



# Transforming Times



*The Journal of the  
Unitarian Universalist Church of Tucson*

*January 2010*

## Evil

Liberal religion holds a generally optimistic view of human nature. Rejecting the Calvinist notion of “total human depravity,” our Unitarian and Universalist ancestors taught that there is goodness to be found in every human soul. This optimism about humankind does raise a legitimate question. If people are basically good, why do people do bad things? Why are some people capable of such things as extortion or murder?

People throughout the ages have grappled with the classic formulation of the same question. If God is all good and all-powerful, why do bad things happen to good people? Why would God allow something as horrific as the Holocaust to happen?

It is the question of evil. Simply defined, evil is that which is harmful, morally bad, or wicked. But why does evil exist? Where does it come from? What can and should be done about it? It has long been the role of religion to seek answers to these perplexing questions.

In January we celebrate the legacy of Martin Luther King, a great man whose greatness was accomplished through his willingness to raise the question of evil, and then to confront institutions and structures that uphold evil.

This month, we’ll celebrate together Dr. King’s vision in an Extended Family Worship service, “I Have A Dream.” Through his example, we just might be inspired to engage the perplexing questions presented by the reality of evil. Through his example, we just might find the courage to dream big, to have a vision of the world in which we all want to live, a world of compassion and justice.

Our Covenant Circles will explore the question of evil in depth, looking at biblical understandings – Hebrew and Christian – as well as philosophical ideas of moral and natural evil, and the contemporary concept of our shared culpability in the maintenance of institutional evil.

And of course, I will share some of my own ponderings on these same ideas in a sermon, “Confronting Evil.”

All of this is in the spirit of the hymn, which reflects our liberal heritage of an optimistic view of life and humanity, “May nothing evil cross this door.”

Yours in the spirit,  
Diane

*Transforming Times* is organized around theological themes. Each theme plays a part in the development of a well-grounded religious and spiritual life. The church’s offerings are by no means limited to the themes. They do provide common ground for community conversation, a way to gain more meaning and depth. We want to hear many perspectives on each theme. You are invited to submit your original poetry, artwork, or short essays of 350 words or less. Be warned: seriously engaging these themes could transform your life!

September: Freedom

October: Covenant

November: Religious Authority

December: Concepts of God

January: Evil

February: Love

March: Brokenness

April: Forgiveness

May: Transformation



## **New Year, New Practices**

*Submitted by Mary Wiese*

Evil is a word I have trouble wrapping my mind around...in fact, I don't even want to try. It is a word that has different meanings for each of us and my personal experiences with it are nightmares I choose not to revisit.

To me the real question is what leads to evil. It starts small. There are many words that are synonymous with evil: wickedness, malevolence, sinful, malicious, immoral, vile, horrible, obnoxious and unpleasant. Many of these words also have personal meaning for many of us. The word that stands out for me is malicious. Maliciousness is deliberately harmful and can lead to evil.

One of my New Years resolutions is to gossip less because I believe gossip can be harmful and malicious. Sure, there is harmless fun gossip that we all enjoy. But too often, gossips origins come from a rumor, misconceptions, or misunderstanding. Our Covenant of Right Relations states that one of our practices is to "Speak[ing] directly and privately with individuals with whom there is a misunderstanding, concern or disagreement in an effort to resolve interpersonal disputes", and "Being loyal to the absent and refraining from criticism of those who are not present."

I know that there are some folks in the congregation who think the Covenant is too wordy and unnecessary. However, the congregation voted to adopt it and it is a tool I use regularly when I feel frustrated. When harmful gossip circulates in the congregation about me, one of my co-workers, or a volunteer, it is extremely hurtful and often destructive. The practices stated in our covenant should be used to avoid these situations. I know I have been as guilty as the next person in the past. I will strive to be better in the future.