

January 2014 Theme: Faith in War & Peace

Readings and Guiding questions

Throughout the month of January, UUCA services will reflect on the theme –
January 5th, the impact of war and the struggle for justice in Guatemala;
January 12, Rev. Sarah Lammert, Ecclesiastical Endorser for Unitarian
Universalist chaplains, preaches on ministry in war zones;
January 19 and 20th, the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. and non-violence.

Rev. Lammert recommends several books to gain deeper understanding of her work:

1. *War Zone Faith: An Army Chaplain's Reflections from Afghanistan*, by UU military chaplain, George Tyger (it and related resources can be found at <http://www.uuabookstore.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=1761>)
2. *War Is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*, by Pulitzer Prize journalist Chris Hedges
3. *War and the Soul*, by psychologist Ed Tick

Excerpts for you to read are below, followed by some guiding questions.

From *War Zone Faith: An Army Chaplain's Reflections from Afghanistan* by George Tyger

Sarah Lammert writes in the Introduction: “Many stories have emerged from Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan – stories of heroic deeds, of endurance, and of brokenness. The toxic cocktail of physical injury, traumatic stress, and spiritual challenge can lead some to break down and lose their very humanity.

“Into this arena enters the military chaplain corps, armed with nothing but faith, courage, and compassion. These non-combatant officers tend to the soulful needs of our soldiers, and in the process take on multiple roles – preacher, teacher, healer, mourner, leader, listener, wisdom-giver, friend, role model. They are there to help our warriors maintain a moral and spiritual center, that they may never forget their humanity. It is a lot to carry on two mortal shoulders, but carry this weight they do, with grace, grit, and generosity of spirit....

“Chaplain (Captain) George Tyger, one of five Unitarian Universalist chaplains currently serving the U.S. Army, represents the best of such ministers to our armed forces. ... His soldiers posted George’s words of wisdom on the sides of buildings and in the chow hall. George is able to find redemption – mostly in the humanity of others – and he passes those grace notes along.”

George Tyger: “Thrown into this broken world, dreadful circumstances sometimes require us to do awful things. When this happens, the life of Christ requires that we turn to each other and see God’s people. ...beckons us to meet our fragmented selves with compassion – standing with, walking with, hoping with, and loving with our fellow human beings.

“The military has taught me much – perhaps most of all, it has taught me about the power of individual choice to shape the course and character of our lives. As much as

military women and men are told what to do on a daily basis, in the end we each make a choice to serve. For most of us, that choice has changed our lives for the better.

“One night, several weeks before going home, I laid awake, thinking of all I had been through. I tried to imagine how this time changed me, or if it had at all. I wrote these lines:

I am an Afghanistan War veteran
I don't want your pity
I served two tours with honor
I've been shot at
Blown up
I put friends into body bags
Seen men die
Sent them home for the last time
According to the popular myth
I should be a
Crazy
Unstable
Angry
PTSD victim
I am none of these
The TV news says you should be careful around me
They say I need help
I will never be the same
Because of what war has done to me

When you look at me
Don't see a caricature
When you hear my story don't sigh and look away
When you think of me don't wish
I had never gone to war

War has not scarred me for life
It has made me more
I am a better man than I was before
I know the value of life more intimately
I know compassion given
And received
I know courage seen
And lived
I know love
For it is love that has kept me alive
Not bombs

“Everything we have experienced can become part of who we are and bring deeper meaning and purpose to our lives. ...

“Our emotional packing list is not made up of the things we will leave behind so much as those we will bring home. It's not about hiding these memories away but

learning to integrate our experiences into who we will become. My fear has taught me to understand the fear of others. My regret has taught me to forgive as I would be forgiven. My grief has taught me to savor every precious moment of life. My loneliness has taught me to cultivate friendship. May pain has taught me the power of compassion.

“The experience of being human, though sometimes difficult and painful, remains filled with possibility.”

from *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* by Chris Hedges

“In the beginning war looks and feels like love. But unlike love it gives nothing in return but an ever-deepening dependence, like all narcotics, on the road to self-destruction. It does not affirm but places upon us greater and greater demands. It destroys the outside world until it is hard to live outside war's grip. It takes a higher and higher dose to achieve any thrill. Finally, one ingests war only to remain numb.

“ 'Just remember,' a Marine Corps lieutenant colonel told me as he strapped his pistol belt under his arm before we crossed into Kuwait, 'that none of these boys is fighting for home, for the flag, for all that crap the politicians feed the public. They are fighting for each other, just for each other.' ”

“The enduring attraction of war is this: Even with its destruction and carnage it can give us what we long for in life. It can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for living. Only when we are in the midst of conflict does the shallowness and vapidness of much of our lives become apparent. Trivia dominates our conversations and increasingly our airwaves. And war is an enticing elixir. It gives us resolve, a cause. It allows us to be noble. And those who have the least meaning in their lives, the impoverished refugees in Gaza, the disenfranchised North African immigrants in France, even the legions of young who live in the splendid indolence and safety of the industrialized world, are all susceptible to war's appeal.

“I learned early on that war forms its own culture. The rush of battle is a potent and often lethal addiction, for war is a drug, one I ingested for many years. It is peddled by mythmakers- historians, war correspondents, filmmakers, novelists, and the state- all of whom endow it with qualities it often does possess: excitement, exoticism, power, chances to rise above our small stations in life, and a bizarre and fantastic universe that has a grotesque and dark beauty.

“To survive as a human being is possible only through love. And, when Thanatos is ascendant, the instinct must be to reach out to those we love, to see in them all the divinity, pity, and pathos of the human. And to recognize love in the lives of others - even those with whom we are in conflict - love that is like our own. It does not mean we will avoid war or death. It does not mean that we as distinct individuals will survive. But love, in its mystery, has its own power. It alone gives us meaning that endures. It alone allows us to embrace and cherish life. Love has power both to resist in our nature what we know we must resist, and to affirm what we know we must affirm. And love, as the poets remind us, is eternal.”

From *War and the Soul* by Ed Tick

“We do not even know how to think about war. To be sure, the politics, economics, and history of particular conflicts are extensively documented. And it is true, as Abraham Lincoln said, that ‘we cannot escape history.’ But we can also become lost in it. ...

“Though people have not always fought for the same purposes or in the same ways, war is indeed universally traumatizing. Because of this inevitable trauma, our ancestors conducted war with far greater preparation, guidance, and restraint than we do today. ...

“History, anthropology, psychology, political science, mythology, world spiritual traditions – indeed all lenses through which we peer – reveal that warrior classes and traditions are nearly universal aspects of human experience. ... The presence of gods of war in all our root traditions ... all demonstrate this universality.

“Once we understand that war is a living archetype inherent to the psyche, ...we are forced to ask then: is war inevitable? ... Our only chance for dissipating the archetypal force of war in our lives is to become conscious of how it works through us so that we do not remain possessed by it but rather can labor responsibly to direct its powers. This labor is fundamentally a matter of soul.”

Guiding Questions for Reflection and Deepening

1. What is the story of your own connection to war?
2. Have you been a victim, a warrior, an objector, a family member, a supporter, a soldier – or something else?
3. What sense can you make of your experience?
4. Is your memory of your experience inspiring or in need of healing?
5. How is your own religion, theology, or personal philosophy reflected in your response to war?