

Here We Stand
A Unitarian Universalist's Response to the Election
By
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I want to begin by sharing my feelings about this week's Presidential election, and presume that many of you will relate. Since Tuesday night I have had intense feelings of surprise, anger, disgust, fear, and sadness, five of the six primary emotions. The only primary emotion I've hardly felt at all this week is joy. I haven't felt the great joy I've had often in recent years, like the night America elected its first African American President eight years ago; or when Washington State became the first in the Nation to legalize same sex marriage by popular vote in 2012; or when the Supreme Court legalized it nationally just two summers ago; or when the world finally came together to tackle Climate Change in Paris a year ago; or when, just a month earlier, President Obama rejected the Keystone Oil pipeline; or when he announced his administration would stop deporting young Latinos, Hispanics, and Mexicans who've grown up in the U.S.; or when millions of Americans rallied around a Democratic Socialist, Bernie Sanders, in the name of economic equality; or when a major American political party nominated a woman as its Presidential candidate for the first time ever. This week it's been difficult for me to believe I live in the same country where all this joyous progress has been possible.

Instead, I've felt surprised and shocked that what seemed impossible has happened; that someone who has expressed so much hate and intolerance toward others, who overtly espouses racist and sexist and misogynistic attitudes, who brags of violating women, who believes President Obama was born in Kenya and that Global Warming is a hoax, and has not served in public office a day in his life, has become President elect of the United States of America. I'm surprised that so many Americans, almost but not quite half the voters who turned out Tuesday, could choose such a candidate. In the back of my head I keep thinking there's been some weird mistake waiting to be discovered that will end this nightmare.

I've also been feeling angry, angry and disgusted that so many Americans, almost but not quite half the voters who turned out Tuesday, would choose such a candidate. I'm angry that Hillary Clinton got more votes than Donald Trump, but he got elected. I'm angry and disgusted with the Democratic National Committee for its undemocratic use of super-delegates and closed-door shenanigans that may have usurped the Democratic process and contributed to this outcome. I'm angry and disgusted with the FBI for interfering with the election at the last minute. I'm angry and disgusted with the mainstream National News media that hoisted Donald Trump upon us by incessantly covering his ratings grabbing antics in a lopsided way that overshadowed all the other candidates in this election, Democrats and Republicans, as well as the many important issues truly facing our nation and our world. I'm angry that more than half the eligible voters in this country didn't even bother with it. I'm angry that more white women voted for Trump than for Clinton. Although those who felt the Bern ended up getting burned, I'm even a little angry that so many of them voted for Trump or didn't vote at all.

And I know that most of my anger is coming from a place of fear. I'm afraid, afraid of what comes next. I'm afraid that at a time when we need to tackle global warming the most, we have elected a man who believes it's a hoax and has promised to revive the deadly and dying fossil fuel industry. I'm afraid that all the racial progress we've made in recent years, including facing the painful reality of a racist criminal justice system and racist police practices on the streets, just got flushed down the toilet. I'm afraid of what's going to happen to our Latino neighbors, and to our Muslim neighbors, and to our African American neighbors. I'm afraid of the white supremacists and white nationalists who think they just got licensed to return us to an era of open hate and violence against anyone who looks, thinks, and acts differently. I'm afraid of lynchings and church bombings, and of fire hoses and police dogs. I'm afraid for my gay, lesbian and transgender friends and neighbors. I'm afraid our recovering economy is going to come crashing down again, like it always does when our government cuts taxes on the rich. I'm afraid for our Constitution and of the unjust rulings a Trump appointed Supreme Court is sure to make

But, most of all, I'm feeling sad, sad that we live in a nation where this could happen. Sad for all the children and youth in our nation saying they are afraid and asking their speechless parents for an explanation. I'm sad for my daughter who called me at 12:30 AM Wednesday morning telling me she couldn't sleep and is afraid of what all this means. I'm sad for all the women in our country, and all the women I know and love, who have now been told respect for women doesn't matter in this world, that sexual abuse isn't a big deal, that they will never be in control of their government, their own bodies, or anything else. I'm sad for all the Latino immigrants in our nation, and for their children who have been raised here, and for Muslims and Arabic looking people wondering what's coming next, and for asylum seekers, and for all the other marginalized groups of people now living in fear and uncertainty. I'm saddened by the difficult to believe reports of racism that have already happened just since Tuesday's election, like the Baylor University student who says she was pushed off a sidewalk in Dallas, Texas on Wednesday by a man who said, "No [N-word] allowed on the sidewalk;" and by fliers posted in restrooms at Texas State University calling for the torture of protestors and of University professors teaching, what it called, "Diversity Garbage;" or the words scrawled in a Minnesota high school bathroom saying "Make American Great Again: Go back to Africa," and "#white's only Trump Train;" or of a Muslim woman wearing a scarf in a New York subway, too frightened to respond to a man who told her, "Your time is up girlie;" and by Mosques being desecrated with graffiti in Trump's name; and middle school children chanting "build the wall" in the lunch room; and spray painted swastikas cropping up in lots of places; or the words, "black lives don't matter and neither does your vote," on a wall in North Carolina; I'm saddened to hear the story of a local little girl who, after the election, asked her adopted parents if they were going to have to send her back to Zambia; I'm saddened by the Facebook post I saw from our own City Council President, Ben Stuckart a couple days ago, telling the story of a local schoolteacher who had tears running down her face as she spoke of how frightened her students are. I could continue, but for now it is enough just to acknowledge that I am heavy hearted, that, like many of you, I am grieving.

I've begun this way, sharing my feelings with you, for several important reasons. Firstly, it helps to unload. So, thanks for listening! Secondly, I suspect many of you share similar

feelings, and to share our feelings together can be healing because there is strength in knowing we are not alone. Thirdly, I'm sharing my feelings with you because I believe emotional ignorance is a big part of the reason we're now in this situation. If more of us could better distinguish between our thoughts and our feelings, we would not be a people who so easily justifies our emotions by rationalizing them, and would become better able to think rationally and to consider the consequences our actions before making important decisions. And finally, I share my emotions because they are the impulses that move me to action, and it, thus, requires emotional intelligence to prevent myself from leaping forward without thinking things through. Having executive function and empathy for others, both functions of the neocortex, is pointless without emotional intelligence, without being aware and honest with ourselves about the feelings that are motivating us.

So now that I've unloaded my feelings and acknowledged my own emotional bias, I can better discuss what I think happened this week and where we go from here in an intelligent manner. But before doing so, I want to address what may be a tiny elephant in the room, my assumption that everyone here is as troubled by Trump's election as I am. It is possible, I realize, that there may be a few Unitarian Universalists who are satisfied with the election outcome, though my guess is they are very few. If they exist, I do not mean to exclude them from this conversation, but I do wish to clarify, as I have done in the past, that as a Unitarian Universalist minister I do not believe being inclusive means only saying things everyone will agree with.

I received an email earlier this week from someone who was troubled that I'd sent a response to our congregation presuming everyone receiving it feels devastated by the election results, and suggested it wasn't very inclusive or tolerant of me. I was grateful for the cordial exchange and explained that being inclusive doesn't mean everything goes, and that Unitarian Universalism has long identified as a liberal religion. As such, it is not possible for us to hold our tongues in response to the election of a man who espouses racist, sexist, xenophobic, and other deplorable ideologies. This is why Unitarian Universalist churches all over the country have been busy reaching out to console their grieving members much of this week.

This doesn't mean Republicans aren't welcome in our congregations, but it does mean we aren't obligated to espouse conservative values in the name of being inclusive. My morality doesn't include many of these values and I'll damn sure walk out of the pulpit before I'm compelled to profess values I morally disagree with. Until the mid 1960s, in fact, the members of our religion were mostly Republican, including our most recent Unitarian U.S. President, William Howard Taft. This began to change, however, when the Party of Lincoln began opposing the Civil Rights Movement and became more exclusively white. Today, according to a recent article in *UU World Magazine*, only 14 percent of us identify politically as something other than Democrat, which could be Libertarian, Green Party, Republican, or something else.¹ According to the most recent American Religious Identity Survey, furthermore, in 1990 the ratio between Democrats and Republicans in our churches was

¹ Schade, Tom, "There is No Going Back: An Unbridgeable Gap is Growing between Unitarian Universalism and the Conservative Movement," *UU World Magazine*, Fall 2016, 9-9-16.

only 2 to 1. In 2008 it became 11 to 1, and today, with 86 percent of us identifying as Democrats, the ratio is even greater. In many cases this isn't because Republican Unitarians, who described themselves as fiscally conservative and socially progressive, felt they were no longer welcome in our churches, but because they no longer felt welcome in the Republican Party, especially as it has become increasingly identified with socially conservative white Southerners and Evangelical Christians. In other words, many of them switched parties themselves, and today there are still many Unitarian Universalists in our churches who describe themselves as fiscally conservative and socially liberal, they just don't call themselves Republicans anymore. You may also be interested to know the number of Democrats in Unitarian Universalist churches is double the national average.

My friends, all are welcome here, but this doesn't mean all is welcome here. Ours is a tolerant religion, but not a religion of tolerance. We need not remain tolerant at the expense of all else, especially our values promoting equality and justice for all. All are welcome, but if there are those entering this sanctuary who hold the racist, sexist, xenophobic, ideologies espoused by Trump, it is unlikely they will feel at home, and, I will tell you this, if any should enter these halls and attempt to practice such hate, they will not be welcomed here on my watch! I will not be a milquetoast minister afraid of saying anything meaningful.

So, while I admit to making some general assumptions about Unitarian Universalists, namely that most of us are pained by the election result, I want you to know that I'm not making too many assumptions about the nearly, but not quite half of those Americans who voted for Trump. I'm sure there are some racists and sexists and ignorant people among them, but I refuse to vilify them or lump them into the overly simple and unflattering categories I've been hearing since Tuesday. For, as a Unitarian Universalist, I strive to uphold the worth and dignity of every person, and I believe the millions of individuals who voted for Trump, voted for their own individual reasons, whether I agree with them or not.

There are, however, two general assumptions I do make about Trump supporters. Firstly, I assume they share many of my values. Secondly, I assume that I share many of their fears. For my analysis of what just happened in our nation boils down to what I consider the fundamental psychological tension in all of us, *to belong or not to belong*. Sigmund Freud called this "the problem of human fate," explaining that, "A great part of the struggles of mankind centers round the single task of finding some [satisfying] solution between... individual claims and those of the civilized community."² Or, as Harvard psychologist, Robert Kegan says, "The two greatest yearnings of human life... may be the yearning for inclusion (to be welcomed in, next to, held, connected with, a part of) and the yearning for distinctness (to be autonomous, independent, to experience my own agency, the self chosenness of my purposes)."³ In short, the fundamental angst of the human condition is between belonging and being free, between society and the individual, between being included and being authentic. In his classic book, *Escape From Freedom*, Erich Fromm suggest this is the same tension that gives rise to fascist societies, and to the otherwise inexplicable rise of

² Freud, Sigmund, *Civilization and its Discontents*, (Dover Publications, Inc., New York, NY, 1930, 1994) p. 27.

³ Kegan, Robert, *The Evolving Self*, Harvard University Press, Boston, MA, 1982, p. 142.

authoritarian leaders like Donald Trump, whenever people move too far toward the “belonging” side of the equation. “As long as I struggle between my desire to be independent and strong and my feelings of insignificance and powerlessness I am caught in a tormenting conflict,” Fromm says, “[But] If I succeed in reducing my individual self to nothing, if I can overcome the awareness of my separateness as an individual, I may save myself from this conflict.⁴ So, to cope with this conflict, many give themselves over to the kind of groupthink we call fascism.

So, this is why, I believe so many voted for Trump, because they succumbed to the fear of being alone, of being left out, of being without the benefits of society, and to do so means creating a monotone society in which everyone looks, thinks, and acts alike; a society where those who appear to be different, threatening to the status quo, are excluded and oppressed. When Americans went to the polls this past week, it wasn’t a choice between Trump and Clinton, it was a choice between fear or freedom, and it appears, at least under our unjust electoral system, fear had the edge.

This, furthermore, is why I say I share many of the same values and the same fears with those who voted for Trump. The difference is, I chose my values over my fears. Certainly, I am afraid of being excluded, of being oppressed, of being left out, of being left without, but, in owning my fear, I’m able to step back, apply a little executive function, and think about my actions and decisions before I make them, and, with empathy, consider how they might impact others. The reason I believe Trump’s supporters and I share many of the same values is because I am a Unitarian Universalist, which means my values and principles have been mined from all of Humanity’s most sacred traditions, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and other religions, as well as from science, philosophy, humanism, and reason. The seven principles we ascribe to in our faith, which boil down to *dignity, equality, diversity, freedom, democracy, justice, and unity*, are not Unitarian Universalist principles alone; they are humanity’s principles. These are the things all of us believe in, that all of us want deep down and aspire toward when we aren’t overwhelmed by the fear of freedom.

This, it follows, is why I believe the most important and most loving thing we can do as a liberal religion is to become more present in the great countryside of America; To, as the great Universalist evangelist and founder of Universalism in America, John Murray famously proclaimed, “Go out into the highways and by-ways of America... Give the people, blanketed with a decaying and crumbling religion, something of your new vision. You may possess only a small light but uncover it, let it shine, use it in order to bring more light and understanding to the hearts and minds of men and women. Give them, not Hell, but hope and courage.” For, as we look at the political map, we realize the divide in our nation isn’t between blue states and red states, but between blue cities and red towns. The problem is not that we don’t have Republicans in our churches, but that we don’t have our churches in rural America to help remind our conservative brothers and sisters of the great values belonging to us all, contained within their own religions, held within their own deepest yearnings.

⁴ Fromm, Erich, *Escape from Freedom*, (Avon Books, Heart Corporation, New York, NY, 1941, 1965)p. 174.

So that's what we can do in response to this debacle, my beloved friends, using the communications technology we now have, and the resources we can share, we can go out into the highways and bi-ways and offer hope. During the year ahead we are going to support our Unitarian Universalist communities struggling in the nearby countryside, in places like Coeur d'Alene Idaho, Winthrop and Twisp Washington, and Whitefish Montana, and we're going to work to establish UU communities in places like Sandpoint, Idaho and anywhere else they are needed. And through this effort we are going to further develop a model of church growth in our denomination that others can follow so that someday Americans across the land can find the courage to choose freedom over fear and love over hate.

The other thing we can do this year is establish an International Organization that promotes and practices logic and emotional intelligence, so that more of us can more readily move into a place of executive function and empathic decision making. This is a project I've been thinking about for some time, and that I actually began working on while I was away and on vacation the past couple of weeks. Little did I realize how timely my efforts were. For we need to become a nation of critical thinkers, critical not only of what we are hearing from the biased, corporate controlled media, but also critical of our own beliefs so that we can begin to tell the difference between genuine reason and rationalized emotions. Stay tuned because there's more to come on this important endeavor, and, again, it's something I hope we can spearhead as a church community.

Those are a couple of the big picture responses to Trump's election. If you want to do something more immediate, I have several other suggestions. Firstly, UU Voices for Justice in Washington will be having its legislative conference today at 1:30 in our Chapel. If you want to help determine its legislative priorities, you can start with a chili lunch at 12:30, register to have your voice counted, then join in the conversation, when the meeting starts. This is going to be especially important during the next four years, to act locally that is, since we aren't going to get much national support for our progressive agenda.

Also, if you haven't heard, there's going to be a Candle Light Vigil tonight at 6:00 PM on the Spokane County Courthouse Lawn, a peaceful gathering for supporting others in our wider community. It's being organized by one of our own younger members, Lilia O'Riordan Rogers. I hope you'll show up with me to help support her, members of our local community, as well as those who are holding similar events across the nation.

And tomorrow night our City Council will decide whether to proceed with the Sick and Safe Leave Ordinance we all worked so hard to recently get passed. It's scheduled to go into effect in January, but now some in the business community are asking the Council to delay it in light of the passage of Initiative 1433, which will increase minimum wage in our state beginning in 2018, only if it isn't slowed down by expected lawsuits. This is clearly a delaying tactic. Please show up with me and members of the Spokane Alliance at the City Council meeting tomorrow at 6:00 PM to let our Council know the time is now!

And please mark your calendars for Tuesday, November 29th, when the kick-off for Spokane Initiative 2016-6, which will fine coal and oil companies for unsafely transporting their product via rail through our city, will take place at 6:30 PM. This is our "All Church" social

justice project this year, and I hope you'll join me in being involved. I was honored to have been the individual in our community to file the Initiative and, I just learned this week, will likely be named in any lawsuits against it. So please help make it worth my trouble.

Finally, if you haven't heard about it yet, people are beginning to wear safety pins as a way of showing the vulnerable and marginalized people in our community, African Americans, Latinos, Muslims, gays, lesbians, transgenders, women, and anyone else afraid of what will happen to them in a Trump nation, that we are safe to approach. This is something my friend Breean Beggs told me about a couple days ago and I've been wearing a safety pin ever since. It's something that was started in England after the Brexit vote, and many there wanted to let immigrants and other marginalized individuals know that they can be trusted. I've brought safety pins with me today, please take one and put it on wherever you go for as long as you must.

For this, my friends, is how we will get through this, not by changing how we do things, but continuing to do what we always do, by standing up for justice and equality in all places, at all times. The answer to the question, what are we going to do now, it to keep doing what we always do. To be ourselves. To uphold and promote our values and principles. So if you are feeling helpless, find someone to help. If you are sad, find someone to comfort. If you are afraid, find someone to encourage. If you feel alone, then take someone's hand. If you can't stand what has happened in our country, take a stand.