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MINNS LECTURE I

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SAVE THE MALES

CHANGING MEN CHANGING THE WORLD

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world;
indeed it's the only thing that ever has.*

Margaret Mead

Nothing is impossible if you believe people can change.

Roger Sanjek

The Challenge

There has been a massive withdrawal from participation in the life of American society in recent history. This was documented in Robert Putnam's trenchant book entitled *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Communities*, a volume that vividly portrays our society breaking down due to severe disconnection from families, neighborhoods, organizations, even the republic itself. *Bowling Alone* especially evidences a retreat of men from communal involvement in everything civic.

Furthermore, during the past 25 years, when liberal, mainline churches and temples have lost millions of members, statistics show that more men have left than women. The numbers of men in attendance and leadership (both lay and professional) have been diminishing within Unitarian Universalism as well.

Speaking solely to the condition of our own communion, I contend this exodus is primarily occurring because adult men comprise the least nourished constituency in our liberal religious ranks. We are inadequately satisfying the deeper appetites of our men, whether

voiced or unvoiced-hungers for a mature liberal religious masculinity that will produce authentic soulful and prophetic growth, inner sustenance and outer purpose.

Although the bulk of men continue to transact business per usual, their interiors are aching for solace and direction. I know, and so do you, too many men leading "lives of quiet desperation", to quote forebrother Henry David Thoreau's ominous phrase.

Now, I'm not recommending that we beat a hasty retreat from what has been, in recent decades, an essentially healthy feminization of our movement. Not at all. My partner-in-life and ministry, Carolyn, has embodied feminine reality at its fullest, and I've aspired to be her soulmate as an ardent, unabashed pro-feminist man. For better, for worse, forever.

Nourishing the health and holiness in both women and men are not oppositional, but mutually reinforcing, endeavors. Both are passionate vows we must make and sustain as a movement, lest we slither into irrelevance.

Decades ago, women gathered together and said: "We need a women's federation. We must band together as women to accomplish what we can't do singly-and apart from not against men!" Well, in the waning moments of the 20th century, some of us convened to pursue the formation of a brothering path for men in alignment with Unitarian Universalist principles and directives. We named it the Unitarian Universalist Men's Network.

So I'm throwing down the gauntlet to our progressive religious tradition, that we pledge abundant resources to the intentional care and feeding of the mature masculine soul...simultaneously with continuing our dogged commitment to women. We must undergird men in the honorable yet rugged quest to become what the 13th century Persian Sufi poet, Rumi, called "hunters of more invisible game."

When Robert Bly was asked to establish a nationwide "men's movement," and to serve at its helm, he quickly retorted "that the last thing men need today is another political union with one of them as its boss, another king of the mountain; for what is truly happening to men is

occurring inside men. It is essentially an interior revolution." But I would quickly amend: an interior revolution that produces significant behavioral adjustments as well. The brothering revolution I'm espousing will alter men in both soulful and prophetic ways.

A related note. When we launched the UUMeN's network in 1993, it's charge was to be a clearing house for exchange of information of special interest to Unitarian Universalist men and to work alongside other continental organizations committed to the same goals. But the emphasis was always indigenous: to help local Unitarian Universalist men and groups foster "a broad range of brothering communities that provide opportunities for growth in a trustworthy atmosphere."

Men have been well-schooled in building continental empires and monolithic movements. Our founding brothers agreed that we didn't need another centralized club but could better serve Unitarian Universalist men by encouraging them to keep growing personally, socially, and spiritually in their home tribes. For we men can all too-readily avoid soul work, as well as prophetic service, by merely proliferating bureaucratic structures and conducting business meetings.

Our emphasis from the outset was to think globally and to act locally-to bid men to serve a vision beyond our own egos while still working the soil where we dwell. As Jean Houston puts it: "We overcome detachment and ineffectiveness by joining local life to great life." In the brothering way we seek to marry the unit and the universal.

When men become healthier bearers of sacred masculinity, all entities whom we touch become stronger and happier. Such has been my measured experience as a parish minister since 1967 and as an involved leader/participant in men's growth since 1972.

There exists no more fitting place in town for men's maturation to transpire than in our local congregations. In truth, it's both the church's duty and joy to furnish the setting and support. Hence, I direct my six distinct yet overlapping lectures to our Unitarian Universalist movement in general and our local parishes in particular:

- I. **Save the Males:** *Changing Men Changing the World*
- II. **A Huge Foolish Project:** *Setting Up a Men's Table on Every Church Patio*
- III. **Men and Faith:** *Living the Vows of A Mature Liberal Religious Masculinity*
- IV. **Men and Might:** *Wielding Power in Responsible Ways*
- V. **Men and Force:** *Saying Yes to Aggression and No to Violence*
- VI. **Men and Aging:** *Blessing and Being Blessed as Elders*

And on a more personal note, I would dedicate these lectures to our two granddaughters and two grandsons, all under 7 years of age-in fact, to all Unitarian Universalist grandsons and granddaughters, that they might have healthy male mentors around, at home and work, at play and in their churches.

May our liberal religious alternative bequeath not merely some money or a platitudinous message but a vigorous movement for our descendants.

As a graying, gnarled elder myself, I would humbly offer these lectures in the spirit of sister Marian Wright Edelman who wrote: "I've always believed that I could help change the world, because I've been lucky to have adults around me who did."

My Thesis

There are lots of ways of framing what I'm about in this initial, groundfloor lecture. I could have named it: *Is There a Future for Men in Unitarian Universalism?* But that sounds a bit too doleful or piteous, maybe even adversarial. Another option: *The Intentional Care and Feeding of the Masculine Soul* is surely descriptive of the quest but unduly tame. Consequently, I've chosen *Save the Males* as the overarching title of the series, starting with Lecture I.

Since I began men's work 30 years ago, my bedrock premise hasn't altered much, indeed it's been fortified: changing men changes the world! And why do men need to change? For our

very own good *and* for the well-being of all living entities whom we touch. And it will be "change that comes out of foundation, not fireworks," to use a phrase from Gail Godwin's *Evensong*.

As an unrepentant missionary, I would further declare that if we Unitarian Universalists want a saner globe, more merciful homes, more equitable workplaces, more satisfying gender and racial bonds, then we will be emboldened to do the gloriously tough yet fulfilling work of occasioning a fresh, invigorated version of masculinity in Unitarian Universalism. Author Barbara Kingsolver goes to the heart of the matter: "the very least you can do in your life is figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope." My lectures are about living inside the hope of a more mature liberal religious masculinity within our Unitarian Universalist world. And beyond.

When men change-soulfully and prophetically, internally and externally-everyone benefits...more than that, the entire Creation is mended. Men's beleaguered bodies and stunted souls will rebound. The majority of women and children will leap exuberantly. Violence of every sort will most assuredly diminish. Animals and plants will be seen to spring heavenward. Even the deities can be expected to throw a party.

I bet my life on that hope and try to behave accordingly!

Ultimately, It's about Salvation

Men's work spells nothing less and nothing more than transformation-I'll up the ante, salvation. This sentiment of changing men as a salvational venture first came home to me when I was ministering in Davenport, Iowa in the mid-1970's, and a man named Bill arrived in town, ostensibly to set up his own dinner theater. Unfortunately, Bill never accomplished that dream in his three years among us, but something else happened. Bill's soul caught on fire.

He wrote songs for our church, led group discussions on Unitarian Universalism, portrayed historical personages, Mark Twain being his specialty. But more than that, Bill entered his

buddhahood; he was awakened from a slumber. And as he was leaving our area to return to New England to rejoin his family-after his intrepid experiment in America's heartland-Bill testified during a farewell worship service, saying something I've never forgotten: "I entered this Unitarian outpost in order to receive some intellectual nourishment, maybe occasional enlightenment, but I got more: I was saved-saved from myself and saved for the world. Hallelujah, thanks be to you folks as well as to the Eternal Spirit!" "Saved" was Bill's exact word, and this, my friends, was 30 years ago when our movement never mentioned anything about saving or being saved, unless in the past tense and with derision.

I stand before you tonight to proclaim that I've seen such a salvational change happen, with my own eyes, to hundreds of men; yea, it's happened periodically to my own crusty, gnarled soul as well. I've seen men whose lives have turned outside-in, then inside-out again-men who have become gentler yet stronger males at home. Men who have dared to quit their secure jobs, because the posts became too confining or incongruent with their values. Men who have left all sorts of closets for closer encounters with life. Men who have dumped much fear for much love. Men who have marched for causes they wouldn't even write checks for in earlier days. Men who have left unhealthy bonds, wobbled and whined and wept for awhile, then stood tall and moved ahead. Men who have agonizingly matured, right in front of us, into a more suitable sexual orientation.

I've seen men massage men's backs; using their hands, for the first time, to touch another man for healing not hurt. And, afterwards, pledging never to do harm with their own hands ever again...to anyone, anything. I've seen men, who've been emotionally constipated most of their lives, never stop crying for an entire weekend, their tears wetting, then cultivating, the very ground upon which they stand.

Can you feel the earth shake a bit and the heavens sing some when imagining such kinds of saving passages?

I've seen men finally "get" the ravaging reality of their own racism, often when unavoidably facing a burdensome condition of their own. I've seen men emerge from prison life to tell

their stories in our safe, saving circles...then other men, converted by the confessions, stirred to go forth and work in brothering other men behind bars.

On and on, I could go on and on. And we will, we must never run out of opportunities for men-liberal, bright, so-called together, oft-productive men confessing their deepest wounds and wishes-bravely unraveling their stories of bone-deep hurt and spirit-soaring hope in sacred circles that gladly harbor their hearts.

That's why we have our churches, folks-that's why we need men's groups, to enable more and more men to become brothers-for that's how males are truly saved...by becoming brothers.

I'm reminded of the fact that in our Universalist tradition members were expected to refer to each other as "brother" or "sister"; indeed, in the early years of American Universalism, the term Reverend was seldom used in reference to clergy. A male minister was a brother, your spiritual peer. The truth is that level glances and active gazes only come from genuine brothers and sisters, whether linked in faith or greeted on the road.

Brothering means choosing to relate respectfully and intimately, starting with yourself, branching out directly to other men, then connecting justly with women and children, and moving outward to form healthy kinship with all of creation. Brothering unquestionably marks a bold, evolutionary leap in the maturing of males!

For the Whole World Are We Born

Now, by talking about saving the males, I'm not trying to be precious or exclusionary. We've got to save the females, the whales, the males, and more. The whole universe-what Kurt Vonnegut calls "The Great Big Everything"! In truth, we Unitarian Universalists bet our lives on the conviction that all reality is utterly interconnected. So, saving one portion of existence banks on saving the rest of it

There's a slogan that served as the family motto of Bishop John A. T. Robinson from Great Britain: "Non nobis solum sed toti mundo nati" (*Not for ourselves alone but for the whole world are we born*). Another version, if you will, of our all-encompassing Unitarian Universalist theology.

But, like it or not, I arrived as a male being and have chosen to stay one, thereby fulfilling my gendered vocation. Accordingly, as a man, any momentous change must begin with my own incarnation and radiate forth from there. I can't afford to get stuck on myself, but I've got to begin there. And, furthermore, when I say "save the males", I'm talking about *all* men, not just men I like or men who resemble my opinions, men dwelling in my homeland, men of a particular race, faith-choice or class, ability or orientation. No, I concur with Walt Whitman who claimed that "all men are my brothers."

Now, this clarion call for such a brothering revolution shouldn't come as a surprise. For, aren't mosques, churches, temples, and sanghas commissioned to be centers of redemption? Aren't religious homes in business principally to strengthen the character of their adherents? Aren't tribes like ours supposed to be focused upon nothing less than full-blown repentance and renewal?

James Luther Adams, the premier Unitarian Universalist theologian of the 20th century, pinpoints the change-agent imperative of religious bodies in the following tale:

Some years ago I was a member of the Board of Trustees of the First Unitarian Church in Chicago. A member of the Board often complained about the minister preaching too many sermons on race relations. He often said that academics, of course, know little of the world of reality. One evening at a meeting of the Board he opened up again. So the question was put to him, "Do you want the minister to preach sermons that conform to what you've been saying about 'kikes' and blacks?" "No," he replied, "I just want the church to be more realistic."

Then the barrage opened, "Will you tell us what's the purpose of a church anyway?" "I'm no theologian. I don't know." "But you have ideas, you're a member here, a member of the Board of Trustees, and you're helping to make decisions here. Go ahead, tell us the purpose of the church. We can't go on unless we have some understanding of what we're up to here." The questioning continued, and items on the agenda for the evening were ignored.

At about one o'clock in the morning our friend became so fatigued that the Holy Spirit took charge. And he gave a remarkable statement regarding the nature of our fellowship. Our friend said, "The purpose of the church is...well, the purpose is to get hold of people like me and change them."

So it is. The job of our liberating religion is, frankly, to convert us-literally to turn us around toward healthier, happier, and holier lives as earthlings. That includes saving the males! Saving males from themselves and for themselves. More than that, saving males from harming others and for reforming society and respecting the planet.

But, alas, religious communities fall short of being stimulating, let alone salvational, centers of change-Unitarian Universalists societies included. Instead religion too often produces reinforcers of the status quo rather than movers and shakers. Granted, individual Unitarian Universalists challenge the gender stereotypes and injustices prevalent in modern society. And there are congregations across our faith tradition that create kinship circles supporting men to become more soulfully alive and prophetically responsive. But the numbers are modest.

A Palpable Plight

Men's attendance is down in our churches: by some estimates, one man for every two women. Numbers of men being attracted to professional religious leadership is flagging. And, if truth be told, most men, in local congregations of any stripe or size, are still lodged in traditional roles of doing maintenance work, raising the funds, leading Boards. Men as religious educators, paid or volunteer, are the exception. Fostering viable boy-friendly programming remains a live challenge for most of our parishes.

By some unofficial analyses, the percentage of Unitarian Universalist parishes that have a men's presence on its campus is meager, perhaps 10%. Hence, the number of our religious societies that exhibit a men's table on its patio, let alone sustain a continuous brothering path, are few and far between. And some groups have been known to piddle out after an initial burst of energy. An annual Father's Day service, infrequent potluck-discussions, or even a five-week series won't suffice; they constitute mere blips on any local ecclesiastical screen.

There are plenty of explanations but no good excuses for the glaring dearth of steady programming to assist men in their arduous (yet playful) work on the road toward becoming more mature liberal religious pilgrims. We must do better by and for our men. Remember: one *raison d'être* of sanghas, churches, temples, and mosques is to save the males!

Now, it seems to me, and to the leadership of the UU Men's Network as well, that the optimal answer to attracting and holding men in our UU congregations is to provide programming that primarily (not secondarily) nourishes their personal and prophetic growth, internal yearnings and external duties. There must be specific male-based growth options available on every UU campus, otherwise men will continue to show up in modest numbers, fade away from deeper involvement, or only participate in prescribed, conventional niches. The allegation that "there's nothing out there to help the men" is unfounded. UUMeN possesses a growing stock of literature available to assist our local tribes in starting and sustaining men's programming. The challenge is to order, then use it.

Think about it: if women's and children's programs blazed out or were non-existent in our congregations, wouldn't there be an understandable outcry?

Shouldn't every boy who is a part of our religious education effort know that he's on a lifespan quest accentuating "positive liberal religious masculinity" and that he's surrounded and guided by exemplary men (other than simply his own father or brothers) who can serve as challengers and comforters for his religious journey? This is of no minor relevance to me

personally since our six-year old grandson Trevor attends our home church. And what about the vast importance of girls and women experiencing mature men in our Unitarian Universalist communities?

These are troublesome times for girls and boys. External influencers such as the media produce rigid and spurious gender growth options for our youngsters. Cooper Thompson tells of an exercise in sexual identity that he uses with elementary school age children. They are asked, "if you woke up tomorrow and discovered that you were the opposite sex from the one you are now, how would you and your life be different?"

He and his co-workers report the following responses as being typical of boys: "If I were a girl, I'd be stupid and weak as a string"; "I would have to wear makeup, cook, be a mother, and yucky stuff like that"; "I would have to hate snakes. Everything would be miserable"; "If I were a girl, I'd kill myself." Those are pitiful, scary answers. We must do better by the boys and girls whom we companion on the road toward their adulthood. And wouldn't it prove an empathic exercise for men to wrestle with their own engendered beings as well: "If I woke up tomorrow as a woman, how would my life be different?"

Again I say, the church exists essentially to assist its members (in this case, men), in deepening themselves in order to change the world. As Protestant leader James Dittes proclaims: "Men should not have to look outside the church to find support and direction for living the manhood for which they were created. This conversion from a worldly definition to a self-definition open to the abundant riches of God's creation-this is the church's business."

Our central concern can't be merely attracting more men to our ranks. That's critical, but once they arrive, we sorely need vital programming that speaks directly to the personal, social, and spiritual needs of men *qua* men. But there's a huge pay-off: in benefiting individual men, we will thicken the spiritual web of our UU congregations, as well as strengthen our overall movement. I bet my faith and church membership on that assertion.

Changing Men...Changing the World

We, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it.

James Baldwin from *The Fire Next Time*

But there's an even greater dividend. It's our discernment, as members of the UUMeN as well as local men's fellowships, that if enough men decide to mature internally and prophetically—that is, become brothers—then the realms in which we hold power will be changed for the better. If enough men reject the oppressive and limiting stereotypes of the traditional male role, if enough men forswear the ways in which we violate personhood of others and self, if enough men become pliable rather than unyielding, then our given global reality will radically alter.

In becoming a different kind of father and partner, colleague and friend, we men will be committing social justice acts of immense reverberation. In sum, our brothering mission is not only to assist individual men in their personal or spiritual growth or merely to produce increased gender balance in our religious tribes, but principally to evolve the kind of mature masculinity that will produce a gentler, more just society, yea, universe.

You may have your own equivalency for "mature" masculinity. A member of our local church and professor of religious studies at the University of San Diego, Evelyn Kirkley, proffers the phrase "liberative masculine spirituality." I like it, for we Unitarian Universalists, at our truest, are both liberal in thought and liberating in action, as Evelyn puts it: "liberative."

Call it mature or liberative masculinity, our recommendation is unmistakable: ***save the males by converting them to brothers!*** And to achieve that feat right where we're planted...in our Unitarian Universalist tribes.

Our religious forebrother, Ralph Waldo Emerson, often suggested that "God has need of a person here," whenever there was a specific duty to accomplish. Well, there's currently a

dire need not merely for a "few good men" as the United States Marines urge, but for a mature brothering presence in every one of our Unitarian Universalist congregations.

Males Are Primary Carriers and Targets of Violence

Our modern society is increasingly chaotic and violent. There's an indisputable upsurge in the amount of violence on film and in the streets, between countries and within schools. The male role in perpetrating and perpetuating the systemic violence in the world is visible and undeniable.

Look at who conceived and executed the terrorist attacks on September 11th and look at who produced the counter-terrorist response in Afghanistan. Look at the leadership that is pushing a pre-emptive strike against Iraq. Bush-men are adult bullies dead-set on throwing the first punch in the fight against the infamous tough-guy, albeit smaller and less powerful, Saddam Hussein.

President Bush has even uttered what Matthew Rothschild calls "one of the grossest obscenities imaginable: 'War may be unavoidable.'" Rothschild goes on: "War is almost always avoidable. In the case of Iraq, it is particularly avoidable, since Iraq has not attacked the United States and is in no position to do so. It's only 'unavoidable' because Bush so desperately wants to go to war."

And I'd go a step farther. This very belief that violence is unavoidable is a root cause of violence; it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because we envision violence to be inevitable, that's what we pursue, we erase from our minds the possibility of surviving through aggressive cooperation.

Bush has even personalized our hypermasculinized war effort by declaring that Hussein tried to kill his Dad, so he's seeking retribution as a just avenger. Additionally, an Iraqi war will furnish our nation with a chance to regain the masculinity we lost in Vietnam. The whole scenario depicts twisted masculinity run amok.

If you view no other movie this Fall, I urge you to see Michael Moore's savagely funny, sad, and horrifying documentary of America's love affair with guns and violence. *Bowling For Columbine* takes off from the massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado to investigating the links between guns, killing, and culture all over the world.

Bowling for Columbine reminds me of a recent cartoon that depicts various stages of evolutionary development depicting figures from apes to men with clubs, then spears, then guns, and the final body bears an automatic rifle, with "gun culture" emblazoned across his torso, and is seen to be stepping off a cliff into the abyss. The title of the cartoon is "Devolution of Mankind."

This film uncompromisingly deals with institutional racism, corporate violence, even contains a confrontive interview with Charlton Heston, unyielding advocate of the National Rifle Association, and closes by unflinchingly recounting the tragic context of the horrendous incident of a 6 year old boy killing a 5 year old girl at school with a handgun in Flint, Michigan. This is a painfully necessary film for families to view, then discuss, together.

Men incur massive violence against women and children, against other men, and against ourselves. We are wounding and wounded of the highest order. I say wounded, because men suffer greatly too in an world that trains, then rewards, us as primary carriers and targets of rampaging violence.

Men and boys are hurting in ways that often go unrecognized. Andrew Kimbrell in the *Masculine Mystique* reports that boys are twice as likely as girls to suffer from autism and eight times more likely to be treated for hyperactivity. Two-thirds of special education is devoted to boys and 60 percent of high school dropouts are male. An estimated 270,000 of our veterans are homeless-70 percent of the homeless being single men. Mostly men of color.

The prison situation is deplorable and degrading to men in general and men of color in particular. Nearly 2 million people are now behind bars in the United States. Two-thirds of those sent to prison are convicted of non-violent crimes. And our criminal justice system is racist to the core. While African-Americans make up only 13% of drug-users, Blacks account for 35% of arrests, 55% of convictions, and 74% of those doing time for drug related sentences. And we wonder why there are more African-American men in prison than in college!

And some are so young and so hopeless, since it's been a game of survival since birth. Beneath the prison swagger lies a young man's deep fears and regrets. "Sorry, Mom, for what I've done, but remember I'm still your son," reads the tattoo on one cellmate's forearm.

On another front. Men are trapped between a commitment to provide for their families and the desire to sustain emotional closeness with those they love. Nearly 80% of married men with preschool children are employed full-time. Half of all marriages disintegrate with men receiving custody of the children in less than 20 percent of contested divorce actions. And then immature masculinity breeds absent non-custodial fathers. One out of five divorced fathers see their children as little as once a year. Lots of men have simply lost hope about their roles as fathers. And you wonder why I exhort our social system and religious communities to "save the males" from our selves and for service to the world?

Myrian Miedzian in her discussion of violence makes several useful distinctions pertinent to male socialization: (1) Constructive aggression, which is assertiveness and determination; (2) antisocial aggression, found in extreme competitiveness and dominance; (3) Destructive aggression, or violence.

Undoubtedly, males are conditioned in American culture toward both healthy and unhealthy aggression. But, whether the violence is societally sanctioned or not doesn't get us off the hook. Our male gender ultimately must do its share to break this cycle of devastation. As Unitarian Universalist colleague, Ron Mazur, puts it: "The ultimate male power is to say *No* to violence..." This means resisting beliefs and ceasing behaviors that violate the

personhood of others. To put it another way, we must evolve a religious community and larger society that is male-enhancing, that affirms masculine energy and gift but never at the expense of anyone or anything else in creation.

While men are the primary carriers of the virus, it is not an incurable disease. Men can change, but it will take a revolution, an ongoing one.

Perverted Patriarchy Is the Culprit

Perverted patriarchy is the culprit-what Unitarian feminist author, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, called "our androcentric culture" in her 1911 book entitled *The Man-made World*. But two brief observations, that complicate matters, need to be made at the outset.

First, it must be recognized that patriarchy has undoubtedly made vast contributions in culture-building throughout human history. Second, while patriarchy literally refers to "the rule of fathers," modern Western culture has been marked by the physical absence of fathering energy and gift. Lamentably, tyrants, not fathers, have dominated the social scene.

So, the brothering imperative is to dismantle a certain kind of patriarchal system-one where irresponsible, misogynistic, and despotic men rule the roost. Such demonic patriarchy has not only devastated the lives of women and children but also caused ruinous damage to the psychological development and socialization of boys, whose growth is severely arrested. Hence, the enemy of mature masculinity is not women or other men, but a diabolical patriarchal system, that has been, with few exceptions, the normative paradigm in the West from at least the second millennium B.C.E. to the present.

The goal that mature sisters and brothers pursue is authentic co-existence of all living entities.

I hope it's patently evident by now that the brothering path I espouse isn't interested in blaming or shaming my male gender but in calling it to accountability. Authentic brothering never sinks to what the media calls male-bashing and scholars reference as "misandry" or

prejudice against the masculine per se. The brothering path stands overagainst the myriad of derisive masculine images flooding the collective consciousness of a modern culture where there can exist TV shows entitled "Men Behaving Badly" and popular essayists composing articles which scornfully ask: "Are Men Obsolete?"

Brothering neither glorifies nor denigrates men but posits a realistic vision and program for our tomorrows. Unitarian Universalism is a life-affirming faith, one given neither to pessimism nor to optimism but to hopefulness, and hopefulness creates change. Brothering summons men to become our best-most emotionally and morally mature-selves, on the path toward effecting an equitable social order and husbanding an ecologically balanced Creation.

Nor are we comparing wounds with women. Men often try to defend or explain ourselves by asserting that women commit their share of violence. Of course, that's the case. In fact, recent statistics relate that the incidence of pre-18 year old girls arrested for violent acts has jumped 80% in current society. But our job as men isn't to decry women but to prod ourselves. We cannot determine women's homework assignments, but we can clarify, then fulfill, our own.

Stopping Violence Against Women and Children

Every 15 seconds, a woman is beaten by her husband or partner. Every day four women are killed by batterers in the U.S. In the past 10 years the incidence of rape has risen four times faster than the total crime rate. In America rape is now the most pervasive violent crime. The hidden tragedy of violent assaults against women is that the vast majority of these crimes goes unreported, uninvestigated, and unpunished. By the end of the next six minutes, a woman will be sexually assaulted.

I know it's painful to keep hearing such horrific statistics. Men don't want to hear them again, neither do women. But psychic numbing wreaks internal havoc and produces apathy. These are live people: women whom we know and who we are. They are our mothers, our

partners, our sisters...and to our own grievous, familial despair, both of our daughters have endured sexual violence.

In Alice Walker's book, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism* (1997), she recounts a conversation with Samuel Zan, the general secretary of Amnesty International in Ghana which is deeply involved with African women and men dedicated to the abolition of female genital mutilation. "Alice," Zan says after a long silence, "do you know what I believe? I believe that if the women of the world were comfortable, this would be a comfortable world."

Comfortable as in safe from harm and safe for free, responsible choices...safe to walk the streets at night and safe to be their whole selves. I believe Zan's statement to be true-agonizingly true.

And the children, oh the children, those of this land as well as those in other parts of the world. Marian Wright Edelman who has been a life-long advocate for the little ones deplores "that we permit children to be the poorest Americans. And despite our nearly 300-billion-dollar military defense, we seem not to be able to protect our children from being murdered ever three hours. I believe that this great nation can keep its children safe on the streets, in their homes, and in their schools. If we do not do that, what are we about?"

Yet children are too frequently, including in our progressive congregations, ignored, marginalized, if not out-and-out devalued, no matter how noble our moral pronouncements read. A Unitarian Universalist brother mentioned to me recently how the core of his life-mission, as long as he breathes, is to make sure that the children he meets at home and on the streets will be heard, listened to, then believed. He is passionately trying to atone for a former path of blatant disregard and betrayal of children. One man changing...changing his corner of the world.

Such candles of respectfulness and mercy must be lit daily for the little ones, for we live in a country that has with impunity, for more than a decade, sanctioned to death over a million

Iraqis, including hundreds of thousands of children, all because we do not like the leader they did not choose. Dean Blehert in his poem entitled "Kill the Children" puts it searingly:

*Always the truly dedicated, the pure
have known that a hundred evil seeds spring up
where one weed is uprooted, that it is
not enough to kill the vermin: You must also
poison the young in their nest, if possible
before they hatch. Always the Hitlers
and Stalins and Pol Pots have known
you must gas, bayonet, starve, kill
the children.*

Horizontal Violence is Rampant

Horizontal violence is also rampant, with men hurting, killing one another, not just in war, but intensifyingly on our streets. Young men being among the primary perpetrators and victims. Remember that men are victims of about 70% of all robberies and make up 70% of all other victims of aggravated assaults. Aaron Kipnis adds: "Violence against men is a form of entertainment in our culture. Boxing, football, hockey, and car racing often feature men being wounded, maimed, even killed."

Littleton, Colorado, and Santee, California, and other similar tragedies of wanton violence, document that our American boys are in grim trouble. Unitarian Universalist activist and author, Michael Gurian, has written two excellent books on the subject: *The Wonder of Boys* and *A Fine Young Man*. He alleges that "our boys are crying out for help through destructive acts." Gurian's research indicates that "girls and boys each have their own equally painful sufferings," but having studied 30 cultures around the world, he notes: "Nowhere have I seen a population of young males who have less emotional bonding and moral development than our own...In recent decades, we have watched our boys become the most violent and incarcerated population of adolescent boys anywhere in the industrialized world."

You know what we men can do to address this horrendous crisis? We can make religious education for our boys, not only friendly but downright saving. However, one stipulation: it will require the full, active companionship of adult male leaders. We men must en flesh Marian Wright Edelman's prophetic imperative to "take responsibility not only for our own child but for all children, or at least for one child who may not be our own."

Evangelicals are targeting teen boys in trouble, by luring them into football stadium rallies energized with Christian rock bands, hip-hop artists, extreme sports exhibitions, testimonials, and fast-paced videos. They are challenging hormone-raging boys to "step up to the plate" and "become warriors for Christ." While our methods and message differ markedly, we religious liberals need to do our own "stepping up to the plate" to attract, hold, and deepen the commitment of young boys and men to their family, religion, and community-hooking them up with male spiritual mentors, who will buddy or brother them through fair and foul weather.

Soulful, prophetic liberal religious programming is a critical contribution toward saving the boys and young men entrusted to the care of our congregations. I'll never forget the sentiment of one adult male minister who poignantly said: "I'm primarily a professional religious educator to make the world safe (no, that's not quite possible)...to make the world **hospitable** for the kind of young boy that I was...outside, different, lonely."

An Epidemic of Self-Violence

Men ensnarled in self-violence is a major epidemic as well. We die from all causes combined an average of nine years earlier than women. In 1900 the incidence of stomach ulcers was primarily among women, but today men have three to four times as many ulcers as women. Our cancer rate tops that of women by 40 percent. Testicular cancer alone has grown by 50 percent between 1970 and 1993 throughout the industrialized world. Diabetes, alcoholism, and lung cancer are all favored manly pursuits, judging by the lopsided statistics.

And toss in additional emotional ailments for painful measure. We males are three times more susceptible to obsessive-compulsive neurosis, and five to ten times more likely to become psychopathic personalities than women. Ten times more likely to commit murder.

This new millennium finds too many men, across the boards, suffering from what Philip Culbertson labels: "gender dysphoria-an emotional state characterized by anxiety, melancholy, and restlessness...rooted in our genderal embodiment." Men are suppressed and repressed in multiple ways, but depressed as well-our hearts simply pressed down. And still, too few men are willing to face bottled-up despondency; the majority stoically "gut it out." And often flounder, even self-destruct. Suicide rates are about four times higher for men than women.

To compound our male fragility, the Y chromosome has fallen on some tough times. In the 50 years since DNA was shown to be a spiral staircase of interlocking chemicals that determine what we're made of, manhood has been tumbling down it. The Y chromosome, which derails 4-week-old embryos from their default female status onto the rocky path of maleness, is starting to look like a genetic reprobate. A recent article in the British Medical Journal refers to the Y chromosome as "a biological injury," although cautioned against concluding that "maleness is a genetic disorder."

I recount this disheartening news in order to animate men toward healthier work, nutritional, and exercise routines. We need to counter our male vulnerability. We must graduate from self-abusive to self-affirming habits. A Yale study of men in mid-life declares that those involved in social organization-contributing beyond their work lives and sharing emotional closeness-live fuller and longer lives than men who stuff their feelings, or merely keep to themselves. We men must not continue to volunteer to die early or violently or both. The church must become a pivotal agent for altering men's health lives for the better. If machismo kills, religion saves.

Liberative religion reminds us that self-care is our greatest resource. Resistance toward medical checkups costs lives. Edward Bartlett, Senior adviser to Men's Health America, a

new advocacy group, laments that "today, men spend more time doing preventive upkeep on their cars than on their own bodies." A deplorable fact. As Unitarian Universalists we affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person-including our male bodies, male spirits, male hearts. But that's a fruitless abstraction unless men engage in systematic, aggressive self-care, what I call "temple maintenance".

Proponent for men's holistic growth, Stephen Boyd, challenges men to make four basic vows with regard to our physical beings: (1) "I will stop numbing my body with...."; (2) "I will nurture and care for myself as a body-self...recognizing the ultimate authority in such care is the body and its wisdom; (3) "I will replenish my senses...realizing that because of the lack of sensory input, we men find ourselves at times depressed, enervated, and compulsive about genital sexuality; and (4) "I will attend to and care for the earth and its creatures. Reconciliation with our body-selves calls forth reconciliation with the earth and other earth creatures."

Again, I say, for our own well-being as well as that of the entire cosmos, men must become a different kind of animal than ever before in human history. We must evolve from carriers of death to affirmers of life. Mature, responsible masculinity is the answer to our physical-psycho-spiritual predicament, and brothering must be intentionally advocated within our congregations. If not there, then where? If not now, when?

We Are a Band of the Cautiously Hopeful

Remember this outspoken summons to brothering is not merely to serve men but moreover to save the world. The premise and promise of these Minn's Lectures is thoroughly salvational. And why not? Salvation dwells at the heart of our Unitarian Universalist gospel. As Unitarians we exclaim that every unit of existence is holy and precious and to be treated as such. And as Universalists we espouse an Infinite Spirit that holds in its loving embrace the totality of Creation. And our primary male task, as I see it, is simply to resemble that gospel.

Salvational work is no idle venture, no sideline spectacle. It requires full involvement, all the way home. Changing men changing the world is holy and hopeful work, unquestionably hard work too. And we contend (notice I keep using *we* because these six lectures represent the chorus of a brotherhood not the voice of a lone ranger)...we contend that men can negotiate successfully the rocky trek from boyhood to manhood, ultimately to brotherhood. But the journey is excruciatingly arduous at times, since there are women who claim it to be impossible and men who unwittingly sabotage the adventure. We brothers of UUMeN remain positive and expectant about the male gender. Cynicism is treason to the spirit, and shallow optimism only fosters smug contentment. Therefore, we are chastened crusaders; we are cautiously hopeful. We believe that men can-not that we always will-but we can repent, resist, reconcile, rejoice, and renew along the road toward fullness of humanity. As radical African-American feminist bell hooks urges:

So many people have expressed this real hard-core sense that men are never going to change. And I have thought, can you imagine the despair of black people under slavery had we felt that there was nothing about that system that was going to change, that there was nothing about white people as a group or as individuals that would change? One of my favorite statements that I say a lot is the whole notion that "what we can't imagine, can't come to be."

Wrestling Matches and Tearful Testimonies

History is teeming with exemplary stories of men changing-seizing fresh names and housing new identities. Jacob, the deceitful one prone to trickery and subversion, dared to wrestle feverishly, all night long, with God, another man, a demon, himself, an angel, or was it some combination of these interweaving forces? And Jacob emerged from the fiercesome fray intact, with two marked changes-one external and one internal.

Jacob entered the fresh dawn with an injured leg, limping the remainder of his days as well as harboring a new name, Israel, which translates as the one "who struggles with Yahweh." What a mighty paradigm for the challenge facing men who would risk changing into brothers. Renamed and wounded, brothers hobble fearlessly into our tomorrows.

And there are modern day transformational tales of men becoming brothers. We can never tell or hear too many stories of salvation, women and men alike. They furnish the nutriment for our maturation. A couple more come to mind from men in our fellowship at First UU Church in San Diego. One of the pillars in the local men's fellowship had been a truck driver for some twenty years before crashing, on the job, in a life-threatening accident. Months later, after healing well-enough to re-attend church, he tearfully offered the following testimony.

Here I am, walking, healed, whole, well mostly whole. This device (he held it up an immense steel contraption for the congregation to see) was surgically implanted in my spine to hold and stabilize the vertebrae that had to regrow.

Prior to my accident, I had a fierce internal conflict I was unable to resolve. I was no longer being spiritually fulfilled by my work as a trucker. Not to sound macabre, but you might say that on April 1st I got my lucky break. My new job suddenly became healing. It has been a slow, tedious process of recovering from surgery, regaining control of bodily functions and learning to walk again, with many setbacks along the way.

I want you to know that my community never failed me. All of you, especially the men from the fellowship. Thank you, all!!!

You know, my accident stimulated thoughts of salvation of my own soul being spared from death. I felt this tremendous burden of obligation, and I didn't have a spine to carry the burden. As I lay in that hospital bed, I was being crushed by the weight, just a feeling, of the obligation for merely surviving the accident and the opportunity to heal. I had to let go.

My deeper learning came through to me, in a dream state, that I didn't have an obligation to pay, that it was a gift, that life was a gift, and all I had to do was accept it. Out of that realization it was appropriate to make the transition with a name change (from Bill to Will). I couldn't pay the bill. I didn't need to pay the bill. I could live in God's will, which is life in all it's abundance. I had been given the will-power to heal and overcome this trial. So life is a gift. For me, the way to pay back a gift is to receive it with thankfulness and be willing to pass it on to others.

I've faced life crises before, but I did it without community, and not very successfully. The Men's Fellowship here is the key for me. It has been my saving community.

And here's the story of a gay man who came to our church to attend a PFLAG meeting. While there he learned of our 4th Monday evening men's discussion group. One Monday, he decided to skip PFLAG and try the brotherhood instead. He was transformed, saved, as he put it:

*Two things happened. One, I saw Mr. Wonderful and knew this must be close to home! But more importantly, in discussion of the **Promise Keepers** one man said something about the good things they promote in spite of their policies toward gay men. I challenged that, saying that since they advocated the death of all gay men, there was nothing redeeming about **Promise Keepers**.*

At that point another man, I'd never seen before, slowly arose and pointed right at me and said with unmistakable passion, "Trust me! If there is a mortal threat on your life, I will place my body...my very life between you and that threat!"

Imagine hearing, for the first time in a life where the world was a constant threat, another man offering his life to defend yours!

The UU Men's Fellowship has been a sacred community for me now for 9 years or more. Within the Men's Fellowship I have been saved literally, from a world of fear and dread. I have learned how to be a brother, both receiving and giving. I have found the solid footing of genuine belonging, a weaving together of all the strings and threads and yarns into one fabric.

Oh, the salvation stories to which I and other men have been privy in sacred settings. Again, as bell hooks relates: "Holding each other close across difference, beyond conflict, through change, is an act of resistance." And rejoicing as well.

You see, every man walking the earth, harbors a tale worthy of the telling and hearing. "If one woman ever told the whole honest truth about her life," writes Muriel Rukeyser, "the world would split open." The fact is that when men dare to reveal their interior anguish and yearnings, earth-shattering results also occur. I've seen it with my own eyes, heard it with my own ears, felt it with my own arms.

"Tell Them About the Dream!"

As Gandhi urged: "We must become the changes we wish to see." And what do our Unitarian Universalist brothering ventures see? We behold a men's presence and path existing on every one of our church campuses in this fresh century. Our mission is to realize that vision, yea, to become the very change we wish to see! Again, this is not merely about saving individual men but transforming the entire universe...starting in our homes of worship and mushrooming from there.

We would follow in sister Susan B. Anthony's footsteps when she wrote: "Failure is impossible." We would be so brazen as to foresee that success is possible-perhaps not in our lifetimes, but surely in this century. That is our prayerful hope. That is the prize upon which our eyes are unswervingly set.

For brothering is our highest calling as men.

I offer a closing story about Martin Luther King, Jr. It occurred nearly 40 years ago, back in 1963, when he delivered his now famous "I Have A Dream" speech at the March on Washington D. C. John Lewis, one of his lieutenants, remembers it as being a good speech but not nearly vintage King. As he moved toward the homestretch of his address, it seemed that King himself could sense that he was falling short as well. He simply hadn't locked into the power he customarily found.

Lewis was sitting near enough to hear Mahalia Jackson, who was seated just behind King, lean in as he was finishing and urged him out loud, "Tell them about the dream, Martin, tell them about the dream..." And the rest, which focused upon King's dreams for the upcoming generations of black children, surely constitutes minutes of some of the finest speechmaking in American history.

Well, those of us in UUMeN have a dream too, and while it differs somewhat in substance from King's, it too would fervently lift up majestic possibilities for the little ones coming along after us, the boys and girls to whom we are bequeathing this wondrous yet wacky world.

We have a dream that men are not incurably macho, let alone violent; that we can take better care of our selves; that we can be attentive partners, intimate friends, dauntless advocates and allies, devoted fathers and sons, peacemakers and husbandmen of the highest order.

We have a dream that both newcomers to our faith and the world at large, when they learn of Unitarian Universalism, will know that ours is a religion that dares to nourish the deeper hungers of men; that assists men in being both poetic and prophetic, strong and vulnerable, playful and productive; and that every male by birth can choose to become a brother and will be supported on that quest as long as he dwells in our religious fellowship.

We have a dream that, in due time, when today's brothers enter the ground, there will be other men taking up the torch of mature liberal religious masculinity in our local congregations and throughout the continent...in short, that there will always be an active men's group present just for our grandsons and their grandsons.

We hold that dream dear, we currently underwrite that vision with our own bodies and souls, and we call upon all card-carrying Unitarian Universalists to play their part in making this dream an approximated reality.

I exhort our *men* to enlist in the brothering revolution, to join the caravan of brothers, for your own salvation and for that of the entire Creation. I welcome our *women* to support healthy masculinity, to call us to accountability, to become our sisters. And I invite our *children* and *youth* to play with us, but to confront us as well...simply to contribute their fair share in making this globe more just and joyful.

For, in saving the males, we do, oh yes, we do, take giant strides toward saving this single, precious cosmos.

Tom Owen-Towle

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