

October 1, 2006

**“Creativity and Change”**

Karen Vyner-Brooks

Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube

**Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube:**

The late Helen Myers, a member of this congregation, left us an amazing bequest. It was a fund the purpose of which was to bring Unitarian Universalist speakers, artists, and others with important things to say or show or perform as a way to bring new ideas, new perspectives, and new energy into the life of our community. This weekend, more than forty of us have been taking part with Karen Vyner-Brooks in a workshop on the Enneagram. The Enneagram is an ancient method of spiritual reflection and spiritual direction. Today I would like to introduce Karen Vyner-Brooks, an old friend, a colleague of Sonya's from the Center for Creative Leadership. She's a Management Consultant and she modestly calls herself an Enneagram Instructor, but she's one of the country's foremost experts on the Enneagram. Today we're honored to have Karen Vyner-Brooks.

**Karen Vyner-Brooks:**

This weekend some of your fellow congregants, as Arvid just mentioned, and I have been exploring change through the Enneagram. The Enneagram is an ancient model passed down across many cultures through the centuries. It describes nine points of view, nine ways of paying attention, and nine strategies for avoidance. *Ennea* is the greek root for nine and *gram* means figure. This dynamic and holistic system also helps us to understand our patterns of stress behavior and it can guide us back to equilibrium. Whether it's change that we've chosen or change that has been thrust upon us, once we recognize our pattern of resistance, we have the opportunity to break that habit of attention and enter into a new one. Behaviors that include letting go and meeting the situation with equanimity help us to begin to embrace change.

There's a Hindu proverb that states “There is nothing noble in being superior to another person. True nobility is in being superior to your previous self.” When we choose to embrace change, we connect with the mystery of life; we have the opportunity to experience grace. We have made the choice to breathe deeply, to listen, and to let go. When change becomes difficult it's usually because to a lesser or greater extent the emotions of fear, anger, or desire are present in us and we're hooked. We often cling to an emotion or a belief because it's familiar; it's safer than seeing the situation or the person from another perspective, easier than taking the time to reflect.

The Enneagram can be used as a way to view emotions, our minds, and our bodies as tools for growth and for inner peace. The Enneagram is divided into nine points and those points can be divided into three triads. Anger, fear, and desire are expressed in different ways according to one's point of view. Wherever home base is for you on the Enneagram, once you recognize desire, fear, or anger, then you have the opportunity to transform these emotions into faith, hope, and love. Breathing deeply, relaxing, listening, helps us to regain our equilibrium and begin to accept change.

My friend Jeff was flying his small airplane over the mountains just east of here, coming back on a wintery night from Mexico. There was snow in the mountains. His plane caught the edge of a storm and it crashed. He had a near-death experience. His legs were shattered and somehow he got both himself and the passenger sitting beside him out of the wreckage. Soon after he was rescued, his doctor informed him that part of one of his legs would have to be amputated and it was. He responded with fear when he first tried to walk with the prosthesis; it was so very painful. His fear turned into faith when he observed a family visiting their quadriplegic father across the hall. Because Jeff knew that that man would probably never walk again, whereas Jeff had the possibility. Jeff was angry that it was so painful and that it took six months to learn to walk again, but Jeff's love for life and the love he received from family and friends was strong. So Jeff's fear, desire, and anger were transformed in faith, hope, and love. Today he is still an equine specialist and rides his horses into the high country.

Fear, desire, and anger, when recognized, can propel us to change. How have you dealt with your fear, your anger, or your desire? Do you take the time to transform your emotions into faith, hope, and love? That's our opportunity right now. That's the way for us to use our emotions in healing ways that help us regain equilibrium in the face of change and help us make a difference to our loved ones and to our community. Setting intention starts the momentum of thought and action towards a new beginning. Faith in oneself and in others and the great mystery of life helps us to go beyond our self-imposed limitations and provides us with energy. Of course, love gives us the connection with the world around us. We realize, as the Buddhists say, there is no inherent existence of anything in and of itself. Everything has an interrelation with something else.

There is a wonderful African story about transition that reminds us about our connection and love and community. When a woman in a certain tribe knows she is pregnant, she goes out into the wilderness with a few friends and together they pray and meditate until they hear the song of the child. They recognize that every soul has its own vibration that expresses its unique flavor and purpose. Then the women attune to the song, they sing it out loud and then they return to the tribe and teach it to everyone else. When the child is born, the community gathers and sings the child's song to him or her. Later, when the child enters into education, the village gathers and chants the child's song. When the child passes through the initiation to adulthood, the people again come together and sing. At the time of marriage the person hears his or her song. Finally, when the soul is about to pass from this world, the family and friends gather at the person's bed, just as they did at their birth, and sing the person to the next life. In the African tribe there is one other occasion upon which villagers sing to the child. If at anytime during his or her life the person commits a crime or aberrant social act, the individual is called to the center of the village, the people in the community form a circle around him or her, and they sing their song to them. The tribe remembers that the correction for anti-social behavior is not punishment, but is love and the remembrance of identity. When you recognize your own song you have no desire or need to do anything that would hurt another person and a friend is someone that knows your song

and sings it to you when you have forgotten it. Those who love you are not fooled by your mistakes you have made or dark images you may hold about yourself. They remember your beauty when you feel ugly, your wholeness when you are broken, your innocence when you feel guilty, and your purpose when you're confused.

You may not have grown up in an African tribe that sings your song to you at crucial life transitions, but life is always reminding you when you're in tune with yourself and when you're not. When you feel good, what you're doing matches your song and when you feel awful, it doesn't. In the end, we shall all recognize our song and sing it well. You may feel a little warbly at the moment, but so have all the great singers. Just keep singing and you will find your way home. Whether you have chosen to change something in your life or change has been imposed upon you, you can meet and greet change with faith, hope, and love. Breathe deeply, listen to your song, and let go.

We've been looking at change through the lens of the Enneagram. Another ancient tradition that speaks about change is Mahayana Buddhism. Arvid will now speak to you about understanding fear, desire, and anger from the Buddhist perspective.

**Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube:**

One of the things that always gives me great joy and awe is the understanding that despite the differences in the world's religions and wisdom traditions, there is a core there. The Enneagram is a very subtle and powerful tool to look at one's particular manifestation of spirit in this world, or, as some have put it, the nine different faces of the image of God. It's interesting how closely Buddhism matches the Enneagram. The Buddha also had a theory of personality. It's based on the three poisons of the mind. It is, according to the Buddha's teachings, what keeps us from our true humanity. The three poisons of the mind are: clinging, we heard about desire; aversion, we heard about anger; and delusion, we've heard about fear. These all, when they take us over, when they are coloring our consciousness in a moment of time, cause us and other people to suffer. We all have all three of those and the purpose of our lives, according to Buddhism, is to transform the energies, which are basically positive, of those impulses in us into an enlightened energy. We all have these three poisons. We have all three of them, but it seems, the Buddha said, that we prefer one over the other two. With spiritual practice we can turn these poisons into fuel for our enlightenment.

In Mahayana Buddhism there are also figures that are called *bodhisattvas*. The closest thing from common western experience that I can compare them to are the saints in Catholicism and orthodoxy. A bodhisattva is a being who has reached enlightenment and is about to enter enlightenment, but out of compassion for all other beings who are still suffering vows to stick around and help the suffering beings until all the innumerable beings have been enlightened. They are, for those of you who are familiar with Jungian terms, *archetypes*.

You may be an aversive type. That might be your particular personality style. How can you tell? Suppose you're going to a party and you enter a room. If you're an aversive type what you notice first is everything you don't like about those rooms and all the

people you don't like. With practice we can transform that energy into the energy that the bodhisattva of compassion, *Avalokitesvara* represents. The Dalai Lama is supposedly the reincarnation of the *Avalokitesvara*, this bodhisattva, this saint of compassion. In a lot of the iconography in his male form (all of these interestingly enough have a male and female forms that are depicted) he often has eleven heads looking in all directions so that he can see all of the suffering beings in the world and innumerable arms, each of the hands on the arms have an eye to see the suffering and the hands are there to help relieve the suffering. Someone who is an aversive type has a call, according to Buddhism, to develop compassion for others especially. In China the female version of *Avalokitesvara*, *Kuan Yin*, is the most popular of all the Buddhist bodhisattvas, this feminine energy of compassion. Love is understanding; that's the important part to remember. The eyes of the bodhisattva see the origins of suffering and understand. The Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh says you cannot love without first seeking to understand. To understand is to love.

Say you are walking into a room, walking into a party, and you don't know what you want to do next or why you're there or what. You're kind of confused. That means that you may be a deluded type. On my altar I have the bodhisattva of wisdom, which is the evolved part of that energy, *Manjusri*. He has a sword, the Sword of Discerning Wisdom that cuts through all the bull. It's to look deeply, to ask the question "Is this true or is it just something I want to believe? How do I know? Everybody says this, that doesn't mean it's true." rather than living in my head, making things up, creating wonderful theories that are not grounded in reality. That sword is my inspiration. There is a vow in evoking the power of *Manjusri*. In one Zen tradition it goes like this: "We aspire to learn your way, which is to be still and look deeply into the heart of things and into the heart of people. We look with unprejudiced eyes. We look without judging or reacting. We will look deeply so that we will be able to understand the roots of all being and the impermanent and selfless nature of all that is." So if you are a deluded type, you can transform that energy by slowing down and not making things overly complicated and abstract. Quieting the mind and looking deeply without prejudice may be a practice for you.

Then there is the clinging type. The clinging type goes into the room where the party is and sees people and objects that are attractive and immediately goes to them. The bodhisattva for that transformed energy is *Samantabhadra*. *Samantabhadra* is the bodhisattva of universal compassion. He is the exemplar of generosity and service to others. I told you I would talk about the Rummage Sale. If you are a clinging type, you want to hold on to stuff. Maybe you have three storage units of stuff you haven't seen and don't even know that you have, but it's really hard to let go. A practice for you might be to go through all that stuff and bring it here so we can sell it. It is a spiritual discipline. I am not kidding you. See how you feel afterward. *Samantabhadra* rides an elephant and that elephant has six tusks. The tusks represent the practice, compassion, morality, patience, diligence of practice, and wisdom. The vow that goes with that is: "We vow to bring joy to one person in the morning and to ease the pain of one person in the afternoon. We know that every look, every action, and every smile can bring happiness to others."

When it comes down to it, all three of those poisons of the mind are about clinging. Delusion is clinging to ideas that do not serve. Anger is a reaction to clinging to the way you wish things were. Of course, there is the grasping that can easily become greed and self-centeredness. Service to others is a universal practice of transforming these energies into what it takes to reach our true humanity. May we have the courage, the intention, and the support in our community to take the energies that are causing us to suffer and transform them into our song because the world needs to hear it.

So be it.