

March Theme for Spiritual Practice

Evil: The Practice of Finding Light

We offer themes each month to encourage personal reflection and to help deepen our faith practices. During the month of March we invite you to explore the concept of evil and consider what it means personally, in community and in our larger world.

Merriam-Webster offers in the definition: “arising from actual or imputed bad character or conduct. causing harm : pernicious.” Synonyms and related words include: morally reprehensible, wickedness, darkness, sinfulness, atrocity, cancer, depravity and corruption.

In The Science of Evil, Simon Baron-Cohen’s discusses possible causes from a social and biological scientific perspective. His work examines evil as resulting from “empathy erosion” caused by corrosive emotions that can lead people to devalue others and treat them as if they were objects.

Baron-Cohen contends, that “Erosion of empathy is an important global issue related to the health of our communities, be they small (like families) or big (like nations).” A practice of finding light, or his response to evil, is cultivating empathy. He writes: “We have a resource to resolve conflict, increase community cohesion, and dissolve another person’s pain.” A practice of finding light, or his response to evil, is cultivating empathy.

The news media is replete with current events, local and international, that epitomize the word evil. Turning on the news can leave us incredulous, confused and longing to find the light beyond the long, dark shadows cast by stories of people inflicting harm upon others. We hear accounts of individuals conspiring to and taking the lives of others who they feel have somehow wronged them, random killings inspired by fear, kidnappings, human trafficking and on and on.

The paradox in evil, particularly in a faith context, lies in strongly held belief systems held by groups who claim to connect with religion. We hear of fringe groups practicing torture and murder while connecting themselves to a religion whose theology professes love and peace.. Their ideas somehow become twisted and in direct opposition to the convictions of a larger community or group they claim to be a part of. Each may believe that their truth is the only correct one, leading them to impose their righteousness upon others. The response of most religious groups is to denounce such ways as evil and to call for justice and work toward peace.

The late Unitarian Universalist Rev Forrest Church preached about “The Cathedral of the World” offering a metaphor of stain glass windows in which we all are a part. A way to understand this is to think of the diversity contained in the colors, the placement, texture and patterns of the glass. The light shines in and through each of us (the windows). We all have our own histories, our own truths, our own spirits. The windows of the cathedral are like the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part.

Each week we light our chalice, a symbol of Unitarian Universalism. The flaming chalice serves to remind us of the light of reason, the warmth of community, and the flame of hope. As we light our chalice, in community, we speak, in one voice, words that connect us to one another and our world. We encourage one another “to seek truth in love and to help one another.”

1. What is evil to you? How would you describe it?
2. Considering ideas about “nature vs. nurture”, what do you think makes someone capable of evil?
3. Are there objects or symbols that are connected with evil? If so, what might some be?
4. Different world religions preach diverse ideas about evil. What are your understandings and beliefs about evil in faith communities?
5. Consider the words “punishment” and “cure” in relation to evil. What are your reactions and what informs those beliefs and thoughts.
6. If you were given the opportunity to be heard by the world community, what would you say about finding light as a practice of responding to evil?

“It is a fact that cannot be denied: the wickedness of others becomes our own wickedness because it kindles something evil in our own hearts.”

~C. G. Jung

“I hope that real love and truth are stronger in the end than any evil or misfortune in the world.”

— [Charles Dickens](#)

“A Native American elder once described his own inner struggles in this manner: Inside of me there are two dogs. One of the dogs is mean and evil. The other dog is good. The mean dog fights the good dog all the time. When asked which dog wins, he reflected for a moment and replied, The one I feed the most.”

— [George Bernard Shaw](#)

And this is the forbidden truth, the unspeakable taboo - that evil is not always repellent but frequently attractive; that it has the power to make of us not simply victims, as nature and accident do, but active accomplices.”

— [Joyce Carol Oates](#)

“All right I think we've been down here in the dark long enough. There's a whole other world upstairs. Take my hand Constant Reader and I'll be happy to lead you back into the sunshine. I'm happy to go there because I believe most people are essentially good. I know that I am. It's you I'm not entirely sure of.”

— [Stephen King, Full Dark, No Stars](#)

“Science cuts two ways, of course; its products can be used for both good and evil. But there's no turning back from science.”

— [Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*](#)

“Evil cannot and will not be vanquished by evil. Dark will only swallow dark and deepen. The good and the light are the keenest weapons.”

— [Nora Roberts, *Heaven and Earth*](#)

“I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is really only one logical conclusion. I need darkness as much as I need light.”

— [Barbara Brown Taylor, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*](#)

God did not create evil. Just as darkness is the absence of light, evil is the absence of God.”

— [Albert Einstein](#)

“I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant.”

— [Martin Luther King Jr.](#)

“In each of us, two natures are at war – the good and the evil. All our lives the fight goes on between them, and one of them must conquer. But in our own hands lies the power to choose – what we want most to be we are.”

— [Robert Louis Stevenson](#)

