

SHANTI, SHALOM; HASITI, SALAAM; HEIWA, DOHIYI; PAX, PACO, MIR...
PEACE

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CHORAL ANTHEM "All Lifted Hearts" Lyrics, Kendyl gibbons; Music, Jason Shelton.
READING. THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION, Karen Armstrong, pp. 390ff selected.

SERMON:

While it is old news that *Slumdog Millionaire* swept the Oscars, and the economy has once again taken top billing in the news, the economy is ever with us and this movie should not be passed over without notice. The film indicates how far cultural globalization has progressed.

The creative team behind the film, including directors Danny Boyle and [Loveleen Tandan](#), was largely British. The film was based on an Indian novel, [Vikas Swarup's Q & A](#), set in India with Indian actors, and deployed the cinematic techniques of Bollywood, the massive Indian film industry of Mumbai.

Globalization underlies the narrative from inception. . Author Swarup is an Indian diplomat as well as novelist, serving in Turkey, the US, Britain and Ethiopia, and now Indian High Commissioner in Praetoria, South Africa.

The film's audience has been global, [Indian slum dwellers mounting angry protests](#), particularly against the title. "Dog," or *kutta* is a highly derogatory thing to call someone in Hindi. The Indian social critic and activist *Arundhati Roy* commented on the film,

People are selling India's poverty big time both in [literature](#) and films. As they say, there is lots of money in poverty today. I am not against showing slums, but depicting them in a depoliticised manner, as has been done in the film, is quite unfortunate. Films do not show the real poor. Even if they are depicted, it's not the true picture. The real poor are not shown in [films](#) because they are not attractive. Poverty sells but the poor do not. The film gives false hope to the poor that they too could become millionaires one day.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/4112989.cms>

While I enjoyed the movie, seeing it in part at the encouragement of friends, I think most of us have become skeptical of the ability of the entertainment industry to accurately portray reality. Even winning Oscars is important, not so much as achievement, but as advertisement. Cinema and television are all too often means of propaganda and sales.

Rather than the virtual reality propped up by technology, we gain a deeper understanding of one another through joint activities, with music one of the most culturally significant. Sharing music, we deepen our appreciation of different peoples and diverse cultures. I think I have learned more about Indian culture from our good fortune here at St. John's

with our Minister of Music, Dr Catherine Roma, and her collaboration with **Kanniks Kannikeswaran**. Through Cathy's collaboration, we here at St. John's participated in the build up to "SHANTI, A Journey of Peace." Kanniks who is referred to as The Magical Musician from Madras has this unique vision of building community through the celebration of threads of commonality between diverse peoples and cultures.
<http://www.shantichoir.org/creativeteam.html>

How much our world today, drawn into tribalism, fundamentalism, protectionism, needs this message of universality lifted up. "Many windows, one light," the choir sang in the Anthem, "Many waters, one sea;" Such is the path of peace: Shanti, shalom.

One of the most important expressions of a vision of human communality, universality is the Declaration of Human Rights. Recently, the team leader of St. John's Peacemakers, Howard Tolley, sent me an email about some commentary in the British newspaper the **Independent**. One of the most primary human rights is freedom of speech,

Several weeks ago, the **Independent's** columnist, Johann Hari wrote an article defending free speech for everyone – and in response there have been riots, death threats, and the arrest of an editor who published the article in a leading Indian newspaper, THE STATESMEN. Hari expressed his concern,

... religious fundamentalists – of all stripes – have been progressively stripping away the right to freely discuss their faiths. They claim religious ideas are unique and cannot be discussed freely; instead, they must be "respected" – by which they mean unchallenged. So now, whenever anyone on the UN Human Rights Council tries to discuss the stoning of "adulterous" women, the hanging of gay people, or the marrying off of ten year old girls to grandfathers, they are silenced by the chair on the grounds these are "religious" issues, and it is "offensive" to talk about them.
<http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/johann-hari/johann-hari-despite-these-riots-i-stand-by-what-i-wrote-1608059.html>

Whether it is the Islamic fanaticism of Osama bin Laden or the Christian extremism of Timothy McVey, what we need more of today is dialogue among religious people. "One light, many windows." Instead, we frequently get the evasive portrayals of interfaith relations as in *Slumdog Millionaire*. In India a love affair between a Muslim boy like Jamal and a Hindu girl like Latika would face obstacles of caste as well as religion which appear irrelevant in the movie. The only one who practices religion is Jamal's gangster older brother Salim, which seems to me to perpetuate stereotyping, once more associating violence with Islam. <http://www.juancole.com/2009/02/they-arent-dogs-in-those-slums.html>

What the world needs now is "Many waters, one sea." Shanti, peace! Our Minister of Music's vision is of social change through music, of music as a way of building a culture of peace, the way is peace. Through music we deepen our understanding of humanity. Cathy's vision is expressed, not only here at St. John's but also on the Muse Choir website:

MUSE is a women's choir dedicated to musical excellence and social change. In keeping with our belief that diversity is strength, we are feminist women of varied ages, races, and ethnicities with a range of musical abilities, political interests, and life experiences. <http://www.musechoir.org/about/philosophy>

Next Sunday will be the last Sunday before Cathy's much earned sabbatical. It will be a time for reflection on her work, deepening it, exploring over coming stereotypes, barriers which keep us in our own puddles rather than seeing while there are many waters, there is only one sea. I look forward to her annotations of the music programs she has developed.

Think of them, Kanniks, our varied Holiday programs lifting up Spanish songs, Messiah, the awesome New Orleans program following hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Throughout Cathy has sought to make a vibrant sound in multicultural America: here at St. John's, with UMOJA Men's Chorus at Warren Correctional Institution, The Voices of Freedom/Martin Luther King Coalition Chorale, and with the Wilmington College Chorale.

Toni Morrison observed that race has functioned as a "metaphor" necessary to the "construction of Americanness." In the creation of our national identity, "American" has meant white. Non-white has meant "Other:" different, inferior and unassimilable.

Ronald Takaki of University of California, Berkeley, calls this the Master Narrative of American history. Growing up an American of Japanese descent, he began asking about what had most Americans learned about Asian Americans in courses called U.S. history? Or about Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and African Americans. Nothing or almost nothing. This narrow definition of who is an American is something we take as a given. <http://rentec.wordpress.com/2008/03/04/ronald-takaki-on-barack-obama/>

Unitarian Universalists have struggled with these aspects of our identity, not just today, but it is part of our religious heritage. It is our tradition to constantly be overcoming our cultural constraints and seeking, as our name suggests, human universality. Cathy in her music is part of this living tradition, singing the journey. Singing diverse songs we deepen our appreciation of others, transcend our cultural embeddedness.

Looking back over our heritage, when in pre-Civil War days, the Transcendentalists sought to break away from the genteel, upper class Unitarians of Boston, they turned to Benjamin Constant. A French man participating in the French Revolution, Constant considered all religions a sham. He set out to explore the world's faiths and write a book proving they all were merely superstitions which science would replace.

But as he explored, when he came to write his book, he changed his mind. Religion he saw was rooted in the experience of human suffering and the longing to overcome it through experience of the infinite. This yearning, this deep and abiding longing, experienced, as wonder, as emptiness, is recognized across cultural and social bonds. The actual expressions of religion: ritual, posture in prayer, standing in song, differ from place to place -- as does language. Constant's great contribution was the appreciation that the expressions of religion: church, synagogue, temple, mosque, these are finite, while the

driving human religious sentiment is infinite. The human sense for transcendence is not to be confused with its cultural expressions.

Human yearning the ‘one sea;’ many rituals: ‘many waters.’ It is the distinction between spirituality and religion. As some say, religion is for those who are afraid of going to hell; spirituality for those who have been there.

Following Constant Ralph Waldo Emerson, Theodore Parker and other Transcendentalists introduced into American religion the notion that improvements in worship are progressive, not derangements. Just as recently many argue whether the use of English at Roman Catholic mass might be progress or a throw back, it was the idea of these Americans who saw these outward forms as human constructions, not eternal creations of God.

Of course, that is the debate. How we worship, how we sing is not dictated by God, but is developed through our legacy of democratic process. One of the innovations the Transcendentalists made in Puritan worship in pre-Civil War Boston was instead of just the choir singing the hymns, the entire congregation sang the hymns. Was this progress? Or a falling way from tradition? And how would Jesus worship; how would Jesus sing?

Many think they should worship as Jesus worshipped; sing as St. Paul sang, worship as Moses worshipped, or chant as Mohammed chanted.

It is our view that as worship is a human choice, our music, our singing deepens our appreciation of others, overcomes barriers and stereotypes. It is our values which have primacy, and worship is an expression of these.

When Cathy invites us into her multi cultural journey, she continues this exploration of human rights, she teaches us, at least me, of the depths of experience in other cultures and societies, other hearts and minds. The essence of the Golden Rule is to experience what others experience. How much deeper that experience when we not only walk in another’s shoes, but sing another’s song. Do we then not learn that indeed, “Many windows, one light? Many waters, One sea?”

As she writes about the Golden Rule, Karen Armstrong doesn’t mention music as a way of indentifying with others. All too often hearing unusual sounds leads to pushing others off. But whether differences are of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or faith, the common human response of defensiveness tends to build high walls.

Armstrong suggests in *THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION* humans are probably wired for self-defense.

“Ever since we lived in caves, we have been threatened by animal and human predators. Even within our own communities and families, other people oppose our interests and damage our self-esteem, so we are perpetually poised – verbally, mentally and physically – for counterattack and preemptive strike. But if we

methodically cultivated an entirely different mind-set, the sages discovered, we experienced an alternative state of consciousness. The consistency with which the Axial sages – quite independently – returned to the Golden Rule may tell us something important about the structure of our nature.” [Page 391]

That something about human nature that the Golden Rule teaches, “Many windows, one light,” music also teaches, a deeper understanding of one another. Music transcends that which divides, and sharing in song builds a culture of peace, shanti, shalom.

Our next hymn is “Woyaya.” It is an Ashanti word meaning “we are going.” We are not sure where we are going, but we will know within when we have gotten there. We seek to overcome barriers, stereotypes, build a culture of peace which transcends race, gender, sexual orientation, faith. This is promised when we practice through music, indentifying with others.