minister of the church said the members of his church "had no desire to be punitive, but there is a desire to do the responsible thing and make sure he's no longer a danger. That feels like justice to me," he said.

Today, let us pray for the victims of gun violence, the survivors and the yes, let us pray for the shooters. It may feel strange to pray for people whom we believe don't deserve the benefit of our prayers, and yet, as Chris Buice said, when you avoid vengeance, yet act responsibly, it feels like justice has been served. In this moment of

silence, let us never forget those who suffer the fallout of war.

[Silence]

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.

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: (Not So Strange) Interlude

Strange Interlude is an experimental play by American playwright Eugene O'Neill. O'Neill finished the play in 1923, but it was not produced on Broadway until 1928, when it won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

Experimental—that's a good way to describe it. Because it runs for

more than four hours, it has sometimes been produced with a dinner break or on consecutive evenings. The play is the saga of *Everywoman*, who acts out her roles as daughter, wife, mistress, mother, and friend. This was very controversial for 1923, and the play was censored or banned in many cities outside New York.

Near the end of the play, the protagonist, Nina, speaks these words: “the only living life is in the past and future ... the present is an interlude ... a strange interlude in which we call on past and future to bear witness we are living!”

I really don’t agree with her. I believe that living in the past and future, as O’Neill did, is dangerous and unhealthy. The present moment, to my mind, is all we have, and we are responsible to make the best of it for ourselves and everyone else.

I suppose I could consider my whole life as an interlude with an existence before and another after. Still the question is, what should I be doing in this interlude? And to me it’s not strange— this life is all I know.

With that in mind, I put the words *Not So Strange* in front of *Interlude* for the title of my sermon this morning because I want you to know that “Interlude” is not strange, and is, people tell me, a worthwhile experience. I mean the Interlude that happens here at the church on most Wednesday evenings. And so I thought to bring you a bit of “Interlude” as we have it on Wednesday evenings here at the church.

With the exception of the first Wednesday in the month, I produce a worship service that I call “Interlude.” It’s about 25 minutes long and it’s designed to be more contemplative, more meditative than the Sunday morning service, which traditionally has been more about thought than about feeling, more right-brain than left. Brain scientists tell us that our brains are divided right down the middle and the left hemisphere understands reality differently than the right.

The left brain is:

Logical
Sequential
Rational
Analytical
Objective

The right brain is:

Random
Holistic
Intuitive
Synthesizing
Subjective

Some occupations held by left-brainers are lab scientist, banker judge, lawyer, mathematician, bacteriologist, librarian, minister.

Some occupations held by right-brainers are forest ranger, wildlife manager, beautician, politician, athlete, artist, musician, actor.

In reality, people are blends of these characteristics. A man who strikes me as analytical—Steve Hollingsworth—turns out to be a good musician. And Kyle Waggener, a naturalist, is often driven by the rational side of his nature, as his letters to the editor attest.

A worship service designed to appeal to only the left side of the brain will be wordy, formal—that is, highly organized—and logical. A worship service designed to appeal only to the right side will be all over the map, musical and artsy. For a long time, Unitarian Universalist worship services, mine included, appealed to the leftys more than the rightys. In creating worship services, I have tried, in the last three years, to lean more to the right, even though “leaning to the right” is something I don’t do well—either culturally or politically.

And yet I know there are people in the congregation who are more right-brained than not, and we ought to address their needs as well as we can. We can incorporate right-brained elements in this mostly left-brained service, but often the result does not satisfy either group. That is what led to the second worship service mid week, which I call “Interlude.”

I often say that Interlude is guaranteed to raise your awareness and lower your blood pressure. Interlude is comprised of responsive readings taken from poems, separated by musical selections and time to contemplate the readings. At the center is a guided meditation that focuses on human nature. And since most of you have not experienced Interlude, I bring you one this morning. We usually begin with music designed to expand one's horizons.

The Woman and the Stone

Your program has an insert with two responsive readings. Please take a look at Abou Ben Adhem and read the part in italics.

Abou Ben Adhem was a Muslim saint and Sufi mystic. James Henry Leigh Hunt made him famous in the Western world with a poem that was published in 1838. Hunt had read of the Islamic belief that on "The Night of Records," Allah takes the golden book of mankind and crosses off the names of those whom he is calling to him in the coming year, those whom he loves. Your part is in italics.

Abou Ben Adhem (*May his tribe increase!*)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich, and like a lily bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold.
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the presence in the room he said,
"What writest thou?" The vision raised its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord,
Answered, "The names of those who love the Lord."
"And is mine one?" said Abou. "Nay, not so,"
Replied the angel. *Abou spoke more low,*
But cheerily still; and said, "I pray thee, then,
Write me as one who loves his fellow men."
The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again with a great wakening light,

And showed the names whom love of God had blest,
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

Sisterseed

Fallibility

I heard someone on the radio describe "a culture of fallibility" as one of the conditions under which democracy can flourish. He was referring to a cultural agreement that nobody has a monopoly on the truth. Such a consensus allows, even requires, a measure of respect for the other party. It allows for negotiation, compromise, and disagreement with civility.

If we believe that we own the truth, then it follows that anyone who disagrees with us is wrong. And since we own the truth, it's only a short step to believe that we have a right to make everyone think like us. This attitude makes democracy impossible. And it leads to repression, holy wars, inquisitions and other unpleasantness.

At the personal level, too much attachment to being right creates a rigid ego structure that can only get in the way of growth. It closes us off from a deeper understanding of reality that can come with releasing our limited personal point of view.

Although I dislike the experience, I am lucky enough to be constantly reminded of my fallibility. Being a bit of a fool offers many opportunities to become non-attached to rigid belief systems. Constantly having to revise what I thought I knew can be very freeing. Of course it can also be frightening.

The ego is like a psychological safety net. We develop this ego—this sense of who we are—to give us continuity and cohesion when faced with the changing flow of mental states. Experiencing emotions and other mental phenomena without a stable sense of self can be quite

unpleasant. Therapists who treat personality disorders will confirm this.

The ego is a tool that tells us who we are in the great order of things. It allows us to act purposefully and confidently in the face of a complex, confusing, world. When we cling too tightly to the ego, we become rigid. When we abruptly release the ego we may experience fear, anxiety, even psychosis. Suddenly the world may not make sense, and we are not comfortable with that. The difference between a sage and a psychotic may be that the sage knows the world doesn't always make sense, and it's not a problem.

So how do we learn to accept our fallibility, how do we know to loosen our grip on our tightly held belief systems, and free our mind to accept what *is*, instead of the illusions we *want* to believe?

Various philosophical traditions have devised ways of handling this. Socrates asked a lot of tough questions that would take his students on an intellectual ride that landed them somewhere beyond their preconceptions. Zen teachers offer students *koans*, seemingly unsolvable questions, like "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" Contemplating the *koan* may eventually move the student past confusion and self doubt to a more expansive sense of being. Sufis have collected many stories, often featuring Mulla Nasrudin, that contain a mind bending twist that pushes the listener to see the world differently. Strategic psychotherapists do something like this when they engage a client in a paradox that destabilizes the client's fixed view of a situation. By destabilizing a rigid system the therapist hopes to allow a healthier, more fluid solution to emerge.

I offer this meditation in the spirit of fallibility, hoping you will find something of value. I'd like you to close your eyes and relax in your seat. This is a safe place to close your eyes, but if you want to keep them open, that's fine.

Close your eyes and imagine you are sitting atop a grassy hill. The

sun is shining, so you are warm and comfortable. The wind is blowing ever so gently—just enough to be refreshing. Down below lies all the world in its busyness, but you are not concerned about that now. Here on the hilltop you are alone with the grass and the clouds and the occasional bird that flies by. You have no worries, and you are smiling gently to yourself. Allow this little smile to move into your heart. Let it calm your mind and your soul.

As you sit here perfectly still, your breathing relaxes and you feel a wonderful sense of peace. You feel the weight of your body on the earth and feel like you are a part of the hill and the air and the sun. You feel completely at home in your body.

And yet, like a fly on the wall, you can see yourself from a point of view outside yourself as well.

Look at this person sitting there so peacefully. See your seated, smiling self from all sides. Open your heart to this person. Acknowledge that you have limited information, that you sometimes make mistakes, that sometimes you don't know what's going on with yourself, and that sometimes you don't say the right thing. In the acknowledgment, reassure yourself that it is all right. Acknowledge that you are a human being—and human beings make mistakes.

Now again visualize yourself seated comfortably upon this hill. Imagine that sitting in front of you is a person who looks to be a bit of a fool. Her clothing is rather odd and she has this funny smile on her face. You greet her and she greets you back. She reaches out to shake your hand. Her hand is strong, but also gentle and warm. As your hands touch, you suddenly see that she is a very wise person. You can see that she no longer worries about the mundane things in life. You know that she has deep life experiences. You perceive that in her mind she has gone places you can not even conceive, and yet she is very humble. Her touch is quite human. In her eyes you see great warmth.

You begin to understand that she can see into your heart. She can see all of your flaws and failings. She can see things that you will not let yourself see. In spite of seeing all of your fallibility, she expresses deep compassion for you. She sees your struggles, and she honors you and loves you despite your failures. She can see the limits of your perceptions and she invites you to share in her expansive world view.

Imagine that this great being in the guise of a fool reaches up and touches your brow with a finger tip. At her touch in the center of your forehead you find yourself completely at peace with yourself. You are very aware of your body and your breathing, and at the same time, all sense of thought falls away. Inside, you are very quiet and that smile that you placed in your heart grows and grows until your heart is overflowing with love.

This love is like a light that shines from your core. It enlightens your sense of being, and it encompasses this wise person in front of you. It grows and grows and it is like a beacon shining from the hilltop. Your love and compassion flow to all those frail and faulty humans you know, and to all that you don't know. You understand that the light of love is infinite, so it need never dim. You see that as your tolerance and compassion touches every person you encounter, it fills each person and is transferred to everyone they encounter. Soon you are able to see the whole world filled with light and love.

And wherever there is darkness you wisely know that the solution is more tolerance, more justice, and more compassion. You promise to remind yourself that in all of your fallibility you will carry an intention to be kind to yourself. You will extend that kindness to the rest of your world as well. And in doing so you trust that the love returned to you will surpass any expectation you have.

Phases of the Three Moons

Please read responsively again, the second poem in your insert, appropriately titled, "A Ritual to Read to Each Other," by William Stafford.

If you don't know the kind of person I am
and I don't know the kind of person you are
a pattern that others made may prevail in the world
and following the wrong god home we may miss our star.

*For there is many a small betrayal in the mind,
a shrug that lets the fragile sequence break
sending with shouts the horrible errors of childhood
storming out to play through the broken dyke.*

And as elephants parade holding each elephant's tail,
but if one wanders the circus won't find the park,
I call it cruel and maybe the root of all cruelty
to know what occurs but not recognize the fact.

*And so I appeal to a voice, to something shadowy,
a remote important region in all who talk:
though we could fool each other, we should consider—
lest the parade of our mutual life get lost in the dark.*

For it is important that awake people be awake,
or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;
the signals we give—yes or no, or maybe—
should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.

My benediction this morning comes from the poetry of D.H. Lawrence, who writes about the Phoenix, a bird that dies in a fire and is revived from her ashes.

Are you willing to be sponged out,
Erased, cancelled, made nothing?

Are you willing to be made nothing?
Dipped into oblivion?

If not, you will never really change.
The phoenix renews her youth
Only when she is burnt, burnt alive,
Burnt down to hot and flocculent ash.

Then the small stirring of a new small bub in the nest
With strands of down like floating ash
Shows that she is renewing her youth
like the eagle, immortal bird.

We have been listening to the music of Andreas Vollenweider this morning. It will continue for some time. You may sit here and listen as long as you like.

The Glass Hall