

What Torture's Taught Me

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When I ended my term as UUA President in 1993, I vowed that I would never preach in the pulpit of any minister who had not been kind to me when I was President. That automatically eliminated about 50% of our congregations. But as I look out over the audience this afternoon, I realize that many of you weren't even around for this ancient history and, besides, I've matured, become more mellow, have put things in perspective, can let bygones be bygones and so will now be glad to preach in anybody's pulpit...unless you were really, *really* mean to me.

At one time I knew the name, settlement, and partner's name and occupation of virtually every minister in the Association. David Starr Jordan, the first President of Stanford, was a world renowned ichthyologist and after he became President, he was heard to complain that every time he remembered the name of a student, he forgot the name of a fish. But having known nothing about fish and little about anything else when I became President, there was very little danger that my remembering people's names would carry any great cost. But it does prompt me to apologize to those of you whose

names I don't know (and far more to those I do but can't remember). If I get really desperate, I will simply resort to the practice of the first President of the UUA, Dana McLean Greeley, who never could remember anyone's name and therefore began every interaction by saying, "You're, you're..." at which point one would feel compelled to say "Bill Schulz," to which Dana would roar back, "Of course you are. Of course you are. Don't be ridiculous." All of which is simply to thank the Berry Street Lecture Committee for taking a chance on someone who has been somewhat removed from the life of the Association the past twelve years, despite his marriage to Beth Graham, and for whom this Lecture signals something of a homecoming.

But while I may have not been as active in Unitarian Universalist circles over the past decade as I once was, that does not mean that Unitarian Universalism has been far from my heart. It has of course been an enormous privilege to lead the world's oldest, largest and, I daresay, most respected human rights organization and Amnesty has afforded me unparalleled opportunities—the opportunity to be insulted in the nicest possible way by Lauren Bacall at a high-falutin' dinner party on the Upper East Side, for example ("Darling, aren't you that dear little human rights man?" "Yes, Ms. Bacall, I suppose I am." "Well, may I sit with you at dinner?" Me, swooning: "Why, yes, Ms. Bacall, I'd be delighted." "You see, darling, I wouldn't ask but, frankly, I don't know a fucking soul here.") or the opportunity to be tailed by the Tunisian secret police through the medina of Tunis and have them quite thoughtfully tap me on my shoulder and return my passport seconds after they had retrieved it from a pickpocket; or the opportunity to be threatened with assassination by a Liberian war lord¹; or the opportunity, when

¹ A story described in detail in Schulz, William F., *In Our Own Best Interest: How Defending Human Rights Benefits Us All*, Boston: Beacon Press, pp. 42-43.

Amnesty in 2004, rather melodramatically, I must say, labeled Guantanamo Bay “the gulag of our times,” to be denounced over the course of five days as “absurd” and “anti-American” by the President, Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Sean Hannity (who, I can report, really is as much of a horse’s ass as he appears on FOX).

Or perhaps, more to the point, the opportunity to greet Wei Jing Sheng, the Father of Chinese Democracy, on his arrival in America after seventeen years in prison or the opportunity to work with Gary Gauger and several others of the 123 people convicted of capital crimes in this country, sentenced to death and subsequently exonerated after serving an average of 9.2 years on death row or the opportunity to go into the refugee camps in Darfur, Sudan to meet those terrorized out of their homes and then into the state offices in Khartoum to confront the ministers who ordered the terror.

There is a smell to refugee camps which, once you have inhaled it, you never forget—a smell of goat dung and human waste; of sweat and tears and unstaunched menstrual blood; but also a smell of desperation that gives way to sagging shoulders and the decay of the human soul. For a body can be clothed in the raiment of fear or stalked daily by death for only so long before the soul—whatever makes the human animal “human”—begins to collapse upon itself as surely as the shoulders do.

So the opportunities Amnesty provided me were singular and I am deeply grateful for them but I have always regarded myself first and foremost as a Unitarian Universalist minister. This faith and community have always been the principal resources from which I draw my strength and so I thank you for welcoming me back into the fold today, if not a

wayward sheep, then at least one who has taken a very long detour and seen things both horrific and awesome along the way.

And of those things that I have seen nothing has had a deeper impact on me than my exposure to torture—to both victims of torture and perpetrators of it and, not incidentally, to all of us in between. So I want to talk with you this afternoon about torture but not in a political context—this is not another social justice screed imploring us all to do more to save the world or excoriating the President one more time. You will get quite enough of that in other lectures this week. I want instead to talk about torture in a theological context and about what it may have to say concerning how we understand God, human beings and the world, and maybe even a thing or two about ministry.

About a week after I began my work at Amnesty in 1994, I came across a report of how the Mujahadeen in Afghanistan—the predecessors to the Taliban—got rid of their prisoners. They tied each live prisoner to a corpse and then left the pair out in the sun to rot. Clever, simple, low-tech, but to one who always tried to stand with his back to the open casket at memorial services, utterly terrifying.

Close to two-thirds of the countries in the world practice torture.² Of course if I had cited that statistic to an ancient Greek philosopher, his response would have been utter astonishment. “Why only two-thirds?” he would have said. “Why not every one?” For the ancient Greeks and the Romans who came after them, torture was not only acceptable; it was standard practice. But the Greeks were very discriminating about who could be tortured. It was only slaves—not free citizens—who could be subjected to the whip and the chain. That was true, however, not just because slaves were slaves. No.

² In its annual country reports Amnesty International cites about 130 countries every year as practicing torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading (CID) treatment.

The reason slaves could be tortured was because slaves did not possess the faculty of reason and hence lacked the capacity to dissemble. And so if you wanted to know the truth about something, all you had to do was to torture a slave who, unlike a free citizen, wasn't smart enough to lie to you.

Unfortunate as the ancient use of torture may have been, it at least had the merit of being employed for a rational purpose, namely, to establish truth and resolve disputes. And the rational use of torture extended into medieval times. In the Middle Ages both civil and religious courts believed that it was unethical to convict someone of a crime on somebody else's word alone, that the only valid evidence of thievery or heresy or murder was a confession and what more effective way to elicit a confession than the rack and the screw?

Indeed, torture was such a reputable instrument of justice that it was not until 1754—only 252 years ago—that Prussia (now Germany) became, ironically enough in light of subsequent history, the first country to abolish the use of torture altogether. For about 150 years torture went out of vogue—at least as an official instrument of government policy.³ But in the twentieth century it began to raise its ugly head again. And this time there was an important difference: for whereas in ancient Greece and medieval Europe torture had been used to determine truth or convict someone of a crime, in the twentieth century torture became an instrument of pleasure, a means of intimidating political opponents, a way to inflict pain on another person for the sheer sadistic joy of it.

³ For the history of torture, see Peters, Edward, *Torture*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, and my own *I Used To Be Innocent: Readings in the Study of Torture* to be published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in late 2006 or early 2007.

The reason Abu Ghraib struck Americans like a thunderbolt is not because prisoners were being tortured—some 63% of Americans say that torture is acceptable at least occasionally when, for example, information about the location of a ticking bomb in a high density neighborhood must be procured quickly⁴. (I don't have time to explain why the perennial "ticking bomb" argument for torture is itself a red herring but, believe me, it is.) The reason Americans turned ashen at Abu Ghraib was because even the staunchest defender of the use of torture as a means of extracting information could not pretend that forcing naked prisoners to form a pyramid or to masturbate for the cameras or to be tethered to a leash like a dog had any purpose other than sheer humiliation. The ancient Greeks would have been ashamed.

Over my years at Amnesty I was perpetually dumbstruck by the sheer creativity of modern torturers. Of course beatings are the most commonplace form of the art--on the back, the buttocks, most painfully on the feet. And electroshock, especially to the penis, the vagina, the eyelids, the earlobes, is quickly gaining popularity with ever more sophisticated electroshock equipment available now even to the general public. But these are for the mere beginners.

In King Leopold's Congo Belgian labor bosses regularly cut off the right hands of boys who did not meet their mining quotas for diamonds and then proudly displayed baskets of those severed hands on their office desks.⁵

⁴ Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "America Place in the World," November 17, 2005. Fifteen percent say it is "often" justified; 31% "sometimes" and 17% "rarely."

⁵ Hochschild, Adam, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), pp. 120-123.

In Brazil prisoners were stripped naked and locked in small, bare concrete cells with only one other occupant—a boa constrictor.⁶

In Central America soldiers were notorious for ripping open the wombs of pregnant women, tossing the fetuses into the air and catching them on their bayonets.

In Pinochet's Chile women were raped by men with visible open syphilitic sores, sexually abused by dogs trained in the practice, forced to watch their own children being sexually assaulted and then fed the putrefied remains of their fellow captives.⁷

In contrast, our American obsession with water torture, most recently in the form of waterboarding or simulated drowning, sounds almost pristine. During our occupation of the Philippines at the turn of the twentieth century, our soldiers inserted bamboo tubes into victim's throats and poured in gallons of water, the filthier the better. The Filipinos got their revenge, however. They buried captured American soldiers up to their heads in manure, poured molasses over their heads and dropped hundreds of fire ants into the molasses.⁸

Practices such as these have no rational purpose at all; they are designed solely to strip another of his or her humanity. If anything deserves to be called unadulterated evil, this does. I tell you about it not to shock you but to ask you to consider a question that has haunted me the last twelve years—is what I say from the pulpit about the world around us, about the nature of God and humanity, about the dynamics of human relationships—is what I preach to the people sufficient to encompass a world in which

⁶ Archdiocese of São Paulo, Jaime Wright, Trans. Joan Dassin, Ed. *Torture in Brazil: A Report by the Archdiocese of São Paulo* (New York: Vintage, 1986), pp. 16-17.

⁷ Ronertson, Geoffrey, *Crimes Against Humanity: The Struggle for Global Justice* (New York: The New Press, 1999), pp. 390-91.

⁸ Schulz, William F., *Tainted Legacy: 9/11 and the Ruin of Human Rights* (New York: Thunder's mouth Press/Nation Books, 2003), p. 155.

such coarseness and brutality exists? Or, to put it another way, if a member of my congregation or my listening audience had herself been a victim of such terror, would she find my words, my faith, my theology, naïve and pallid or authentic and satisfying?

I know of course that few Unitarian Universalists have been subjected to torture but far more people in our congregations than we know have been raped or abused and even those who have not have to live in a world, cope with a world, feel at home in a world in which such practices flourish. I find it a helpful exercise to use torture as a plumbline test of the adequacy of my worldview and sophistication of my sermonizing. I remember a cartoon from years ago in which the wayside pulpits of an Episcopal church and a Unitarian Universalist church were both visible on a street corner. It was Easter and the title of the Episcopal rector's Easter sermon was "The Truth and Power of the Risen Christ" while across the street the Unitarian Universalist was preaching a sermon entitled "Upsy-Daisy." My point is simply that to my mind an "upsy-daisy" theology fails the torture test.

Sallie McFague, a theologian whose work is popular among liberals, says that "there is no place where God is not." Process theologian Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki insists that "[God is] pervasively present, like water, to every nook and cranny of the universe, continuously wooing the universe...toward its greater good."⁹ But I would submit that no God worthy of the name is present in a torture chamber. I am sure that some victims of torture have found solace in their faith sufficient to sustain them through the ordeal. That appears to be the case, for example, with some of the Islamic prisoners being held at Guantanamo Bay. But I have talked to dozens of survivors of torture, read

⁹ Quoted in Razor, Paul, *Faith Without Certainty: Liberal Theology in the 21st Century*, Boston: Skinner House Books, pp. 20-21.

hundreds of others' accounts, and I have rarely, if ever, come across a testimony that it was faith in God that saw them through the night. For when the needle slips under the fingernails and the pliers rip them off, that pain obliterates the very face of God.

I am not here scoring some cheap humanist point against vapid notions of God. Over the years I have myself become increasingly comfortable using the word to describe that source of graciousness upon which we depend for our very lives. All I am saying is that, whatever our conception of God, it needs to be both complex enough and circumscribed enough to account for the fact that God's absence—true absence—is as real a phenomenon as God's immanence.

Similarly, our traditional doctrines of human nature rest uneasy in a world full of torturers. In what sense can we defend the notion that a torturer is a person of “*inherent* worth and dignity?”

A South African neuropsychologist has recently theorized that cruelty, especially in males, is grounded in an adaptive reaction from the Palaeozoic era when early humans were predators and had to hunt for their food; that the appearance of pain and blood in the prey was a signal of triumph; and that gradually the evocation of such reactions—howls of pain, the appearance of blood--in our fellow humans became associated with personal and social power, with the success of the hunt.¹⁰ That theory strikes me as plausible but, if it is true, it doesn't lend much credence to the notion of inherent dignity. As that great theologian Genghis Khan put it in the thirteenth century: “The greatest pleasure is to vanquish your enemies, to chase them before you, to rob them of their wealth, to see their near and dear bathed in tears, to ride their horses and to sleep on the bellies of their wives

¹⁰ Victor Nell, “Cruelty's Rewards: The Gratifications of Perpetrators and Spectators,” forthcoming in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. www.bbsonline.org, 2005.

and daughters.”¹¹ Had he lived a few centuries later, Mr. Khan would surely have been a Calvinist.

So who are the torturers? Are they madmen? Deviants? Hardened criminals? Sexual predators? Almost never. In fact, most police and military units weed out the psychological misfits from their midsts because they know such people have trouble taking orders. No, the horrible truth is that the vast majority of torturers are average Joes (occasionally, but rarely, average Janes).

And it is remarkably easy to turn Joe into what most of us would regard as a monster. You put him in a restricted environment like a police or military training camp under the command of a vaunted authority figure. You subject him to intense stress. (The Greek military police in the time of the Greek generals, for example, were renown for their brutality and they got that way because each of them was subjected during training to severe beatings, forced to go weeks without food, and not permitted to defecate for up to fifteen days at a time.) And then, having created an angry, bitter, but obedient servant, you provide the sanction, the means, the opportunity and the rationale for that servant to take his outrage out on a vulnerable but much despised population. “These are the people who are threatening our country.” “These are the people who are killing your comrades.”

Who is this creature of “inherent dignity” who is so easily led astray? Sixty five years ago James Luther Adams delivered the most heralded Berry Street Lecture of the twentieth century entitled “The Changing Reputation of Human Nature” in which, while rejecting the doctrine of total depravity, he resurrected the notion of “sin.”

¹¹ Quoted in Buss, David, “The Evolution of Evil,” www.edge.org, accessed on January 8, 2008.

...whether the liberal uses the word “sin” or not, [Adams said], he cannot correct his “too jocund” [blithe] view of life until he recognizes that there is in human nature a deep-seated and universal tendency...to ignore the demands of mutuality and thus to waste freedom or abuse it by devotion to the idols of the tribe...It cannot be denied that religious liberalism has neglected these aspects of human nature in its zeal to proclaim the spark of divinity in man. We may call these tendencies by any name we wish but we do not escape their destructive influence by a conspiracy of silence concerning them.¹²

Have we forgotten Adams' exhortation? If we no longer think of human beings as made in the “likeness of God,” are we not still reticent to dwell upon the features of the flesh that make us not just “slightly lower than the angels” but out of the angels' league altogether? Do we even have a commonly shared doctrine of human nature today and, if we do, is it sufficient to explain why even the most reputable souls may, under the right circumstances, be transformed into savages?

When I was seven or eight years old, I lived across the street from a little dog named Amy. Every afternoon after my school let out, Amy and I would play together for an hour. One of Amy's favorite games was a dancing game in which I held her two forepaws in my hands and we would dance around the yard. Sometimes Amy even put her paws in my lap to signal that she wanted to dance. But I noticed that after a few minutes Amy's hind legs would get sore and she would pull her paws away. The first few times we played our dancing game, I dropped her paws the moment I sensed her discomfort and we went on to something else.

¹² Adams, James Luther, *Voluntary Associations: Socio-Cultural Analyses and Theological Interpretation*, Chicago: Exploration Press, 1986, pp. 49-50.

But one day I decided to hold on. The more Amy tugged, the tighter I held on until finally, when she yelped in agony, I let her go. But the next day I repeated my demonic game. It was fascinating to feel this little creature, so much less powerful than me, entirely at my mercy.

I was lucky that Amy was such a gentle dog for she had every right to have bitten me and when, after two or three days, I saw that my friend, who had previously scrambled eagerly toward me on first site, now cowered at my approach, I realized with a start what I had done and I was deeply frightened of myself and much ashamed. Whatever had come over me that I would treat someone I had loved that way?

What had come over me, I now know in retrospect, was the displacement of anger onto one who held no threat to me. Bullies at school might pick on me. My two parents might tell their only child what he could and could not do. My piano teacher might try to slam the keyboard cover on my fingers when I played off key. But in that yard I ruled supreme. Not only did I hold the power but the one who was powerless for a change was Not-Me.

Adams, like nineteen centuries of theologians before him, would try to rescue humanity from its own degradation by asserting that *freedom* was what underpinned our inherent worth—the capacity I retained to decide to stop tormenting Amy, the fact that not every student of torture chooses to finish the course.

But, quite apart from arcane philosophical debates about free will or more contemporary insights into the traits of animals, is freedom robust enough a characteristic of human beings sufficient to overcome the basest of brutality? And when we speak of the “inherent worth and dignity of every person,” are we really thinking first and

foremost of free agency anyway? I doubt it. I suspect that we base our belief in the inherent worth of human beings on some far vaguer notion that *aliveness* itself is good and some long-outdated hierarchical assumption that because human beings represent the pinnacle of aliveness, we possess inherently some kind of merit.

Well, I don't buy that anymore. I have fought tirelessly against the death penalty in this country. I have visited death rows, spoken frequently with condemned prisoners. Some of them have acknowledged their crimes and altered their hearts. Others of them are truly innocent. Many of them are mentally ill. And some of them are vicious, dangerous killers. I oppose the death penalty not because I believe that every one of those lives carries inherent worth. In some cases their deaths would be no loss at all to anyone. I oppose the death penalty because I can't be sure which of them falls into which category and because the use of executions by the state diminishes *my* own dignity and that of every other citizen in whose name it is enforced. I need, in other words, to *assign* the occupants of death row worth and dignity in order to preserve my own. But I find no such characteristics *inherent* in either them or me.

If a loved one of mine were murdered, I would want her murderer to suffer the worst torments of hell I could imagine. No torture would be too great to satisfy my lust for revenge. But I do not want the state to indulge me in my worst impulses. Part of the role of government is to save us from our basest passions in order to extract some semblance of worth and dignity out of the muck and meanness that infects our hearts.

So is the worth and dignity of every person *inherent*? No, inherency is a political construct—perhaps a very useful myth but a myth nonetheless--designed to cover up the fact that we all are sinners and that we are not always certain which sins (and hence

which sinners) are worse than others. Each of us has to be assigned worth—it does not come automatically--and taught to behave with dignity because, as Sartre once said, “If it were not for the petty rules of bourgeois society, we humans would destroy each other in an instant.”

But who does the assigning of worth? How *do* we decide that something is a sin? How do we know that torture is wrong? What is the basis for human rights?

There are only three options. Rights are established by divinity, by natural law or by pragmatic consensus. I wish we could get everybody to agree on one of the first two. But because we cannot--because not everyone agrees with the Montanists, for example, that God will only save those who eat a steady diet of radishes nor with Isak Dinesen's conception of natural law as reflected in her famous question, “What is man but an ingenious machine for turning red wine into urine?”—we are left with public opinion as the basis for determining rights. Global public opinion, to be sure, but public opinion.

This is a discomfiting notion, I know. We Unitarian Universalists are champions of the individual as the source of authority for both truth and righteousness. We are well aware of all the many instances in which majority opinion has been just plain wrong. We are aficionados of the lonely, courageous soul standing up for truth, justice and Esperanto even in the face of the crowd's disparagement.

But you know something: most of the time those lonely, courageous souls are sheer crackpots. And unless they can get a whole bunch of other people to agree with them—at least eventually—we would usually be wise to keep them at a safe distance.

Was torture wrong even before anyone in the world, including the slaves being tortured, thought it was wrong? The hard answer is “No.” Or if it was “wrong” in some

parallel ethical universe, it was certainly no violation of anybody's rights until a significant number of people *in this world* began to say that it was. When South Carolina shut down its video poker parlors a few years ago, one stalwart gambler was quoted as saying, "This is like the state telling me I have no rights. It's pretty close to being communist."¹³ I'm sorry but there is as yet no international consensus that all human beings have a right to play video poker.

Human rights are whatever the international community—through its various declarations, covenants, treaties and conventions—say that they are. This means that theoretically at least the world could regress and torture could once again be deemed acceptable. But experience seems to show that the more people who are involved in decision-making about rights, including the victims of their violation, the less likely the backsliding. If there is one arena in which Theodore Parker's famous dictum that "the arc of the universe bends toward justice" seems to have been borne out, it is the evolution of human rights.

But what all this means is that, when it comes to deciding right and wrong, when it comes to assigning worth and dignity, the individual is *not* the final source of authority and without a reference to the values of the larger community—the *world* community, not that of any one nation alone—our judgments are fit only for a desert island upon which we ourselves are the only occupant.

But what it also means is that our job as ministers, as builders of the blessed community, is tougher and more important than ever for if we can't rely upon the inherency of human worth and dignity, if we have to *assign* worth and *teach* dignity, then we cannot escape confrontation with the forces of idolatry who would reserve worth to

¹³ "South Carolina High Court Derails Video Poker Game," *The New York Times*, October 15, 1999.

only a few and save dignity for their immediate neighbors, people like those children and grandchildren of immigrants, for example, who would not be where they are today if their forebears had been treated the way they propose to treat a new American generation .

And if the individual is *not* the ultimate source of authority when it comes to some of the most important decisions on earth, like who lives and who doesn't, then autobiographical theology, popular as it is and tempting, is inadequate—not deleterious or to be shunned—but insufficient for a faith that would not just engage the world but transform it. What torture has taught me is that, fascinating as I find my own life, it alone is a cloudy prism through which to view Creation absent reference to the experience of others, the wisdom of community, the demands of tradition, the judgment of history, and the invitation of the Holy.

And it has taught me one thing more. If these twelve years have caused me to re-think the nature of God, the inherency of human worth and the credibility of individual authority, they have more than confirmed two other bedrock Unitarian Universalist principles, the indomitability of the spirit and the mysterious workings of an unfettered grace. I want to close with four short vignettes out of dozens I could have chosen, four vignettes which build upon each other, the first from the memoir of a torturer, in which the stirrings of the spirit are just barely visible but working nonetheless.

General Paul Aussaresses was a French intelligence officer in occupied Algeria in the 1950s. To this day he is one of the most outspoken defenders of the use of brutality in the cause of national security. His memoir, *The Battle of the Casbah*, is full of callous disregard for his victims. But here is his fascinating description of a conversation he had with a physician over the dead body of a prisoner he had just tortured to death.

"I was talking to the prisoner and he fell ill," I said unconvincingly. "He told me he had tuberculosis. Can you see what's wrong with him?"

"You were talking to him?" the doctor asked incredulously. "But he's drenched in blood. You must be kidding!"

"No, I wouldn't do such a thing," I said.

"But he's dead," said the doctor.

"It's possible," I answered, "but when I called for you, he was still alive."

And then, since the doctor was still not cooperating, I lost my cool and said:

"And so? You want me to say that I killed him? Would that make you feel better? Do you think I enjoy this?"

"No," said the doctor. "But then why did you come to get me when he was dead?"

I didn't answer. The doctor finally understood. I had called him so that he would get the body out of my sight once and for all¹⁴.

Occasionally the angel finds even a torturer's ear. But more often of course it is the victims of torture and their families who teach us how to live.

The great Soviet poet, Anna Akhmatova, spent seventeen months waiting with others in the prison queues of Leningrad to see their loved ones who were being tortured inside. One day somebody in the crowd recognized her. "Standing behind me," Ahkmatova later recalled, "was a woman with lips blue from the cold... 'Can you

¹⁴ Aussaresses, Paul, *The Battle of the Casbah*, New York: Enigma Books, 2002, p. 131.

describe this?' [she asked]...I said, 'I can.' Then something like a smile passed...over what once had been her face."¹⁵

Nick Yarris spent twenty-three years in prison for a murder he did not commit—a singular form of torture. When he was released and was asked how he felt, he said, “What are my choices? I could be really devastated and angry and let them continue to own me or I could have fun. [Having fun] sounds better...The lowest insult would be if I came out destroyed, a broken man...My survival technique was to become a good man.”¹⁶

Perez Aguirre was tortured mercilessly in a South American prison. Many years later, walking along the street, he ran into the man who had tortured him. The torturer was now among those being prosecuted and he tried to avoid Aguirre's gaze. But Aguirre took the initiative. “How are you?” he asked his torturer. The man said he was very depressed. There was a long pause and then Aguirre said, “If you need anything, come to see me.” And then, “Shake hands, friend. I forgive you.”¹⁷

What torture has taught me, what all those brave souls and, yes, even a few of their tormentors, have taught me, is to never give up on the glimmers of grace for not everything is all that it seems. If even survivors of torture can reclaim a sense of life's bounty, then surely you and I and all to whom we minister can too. If the torturer cannot fully break the human spirit, nobody can. For we Unitarian Universalists know, out of

¹⁵ Akhmatova, Anna, “Instead of a Preface,” in Forche, Carolyn, ed., *Against Forgetting: Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993, pp. 101-02.

¹⁶ Recounted to author.

¹⁷ Weschler, Lawrence, *A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts With Torturers*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1990, pp. 198-99.

the depths of our faith and the teachings of our tradition and the succor of our community, that the chess master was right.

Chancing upon a great painting in a European gallery of a defeated Faust sitting opposite the devil at a chess table with only a knight and a King on the board and the King in check, the master stopped to stare. The minutes changed to hours and still the master stared. And then finally, "It's a lie," he shouted. "The King and the knight have another move! They have another move!" And that's finally what torture has taught me--that it is not just the King but the knight, not just the Queen but the rook, not just the Bishop but the pawn, not just the wealthy but the pauper, not just the fortunate but the weary, not just the torturer but the tortured, not just the powerful but every single person, every single blessed person, until the day we die, every single blessed person on this earth, every single blessed person who has another move. We all have another move.