

Shoah Service
[Edited

Transcript]

A Sermon by E. Arlen Goff
High Street Unitarian Universalist Church
April 14, 2002

Shema Yisrael, HaShem E-lo-kenu, HaShem Echad.

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead; inscribe them on the doorposts of your home and on your gates.

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.

Shema Yisrael, HaShem E-lo-kenu, HaShem Echad.

-- Deuteronomy 6.4-9, *TANAKH: The Holy Scriptures*

Lighting the Chalice

We light this flame in memory of years past that have brought us to this hour, and to the countless lives, known and unknown, that have made our lives possible.

We light this flame of life in affirmation of the strength that is ours to live this day, and the potential we have to create a better tomorrow.

We light this flame of faith that our minds may be enlightened, our love deepened, our path together illumined by understanding and peace.

The Lighting of the Shoah Candles

People against people
Night seems to have succeeded

Life and again stripped
Again, again
Persecuted
Human spirit tries to remain
As the last minutes fall upon us

All: **We light this candle for those who wore
the pink triangle – gays and lesbians
who would not, could not, bear children
for the thousand year Reich.**

Fourth Voice: The flame burns
Weak
Stamped out
Left for dead

Orange yellow, brown, black
Black, black,
Night
Hate
Loathing

All: **We light this candle for Gypsies, those
called Sinti and Roma, of foreign
appearance, language and customs.**

Fifth Voice: A flame is extinguished
Snuffed out
Blown out in the wind
Never seen
We must remember
Never forget
Hope is left

All: **We light this candle for Jehovah's
Witnesses, who would not signal their
allegiance to any earthly kingdom or
government, who would not compromise
their faith by hailing Hitler as Fuhrer.**

Sixth Voice: Rebuild
Burn once again
Burn flame burn
Grow and learn

One tiny flame
One small voice
One giant love

All: We light this candle for “the righteous of all nations” – the Schindlers and Wallenburgs, those whose names are recorded, those whose names will never be known – who gave their lives to save even one life.

We must remember ... never forget ... hope is left!

**I have lived
dear God
in a world gone mad
and I have seen
evil
unleashed beyond reason or
understanding.**

**I was with them.
We drank from the same
bitter cup.**

**I hid with them
Feared with them,
Struggled with them
And when the killing was finally done
I had survived
while millions had died.
I do not know why**

**I have asked many questions
for which there are no answers
And I have even cursed
my life
thinking I could not
endure the pain.**

**But a flame
inside
refused to die.
I could not throw away
What had been ripped away
from so many.**

**In the end
I had to choose life.
I had to struggle to cross
the bridge between
the dead and the living.
I had to rebuild
what had been destroyed.
I had to deny death
Another victory.**

-- Malka, a survivor

Reading

**They came for the Communists, and I didn't object –
for I wasn't a Communist.**

**They came for the Socialists, and I didn't object –
for I wasn't a Socialist.**

**They came for the labor leaders, and I didn't object –
for I wasn't a labor leader.**

**They came for the Jews, and I didn't object –
for I wasn't a Jew.**

**Then they came for me –
and there was no one left to object.**

-- Martin Niemoller, German Protestant Pastor

Message

E. Arlen Goff

“Never Again – UUs and Yom ha'Shoah”

The mystery of how God could have permitted the Holocaust remains inexplicable. The only viable explanation is that the Holocaust, and all evil, poses a challenge to us all. When confronted by evil, we must oppose it without compromise, without temporizing, without hesitation. All evil challenges us for a response that sees each victim or potential victim as created in the image of God. Only the absolute conviction that he who saves one life saves the entire world can offer meaning in the face of absolute evil. The certainty that evil challenges us to total and uncompromising moral action is rooted in the imperative to mend the world through resistance to evil

Although we cannot ultimately explain why evil persists, we can agree on the human imperative to actively resist it. We are responsible for the world and for each other.

- David S. Ariel, *What Do Jews Believe* (Schocken, 1995: pp106-107)

“We are responsible for the world and for each other.” Those are powerful words, for they take us far beyond even our own UU first principle of “affirming the inherent worth and dignity of every person.” They remind us that our stated belief or principles are worth less than the paper we print them on if they do not move us to act for “justice, equity and compassion in human relations” (our second principle). Nodding the head in sympathy is not enough; our hands must become dirtied in the hard work of social justice.

So, why is a group of UUs in a small, Southern city in America’s Bible Belt commemorating *Yom ha’Shoah*? After all, it seemed so appropriate that this first public announcement of today’s topic came during our annual April Fools’ service. And, just to make this moment a little more surreal ... we found out Tuesday evening that Dorner’s cousin would be attending a conference in Atlanta and that there might be an outside chance he could come down for today’s service. This would not normally cause me to panic, but Johannes is from Munich, and is a college professor of history who recently taught a course on Nazi Germany while on sabbatical at Emory. And so ... here we are.

And so, why? Why celebrate *Yom ha’Shoah*? Well, the UU connection to the Holocaust is not hard to find. For we also have our martyrs and heroes of the Shoah.

Two weeks ago, on Easter Sunday, we celebrated the Flower Communion. This annual observance comes to us from the Unitarian community in Czechoslovakia. Norbert Capek, a Baptist who converted to Unitarianism while studying at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, founded the Unitarian Church in Prague during the 1920’s. He developed the Flower Communion as a way of affirming the interconnectedness of his

parishoners' lives. We are all as unique as each individual flower, but we are all members of a community ... "we are responsible for the world and for each other".

Norbert Capek's ministry of affirmation and inclusiveness made him a dangerous man, at least in the eyes of the Nazi regime. In March 1939, six months before the Nazi invasion of Poland, German troops marched into Czechoslovakia as part of a bartered deal with leaders of the Western European nations, whose primary spokesperson was the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. The rationale seemed to be that, if they gave in this one time to Hitler's demand for *lebensraum* ("living room"), perhaps he would be satisfied and just go away. And, of course, as happens so often when good attempts a compromise with evil, they could not have been more wrong.

According to Nazi court records, Norbert Capek's gospel of the inherent beauty and worth of every human being was "too dangerous to the Reich for him to be allowed to live." Dr. Capek was arrested in Prague in 1940. He was taken to the Dachau concentration camp, where he perished in a Nazi "medical experiment" in 1941.

Dr. Norbert Capek ... a UU martyr ... one of the "righteous of all nations."

And we have our heroes, too.

Each Sunday, we light the chalice as a symbol of our Unitarian Universalist faith. The flaming chalice, so sacred to us and so beloved, is another legacy of the Holocaust.

Hans Deutsch was an Austrian artist living in Paris who drew numerous political cartoons during the late 1930's and early 1940's, ridiculing and lampooning Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime. Because his drawings were considered treasonous, he fled before the Nazi *blitzkrieg* ("lightning war") reached Paris ... first, to the south of France, then to Spain, and finally, to Portugal.

In Portugal, Deutsch became connected with the work of Charles Joy and the Unitarian Service Committee (the predecessor of the UUSC). The Unitarian Service Committee was a nascent organization, having been formed to assist Jews and Unitarians escape from Nazi-occupied lands. Very soon, Deutsch found himself working alongside Joy in the effort to save "even one life" from the camps.

These are Deutsch's words to Joy:

"There is something that urges me to tell you... how much I admire your utter self denial [and] readiness to serve, to sacrifice all, your time, your health, your well being, to help, help, help.

"I am not what you may actually call a believer. But if your kind of life is the profession of your faith--- as it is, I feel sure---then religion, ceasing to be magic and mysticism, becomes confession to practical philosophy and---what is more- --to active, really useful social work. And this religion--- with or without a heading---is one to which even a 'godless' fellow like myself can say wholeheartedly, Yes!"

In an effort to identify their clandestine agents behind Nazi lines, Deutsch developed the symbol of the flaming chalice. As the UUA web site states: "When Deutsch designed the flaming chalice, he had never seen a Unitarian or Universalist church or heard a sermon. What he had seen was faith in action---people who were willing to risk all for others in a time of urgent need."

For UUs, *Yom ha'Shoah* thus becomes a way of re-connecting with our own history, and a way of reminding ourselves that "we are responsible for the world, and for each other."

I'm not sure when I actually became aware of the Holocaust. I do remember sitting in the dark of my room, long after I was supposed to be in bed, watching a documentary presentation on CBS (I believe) of William Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. I remember seeing images of Nazi SS goose-stepping down city streets, being mesmerized by Hitler's oratory (even though I understood no German) and being repelled by those first visions of the skeletal remains of victims as Allied armies liberated the camps. I also remember lying on the couch in my grandparents' home in Haines City, Florida ... reading a paperback book entitled *Hitler's Henchmen* ... engrossed in stories of atrocity upon atrocity ... while my family gathered around the dining room table for the evening meal. [I was a really *fun* child] I remember having nightmares ... my face superimposed on the faceless thousands ... of living and dying in the camps ... never surviving.

I have a more specific memory of my first *Yom ha'Shoah*. I was a student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC. One Spring day, I noticed that some of the faculty and students were wearing yellow Stars of David on their chests. In the center of each star was printed a number ... 6,000,000. I learned that B. Elmo Scoggins, Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament, was hosting a Holocaust Remembrance Service in one of the classrooms that afternoon. I went, and once again, saw the images and heard the stories ... and was moved. It was the first time I heard the words, "Never again."

It was also during my time at Southeastern Seminary that I became aware that the Jews were not the only victims of genocide. I had taken a summer elective course on “Peacemaking and the Nuclear Arms Race” and became one of the founding members of Peace Pilgrimage, an organization of students which eventually affiliated with the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America. Now, one of the great things about that class and that organization was that it seemed to attract some of the more liberal female students at Southeastern (of which, there were precious few). So, while I was committed to peacemaking, I also discovered that being involved with Peace Pilgrimage was a great source of dates.

I cannot remember her name. I remember that she was from Maryland, drove a Ford Escort XP and had long blond hair. I remember sharing a carafe of white wine with her at the Pizza Inn. Most of all, I remember going to see a movie with her. The movie was *The Killing Fields*, a cinematic re-telling of the experiences of *New York Times* journalist Sydney Schanberg and his associate, a Cambodian stringer named Dith Pran. [I was a really *fun* date.] The setting is the late 1970’s, and Schanberg and Pran are covering the collapse of the pro-Western government of Cambodia at the hands of the revolutionary Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot. While Schanberg eventually escapes back to the US, Pran is forced into a re-education labor camp, and witnesses the nightmare of “the killing fields”. By percentage, a great many more Cambodians were exterminated by the Khmer Rouge than were Jews eliminated by the Nazis in Europe. The single most poignant scene in the movie occurs when Pran manages to escape from the labor camp, and finds himself in the midst of thousands of corpses which have washed up on the shore of a lake that had become a dumping ground for victims ... an image reminiscent of the liberation of the Nazi camps by Allied troops. Those images still come to my mind each time I hear John Lennon’s “Imagine”, for it is that song which plays during the credits at the end of the film.

And the carnage continues ... Rwanda, Bosnia, Croatia, Sudan, Chechnya, Palestine (?) ... in each of these lands in just the last ten years, millions have died. In Rwanda alone, Tutsis killed 1,000,000 of their Hutu countrymen in the space of just a few months ... as the rest of world sat idly by.

“We are responsible for the world, and for each other.”

And what happens when the victim becomes the victimizer. This week, I feel that I had a profound experience of cognitive dissonance. I saw images on the television screen of the entire male population of a village gathered up by armed soldiers, their papers checked, and many of them carted off to a detention center. But these were not Jews being rounded up by black-bedecked SS death’s-head units. They were Palestinians being rounded up by Israeli defense forces. Whatever happened to “never again.”

Yom ha'Shoah is a call for remembrance coupled with a firm resolve. A head nodded in sympathy is worthless unless accompanied by hands dirtied in the struggle. Never again ... as long as I have breath ... as long as I have voice ... as long as I have two hands ... as long as I have life.

Martin Luther King, Jr. once said:

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere ... One day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek but a means by which we arrive at that goal. We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means. We shall hew out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope.

Remembering the Holocaust is not a pleasant thing to discuss with friends at a cocktail party. We don't celebrate *Yom ha'Shoah* with balloons and party favors and streamers and sweets. The realization that folks like you and me can be perpetrators as well as victims is too bitter to contemplate. But we must.

From the depths of despair, we must grasp hope.

As Eric Lashner wrote: "We must remember. Never forget. Hope is left."

We are all connected.

"We are responsible for the earth, and for each other."

Never again. Never again. Never again.

So may it be.

Extinguishing the Chalice

Knowing how quickly the flame of truth might be extinguished, how easily the chalice of fellowship broken, let us be vigilant in our faith, keep peace in our hearts, and make care for one another the watchword of our lives together.

So our light shines out ... everywhere ... into the world.

Closing Words

All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing.

-- Edmund Burke

**Take courage, friends.
The way is often hard, the path is never clear,
and the stakes are very high.
Take courage.
For deep down, there is another truth:
you are not alone.**

-- Wayne B. Arnason

***Shalom havayreem, shalom havayreem. Shalom! Shalom!
Shalom havayreem, shalom havayreem. Shalom! Shalom!***

-- Hebrew round sung by congregation

**The service is ended. Now the true work of the church begins.
Go in peace. Go in strength and power to create a better tomorrow.**