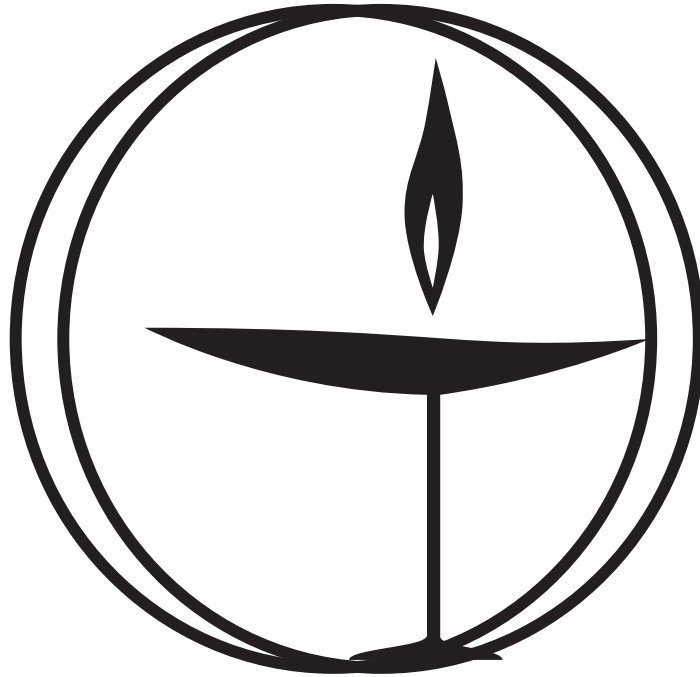


**Heart and Mind**  
**A Sermon offered at Countryside Church Unitarian Universalist**  
**By the Reverend Hilary Landau Krivchenia**  
**On May 31, 2009**



*Facts, religions, improvements, politics, trades, are as real as before;  
But the Soul is also real, – it too is positive and direct;  
No reasoning, no proof has establish'd it,  
Undeniable growth has establish'd it.*

~Walt Whitman, Carol of Words

*Faith is nothing but a firm Assent of the Mind: which if it be regulated,  
as is our Duty, cannot be afforded to anything but upon good Reason;  
and so cannot be opposite to it.*

~John Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding

## **Readings**

From the Divinity School Address of Ralph Waldo Emerson – given in 1838:

The perception of this law of laws awakens in the mind a sentiment which we call the religious sentiment, and which makes our highest happiness. Thought may work cold and intransitive in things, and find no end or unity; but the dawn of the sentiment of virtue on the heart, gives and is the assurance that Law is sovereign over all natures; and the worlds, time, space, eternity, do seem to break out into joy.

Certainly there have been periods when, from the inactivity of the intellect on certain truths, a greater faith was possible in names and persons. The Puritans in England and America, found ... scope for their austere piety... But their creed is passing away, and none arises in its room. I think no man can go with his thoughts about him, into one of our churches, without feeling, that what hold the public worship had on men is gone, or going.

now let us do what we can to rekindle the smouldering, nigh quenched fire on the altar. The evils of the church that now is are manifest.

All attempts to contrive a system are as cold as the new worship introduced by the French to the goddess of Reason, -- to-day, pasteboard and fillagree, and ending tomorrow in madness and murder. Rather let the breath of new life be breathed by you through the forms already existing. The remedy to their deformity is, first, soul, and second, soul, and evermore, soul.

From John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

By what has been before said of reason, we may be able to make some guess at the distinction of things, into those that are according to, above, and contrary to reason.

1. *According to reason* are such propositions whose truth we can discover by examining and tracing those ideas we have from sensation and reflection; and by natural deduction find to be true or probable.
2. *Above reason* are such propositions whose truth or probability we cannot by reason derive from those principles.
3. *Contrary to reason* are such propositions as are inconsistent with or irreconcilable to our clear and distinct ideas. Thus the existence of one God is according to reason; the existence of more than one God, contrary to reason; the resurrection of the dead, above reason. . . .

In *View From the Center of the Universe* Joel R. Primack and Nancy Ellen Abram wrote "There's a joke among cosmologists that romantics are made of stardust, but cynics are made of the nuclear waste of worn-out stars. Sure enough, the complex atoms coming out of supernovas can be seen either way, but these atoms introduce into matter the possibility of complexity, and complexity allows the possibility of life and intelligence. To call them nuclear waste is like calling consumer goods the waste products of factories. A cosmology can be a source of tremendous inspirational and even healing power, or it can transform a people into slaves or automatons and squash their universe into obsession with the next meal or with trivial entertainment. The choice of what attitude the twenty-first century will adopt toward the new universe may be the greatest opportunity of our time. The choice between existential and meaningful is still open."

## **Sermon**

Rem Stokes, a longtime member of this congregation was sitting, seemingly innocently, at a table in Atherton Hall a few weeks ago. I went over to greet him and he enthusiastically gave me a copy of this book – Head and Heart – a history of Christianity in America by Gary Wills. It was an instance of perfect timing and I told him so. Since I was planning on preaching on that very topic this week. It gave me the perfect review of our religious history -- a history in which Unitarianism, in particular, figures prominently.

Head and Heart – as though never the twain shall meet. History has made us quite used to thinking of those two as living on different planets – Mars and Venus, perhaps, or earth and heaven. We are used to the idea that these two are diametrically opposed forces that vie for control in the human soul.

When I studied philosophy in college, I was convinced that all we needed was our mind encountering the world and reasoning from that encounter – armchair philosophy. It was a secure idea – that there were certain truths that could be reasoned at and therefore would be inarguable. Better than faith – it would be knowledge. Out of this knowledge would come an ordered and just world ruled by measurable facts. According to this idea, the world of emotion was some sort of distraction from the orderly world of ideas and of the reason that would navigate them. Tidy. No fuss, no forays into the messy world. Thomas Aquinas, the 13<sup>th</sup> century Italian theologian, wrote in his Summa Theologica - "All the passions of the soul should be regulated according to the rule of reason . . ." Even Shakespeare, master of human feeling knew that emotion – when it was given free reign brought chaos and tragedy in its wake. Poor Hamlet, struggling with depression and anger and facing moral puzzles remarked "Give me that man/That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him/In my heart's core..." Passion was the enemy of clarity and rationality.

On the other hand, the dangers of reason were clear to the Catholic Church, as it condemned as heretical those who questioned the teachings of the church by reading scripture. The bible remained inaccessible for more than a millennia by keeping it in Greek and Latin. At least, it kept the numbers of heretics limited to those who could read those languages.

As soon as the Bible could be read by anyone who chose to, the cautious attitude of the Catholic Church seemed prescient. There were more dissenters than you could light a stick under. Including the folks doing science and noticing that scriptural accounts of the world might be inspired and inspirational but weren't accurate. The world wasn't created in 6 days and the sun didn't revolve around it. The struggle to reform the Catholic church led to the – you know – Reformation – and that led to a Europe that knew a religious zealot when one came along. So the Reformation eventually quieted down and the period known as the Enlightenment rose. That's when all those Armchair philosophers came rocking in. They were adherents to the cult of reason.

America was settled by people who wanted to read the Bible themselves – but who wanted very much the same sort of control that the Catholic Church had once had. It was a great disappointment as I learned this, years ago. I'd fallen completely for the idea of religious freedom as a foundation of this nation as it was delivered in elementary school – as a religious minority in a school that went from Kindergarten through fifth

grade – it was a comforting notion. But the reality of our Puritan forbearers was that they were caught up in a dangerous world – living on the very edge between life and death and they wanted assurance that all this hardship had not been for naught. They wanted their beliefs in charge, no dissensions tolerated. And from the genocide of the Native Americans to the witch trials, they felt justified killing in the name of their passionately held faith and the new Jerusalem which they'd been, they felt, given to be the masters of.

On American soil, the dark excesses of the Puritans ran aground as they met the values of the founding fathers – who'd been to Europe and been converted, you might say, to reason. Many of them were theologically Unitarian and they argued for a nation based in tolerance and a religion based in reason. They were able to organize a military overthrow of the king's rule – and they were able to enshrine in the constitution, the use of reason to set apart the arena of religion to create freedom for diverse religious beliefs. It was a time for dancing in the streets and for celebration. But, as luck would have it – not all the Puritans were happy to go gently into that good night. Absolutely not -- instead they spawned new movements and sweeping Great Awakenings.

Gary Wills the author of *Head and Heart* must be correct since he completely agrees with me that the Second Great Awakening was provoked by the growing sentiments of freedom and reason in this country. America was not yet a nation – but the people in it were drawn to the idea of self-government, freedom from a king, a greater sense of egalitarianism – though, as we know, that was entirely limited to all the landed, white, free males. Diatribes and pamphlets – like Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* – circulated the land and provoked a full scale and fevered swing toward reason. It was manifest in people like Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and the other founders. It was a reasoned revolutionary movement. Quite in contrast to the revolution in France that would run knee deep in passion and blood, our revolution was measured and was followed by a dramatic, though laborious process of creating a new government not through combat but through conversation.

Meanwhile the preachers of the great awakening – like the famous Jonathan Edwards – roved the countryside preaching hellfire and damnation for the unsaved. They encouraged people to have intense personal experiences of conversion because it was only by conversion that each person would be saved and you only knew that you'd been converted if you had a positively earthshaking, revolutionary experience. It was a studied irrationalism. In response, the theologically liberal clergy wrote pamphlets and preached sermons to try to revive reason. Those religious liberals were our direct forebears. They even called themselves Unitarians. The debate raged and, ultimately, the religious liberals won – with their vision of a loving god, a worthy humanity, and a future without hell. It was progressive – in harmony with the post-revolutionary spirit of the times.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ralph Waldo Emerson tried to thaw the cool rationalism of the Unitarians. He was both a Unitarian preacher and the heir of passionate revivalists – through his aunt Mary Moody Emerson, whose close relations were leaders in the revivalist movement. Emerson encompassed both worlds and he wanted Unitarianism to fuse reason with intuition, poetry, and passion. In 1838, when he gave his famous address to the graduating class at Harvard Divinity School, he exhorted

them to be newborn bards of the spirit and to get the fire lit in the churches again. Though the movement was young, there was, already, an old guard. His call for a more passionate Unitarianism caused another pamphlet debate. Emerson was, himself, too much a product of staid New England to bring about the change he hoped for.

What I've come to recognize in Emerson and in the controversy that he unleashed in Unitarianism, was one of the core tensions in Unitarianism and later in Unitarian Universalism: the tension between head and heart.

When we face our current tensions – theist and nontheist, spirituality versus intellect, faith versus skepticism, political, spiritual, we are, quite simply, living out again, that unresolved tension.

And our society is continually beset by this same issue.

I found on youtube recently an amazing cartoon, produced by the Walt Disney Studios in 1943 as piece of war propaganda. It looks inside the brain of a man and shows a sort of babyish cave man character – emotion – who craves violence, sex, and adventure. There's also a nerdy, bespectacled character -- the personification of reason. The two struggle constantly. Emotion falls prey to fear mongering, hate speech, and false pride and is swayed by Adolph Hitler. Dictators, we're told, will use this emotional aspect of ourselves to manipulate and control us unless we use reason to see through them. Emotion and reason make peace with one another as they head off in an army plane to fight the Nazis.

The sentiment the cartoon expressed was echoed by free thinkers around the world, even as the war ended, the troops came home, and we entered the 1950s. In our fellowships around the country, people gathered eager to find kindred spirits – but the word spirit would have been off the table and they gathered to some large degree around the rejection of all that emotion that they had just lived through – the cruelty of war and the madness of fascism. They put reason in the driver's seat. One of my favorite Unitarians is Gene Roddenberry, the creator of Star Trek. Roddenberry looked into the future and wanted to find a universe of peace. He created a character – Mr. Spock – the Vulcan, whose people had been able to develop a peaceful culture by entirely subduing emotion with reason. They still had feelings but their feelings were tamed and controlled by their superior reason. That's one approach. But it's a reactive approach.

Stephen Colbert famously said: "I don't trust books. They're all fact, no heart. And that's exactly what's pulling our country apart today. Because face it, folks, we are a divided nation. Not between Democrats or Republicans, or conservatives and liberals, or tops and bottoms. No, we are divided by those who think with their head, and those who know with their heart..." □ Sadly, there are people who think that he's not being satirical.

In fact, reason and emotion are simply two aspects of our human being. Professor Garrett Merriam of Southern Indiana University, whom I was fortunate to recently discover, says: "The division between reason and emotion is an artifact of western philosophy." I'm grateful to Professor Merriam for putting so succinctly what I put rather ramblingly. In fact, it is the very reason that I left philosophy after college, studied massage therapy, and entered the ministry. Western philosophy is largely – though not solely responsible – for the partitioning of humanity into body and spirit, reason and emotion, nature and civilization.

Merriam says, as I do, that heart and mind are interlocked ways in which we

function. They are inseparable. We fool ourselves when we pretend that we reason without feeling – even in mathematics. Merriam points out that if you hook a mathematician up to machines that map emotional response and let that mathematician explore some beautiful equations you find ample evidence for passion in mathematics.

Merriam also pointed to the case of Phineas Gage. Gage was foreman of a railway construction gang, preparing the ground for the Rutland and Burlington Rail Road in Vermont. On September 13<sup>th</sup> 1848, an accidental explosion blew an iron rod through his head destroying his prefrontal cortex. Although the research done on him was slight, key things were learned from Gage, who lived for twelve years after this unique accident. He was a man with both reason and emotion – but after the prefrontal cortex was severed he was a ruder more impulsive man. He was highly emotional. It was from Gage that doctors learned that both reason and emotion live in and are coordinated by the brain. They rely upon, complement, and inform one another.

Of course, it doesn't take a pole through the head to demonstrate that in religion no path is purely reasonable, nor is one anyone purely emotional. The most enthusiastic preacher claiming utter surrender to the word uses reason to parse the passages and create her or his own interpretation. In my experience, the atheist who claims to have abandoned enthusiasm in favor of a few good facts, is moved by the plight of all life in deep compassion or is recovering from a bad religious experience.

In Emerson's time the revivalists had begun to change. It wasn't enough, any longer to threaten hellfire and damnation – the logic of an angry and condemning God wasn't enough to hold sway. Many fundamentalists found themselves in a more benign mode – and are to this day. At the same time there was a strain of fundamentalism that was, Wallis called it, premillennial. They believed that the current challenges and turmoil were pointing to the end of time – the final coming of the Lord. They were apocalyptic in their vision and no earthly revolution was needed – only the revolution at the end of time as Jesus would return and establish the kingdom on earth. They were not concerned with improving the conditions of humanity as that would only create peace that might delay the final coming. They were unwilling to minister to the needy, alleviate suffering, in fact welcoming earthly suffering and discord as heralding the beginning of the end.

Like the apocalyptic vision of Nazism this premillennial thought is willing to sacrifice all life on earth in favor of being a chosen, superior people who will be saved and feel no suffering. They're willing to sacrifice the image of a loving God and a compassionate Jesus in favor of a Jesus who will destroy the unsaved in a blood bath of apocalyptic proportion – just as Hitler was willing to destroy Jews, Gypsies, Gays, in order to define and preserve a chosen race.

The terms may change – but in era after era there has been a religious or political movement willing to call upon unrestrained emotion to divorce people from this world and to focus on an end time. It is this repeated pattern that has made of Unitarian Universalist tradition a tradition more grounded in reason than emotion – as a hedge against what our sources call “idolatries of the mind and spirit”.

But that is no way to settle the dispute between the mind and the heart. It is no better than the metal rod that shot through Phineas Gage's brain. We are heart and mind. There is no genuine separation -- there is only one being – we are reason and emotion – they inform and shape one another and we convince ourselves otherwise at great risk.

Unitarian Universalists, heirs now to both the ultra-rationalists and the transcendentalists, heir to the faith of the founders and of every wave of immigrant to reach these shores, we have a unique role to play in settling the mistaken estrangement between heart and mind. We are uniquely able – and can be more intentionally – those who bridge what was artificially separated. When we see it played out in our midst – in disagreements over priorities in worship, in work within or outside the congregation, in the balance of our yearly calendar, rather than getting swamped in the detail, perhaps we can remember the larger picture – that we working to clarify and honor among us both reason and emotion and therefore, the very wholeness of human being.

We are open to the revelations of science, but we also lay claim to the insights of the world's religions and the experience of every person. We revere this world and celebrate this life and we recognize that to do so is to be called to work for justice and peace in the world, it is to honor the body and to respect the heart. We still wrestle between heart and mind – it is an honest aspect of our spiritual and intellectual inheritance. We intend to guard against anything that would degrade the world and life within this garden.

I get tired of the overly pluralistic modesty of Unitarian Universalists. We need not be a tepid faith for fear of reason or of emotion. We need not be a tepid faith for fear of offending – we will offend anyway. Instead I ask us to step forward – as the direct heirs of the framers of the constitution, of the intellectual life of this nation, and as the faith that has lived in the very center of the American struggle for identity. We have a critical key that can make clear the American story. That can make clear the human story – and all we really need to do is to devote ourselves to this wholeness with all our heart and mind.