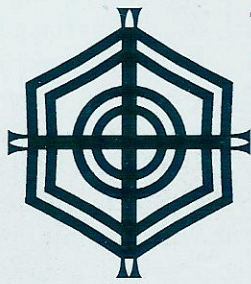


Issue 3, 2016
Volume 169
Published Quarterly

Universalist
Heritage and
Spirit Today

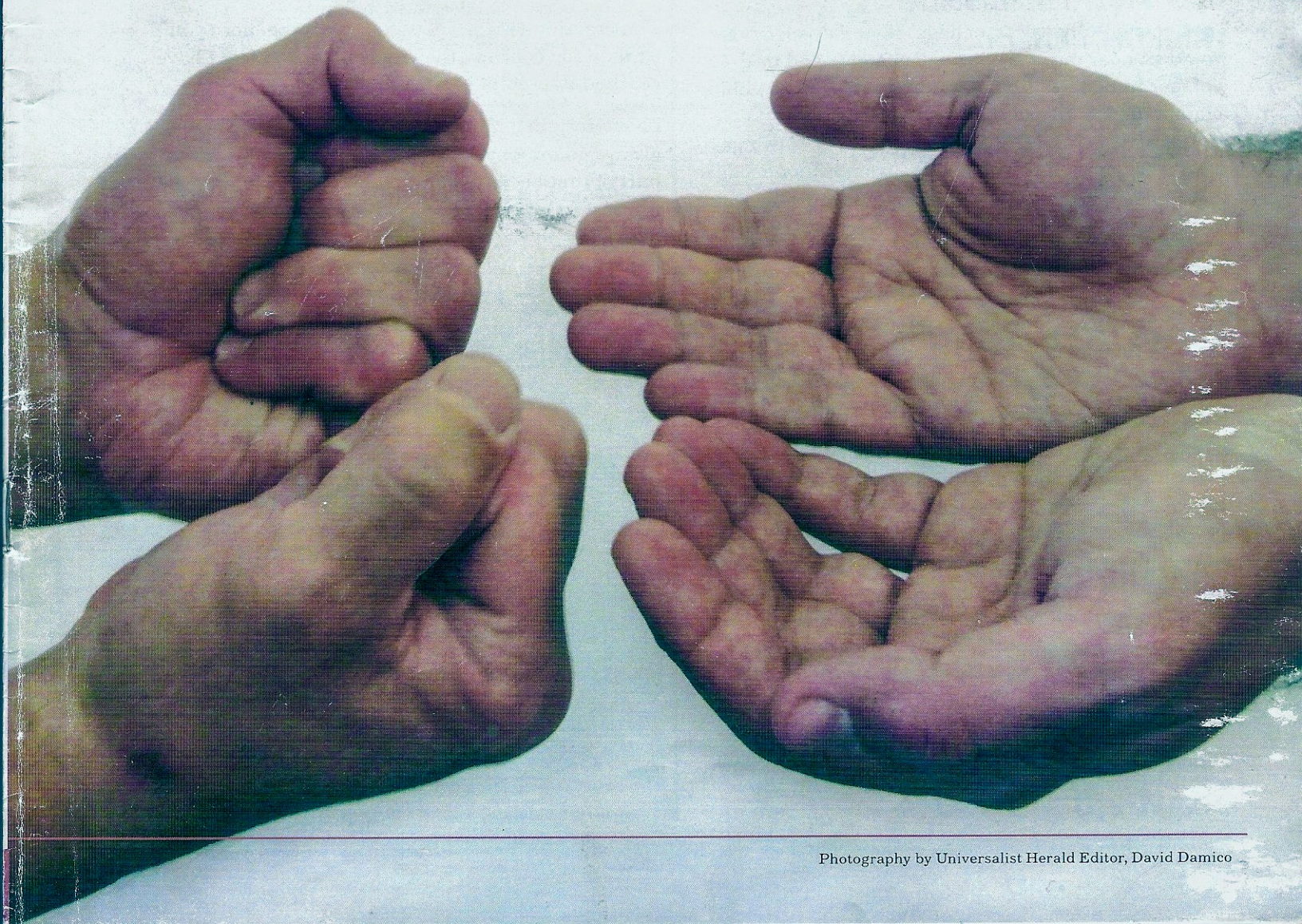


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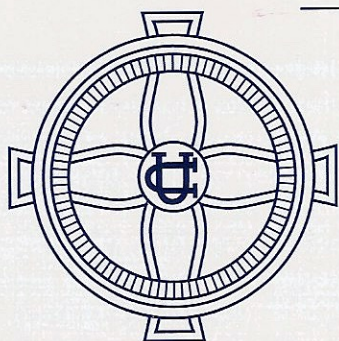
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Strength vs Passivity

How do we react to violence?



Photography by Universalist Herald Editor, David Damico



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By The Universalist Herald Publishing Company
ISSN# 1933-6691

www.universalist-herald.org
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Universalist Herald on Facebook

For subscriptions and renewals
mail check or money order payable to

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21 Cheverus Road
Dorchester, Massachusetts 02124

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Subscription Rates

Postal subscription is \$18 for one year (4 issues), 2 years \$32, 3 years \$44 to any domestic address, or \$30 international for one year, by the *Universalist Herald Publishing Company*. Digital is also available.

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People of Love and Conscience

Submitted by Nadine Hoover

"I expect to pass through this world but once; any good thing therefore I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now; let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."
Stephen Grellet, Quaker c. 1800

People of love and conscience know experientially that the power of life far exceeds the power of human destructiveness, which, although tragic on a human scale, pales in comparison to the immense, creative force of life. We commit to allowing the transforming power of life to shape and guide both our private and public lives.

Generations have experienced the creative, regenerative force of life in the tiny seed, tender sprout, gentle baby, or laughter of family and friends. But the generation of the atomic bomb faced a new concept, 'nuclear winter,' that human beings could 'wipe out all life as we know it.' In other words, the concept that human destructiveness was greater than the power of life. This myth seeped into and corroded U.S. culture, and eventually global culture.

The next generation faced environmental devastation, that not only could we, but we are, actively destroying the planet upon which our very survival depends, and we refuse to stop. Young men in the U.S. describe how they would die in war, if needed, to protect their lifestyle, which they described as owning an SUV and a big screen TV. What a tragedy that young people believe their families value industrial objects over their own lives, and that they believe their life requires war and environmental devastation!

The tragedy of exploding an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki exceeds all comprehension or sense of humanity and echoes through people's bodies and souls for generations, but human beings cannot 'wipe out all life.' New life bursts forth; even in Hiroshima the grass, trees, birds, people, and city come back. The native people of Northeastern America, the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), give thanks for the people, Mother Earth, waters, fish, plants, food plants, medicine plants, animals, trees, birds, winds, thunder, sun, Grandmother Moon, stars, teachers, and the Creator, reflecting a faith fully focused on the power of life.

Even as we cry in pain, life's transforming power moves people, places and situations towards its own creative nature. As humans drive other species to extinction and threaten our own existence, we cannot begin to threaten life itself. Life formed out of wind, rain, sun and rock through blue-green algae to the complexities of today will persistently press forward, without as much as a moment's hesitation, because that's its nature.

Tragedy is tragic—for human beings, on a human scale—but the power of life's regenerative force stays in perpetual motion in every moment irrespective of human tragedy. Human destruction does not have the power to create or protect; it destroys. The illusion that human powers, of either industry or destruction, outstrip the power of life itself distracts us from experiencing the magnitude life's power, almost imperceptible as a result of its very magnitude. Our faith defines our actions and therefore history.

Learning to live in love and conscience combines action and inaction; creativity and resistance; listening and feedback; solutions and critiques. Do not strive to figure it out: fix it, find utopia, or play God yourself. Strive to respond to everyday interactions by discerning what 'rings true,' or does not, in each moment. Then consistently act on your best discernment, and in the process learn to trust, rather than fear, the truth.

Conscience does not spring forth fully formed, it grows as we pay attention to it. Conscience relies on discernment, our ability to comprehend the inner nature and relationship, especially when obscure, that leads to keen insight and judgment. Discernment in turn relies on cultivating confidence and conviction that arise from our inward experiences of transforming power. But when we're inwardly guided, the differences between acting from inspiration and acting out of our own distresses or ego offer the most reliable tests: distress cannot stop and does not respond to external feedback. We test what rings true, like a musical note or well-tempered metal, by stopping and responding to feedback from others. Together, we learn to identify when, how and with what to act, not act, or resist.

Peaceful communities and societies flourish when we learn how to live loving, conscientious, creative lives; actively choose and call for public cultures of peace; and resist deterrents with confidence and conviction. Love and conscience consistently transform both us and our communities beyond our imaginations,



and greatly reduce the strain, stress demands, and conflicts in our lives!

At Conscience Studio (www.consciencestudio.com) we sought a minimal set of tools, practices, and activities that lay people could handle to preserve peace and resist tendencies toward ego and violence that lead us astray. We inherited and built on the documentation of the *Alternatives to Violence Project* (AVP), which peace, education, civil rights, prison reform, and new society movements in the Northeastern U.S. developed in the 1970s, combining

essential elements of nonviolence: 1) recognition of transforming power; 2) experience of loving, trusting community; and 3) skills in responding to precursors to violence. We combined this with the tremendous contributions of the Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) communities, which unemployed laborers in Seattle, Washington, developed in the 1950s, recognizing companionship and leadership in the discharge of emotion, re-evaluation of meaning, and liberation from oppression, and of the new trauma recovery and resiliency studies, which psychological professionals developed in the 1980s, treating traumatized people who suffered from U.S. advancements in sensory-deprivation torture and kill-rate efficiencies in ammunition for war, providing tools for memory reprocessing of past trauma, resiliency to current trauma, and prevention of secondary trauma. Stages of trauma recovery (Judith Herman, 1983) parallel precisely the AVP road-map: principled friendship, affirmation and safety, communication and remembering, and cooperation and re-connection, which form the foundation of creative settlement of disputes.

Transforming Power. To counteract the myth of inevitable destruction, we focus on experiencing the power of the creative, rejuvenating, transforming power of life in every moment. Beginning each morning or at a group gathering, take a moment to *stop and let go*. Read or recite something like this: "Sit comfortably. Feel your whole body relax on your skeleton. / Stop. ...Sit silently. ...Let yourself fall away. / Let what you want, ...what you like, ...what you understand fall away. / Feel your breath, ...your heartbeat, ...and where they come from. / Feel the unconditional gift of life. / Open to the transforming power of life. / This is it. ...This is enough. / Life is

valuable, you are alive and valuable. Nothing you can say or do will make, *can* make you any more valuable than you are right now. This is it. This is enough." Then take this practice with you into the day or meeting as a state of mind or manner of being. Frequently stop, open and notice the value of life

in yourself, others and every moment.

When people experience the transforming power of life at all times, good and bad, we feel a great sense of confidence and conviction. All our tools, practices and activities focus on this one, simple thing: learn to

live in and from the universal, transforming power of life, which is our core, true, natural selves, in relation to the core selves of others and the Earth. When we act from our core selves, we feel united regardless of our differences, and our actions bear the fruits of this universal unity. Take a moment to remember a time when you felt completely yourself and draw a representation of that with oil pastels or other materials, especially vibrant color. If a group does this, post the drawings as a collage on the wall. Stand back and notice that this represents 'who we are.'

Since human beings retain the option to use violence for our own ends or benefit, and some of the worst violence in the world is among loved ones and neighbors, friendship is not enough. We also need to agree to practice the following:

Common Agreements for Peace

- Affirm myself and others, no put-downs or ups, even in joking.
- Stop, listen, don't interrupt.
- Speak simply and honestly, without fear of mistakes.
- Speak from my own experience, not others'.
- Be authentic and open to change.
- Ask for and give feedback and help.
- Allow physical release of emotion, speak directly about disputes.
- Build friendships with people like and different from myself.
- Use what I need and share the rest.
- Volunteer myself only, not others.
- Exercise my rights to pass, to consult, and to have privacy.
- Care for myself, others, the group, the community and the land.
- Live in integrity with life's transforming power.



We agree to call each other back to our core selves or to remind each other when we don't adhere to these agreements. Many people post them at home, family members' homes, religious buildings, community centers, or workplaces, taking responsibility for our public as well as our private cultures.

Community Experience. A generation ago, prior to cellular phones and internet, people-to-people exchanges proliferated: diplomats, scientists, students, people of various occupations and interests. Charitable organizations help specific programs for wheelchairs, eye-glasses, medical aides, and so forth, and national or multinational entities help specific projects for public works, libraries, laboratories or other high-cost developments, but neither of these have replaced people-to-people exchanges. Friends Peace Teams' Asia West Pacific Initiative allows us to build friendships with people from very different backgrounds than our own. The diversity of Asia helped us to identify universal practices and activities.

Truth interwoven with love draws us into the fabric of transforming power. Love without truth deceives; but truth without love hurts. We don't pursue truth in authoritarian self-righteousness, expecting to triumph. We seek truth to guide and prosper in the end. We don't pursue love in desperate self-indulgence expecting to win out. We seek love that persists and endures. Love and conscience provide an interlocked strength to face distress or paralysis caused by loss, fear, pain, injustice, and challenge of life. In order to stay aware of life's gift, we find that we need one another, not only bound together in the joys of daily tasks and play, but in the hard work of facing violence and healing.

Skills in Precursors to Violence. Openly acknowledging that we all face violence and experience tragedies binds us together, especially when we learn the skills of nonviolence and healing from violence, for example good listening, as well as good companionship. Good listeners learn to be silent and stop what we're doing and thinking, turn our bodies and faces towards the speaker, and give our full attention to what the speaker means, not just what is said. Good companions also learn to take turns staying in our relaxed, non-anxious, core selves, while noticing the good, capable core self of the speaker, or discharging emotional distresses and reprocessing traumatic events, in order to re-evaluate meaning and come to life with a clear mind. When we recover from and learn to be resilient to trauma,

we feel enlivened once again. Yet prolonged exposure to violence also creates social and environmental disconnection and erodes developmental capacities. Play, especially early childhood learning activities, reconstitute basic connections and capacities. Adults, however, typically won't play for our own benefit, but may sometimes play to support children or grandchildren. Transforming power, trauma recovery and learning through play reconstitute healthy people and communities.

Then, we discover that our new lives do not fit well in old, hierarchical social structures. To reshape our relationships and decision-making, we find that we need groups of companions who share a common commitment to experiment with transforming power in our lives and offer to exchange feedback. Together, we practice recognizing transforming power in every person, giving up the contemporary culture of prejudice and enemy-making. We engage in interdependent, conscientious relationships with people in our own communities and afar, investing in generous and skilled relationships with the natural world, resisting aspirations to unnecessary and unfair power for our sense of security or success. We put our lives in order, with the least effort and the most beauty and joy, so we are attentive and available. We document our faith, insights, and experiences in stories, art, news, law, and court record, to go out into the world and pass it on to future generations.

We all find our work in society--production, expression, rescue, development, justice, and so forth--but every one of us needs to stand up for safe haven as a basic human right. The time has come to make war illegal and restrict our consumption to ecologically sustainable products. As Dahlan, a survivor of the U.S. funded war in Aceh noted, we will not make peace with each other until we make peace with the earth, and we all need peace.

"The practices of goodness—noticing, savoring, thinking, enjoying and being thankful—are not hard disciplines to learn. But they are disciplines, and they take practice. The habits that allow wrong to become entrenched—mindlessness, tuning out, inattentiveness, the busyness of doing to distraction, and the ungrateful heart—can take hold so easily." ~ Desmond and Mpho Tutu, Made for Goodness.



My father, Dean Hoover, tells a very old, new story which I recount below...

one glass of water

one glass of water has millions more molecules of water than there are glasses of water in the world, which are constantly mixing.

so

one glass of water poured back into the world will mix and molecules of that one glass of water will be in every other glass of water in the world.

so

one glass of water has water that has done everything water has ever done:

gone through every plant, animal and person who ever lived;

gone down every river; through every factory, power plant and home;

been in every inch of every ocean;

and we're over 80% water; and we drink it.

People are flickering flames of water, air and rock, dancing on the earth.

Too interdependent to be enemies, we're all living beings sharing common needs and resources on one amazing, beautiful planet.

We invite you to send your stories and news to Power-of-Goodness.info.

.....

Nadine Hoover holds a PhD from Florida State University in Education and International Development and a B.A. from Friends World College having studied on Pine Ridge Reservation, S. Dakota, USA; Kyoto and Osaka, Japan; Seoul and Pusan, S Korea; and Java, Indonesia. She worked as an international consultant for two decades. Fluent in Indonesia, she brings together former enemies—Acehnese/Javanese, Christians/Muslims, victims/perpetrators—who report significant personal and community transformation. ☺

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