

Honoring Our Veterans

[For Pearl Harbor Day]
By

Robert P. Tucker, Ph.D.

[Minister Emeritus of The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Lakeland, Florida]

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Lake County, Eustis, Florida – December 6, 2009

Copyright © 2009

REMEMBER these WORDS?:

WHEN IN THE COURSE OF HUMAN EVENTS, it becomes NECESSARY for ONE PEOPLE to DISSOLVE the POLITICAL BANDS which have CONNECTED them with another, and to ASSUME AMONG THE POWERS of the earth, the SEPARATE and EQUAL STATION to which the LAWS OF NATURE and of NATURE'S GOD ENTITLES them, a DECENT RESPECT to the OPINIONS of MANKIND REQUIRES that they should DECLARE THE CAUSES which IMPEL them to the SEPARATION.

WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO BE SELF-EVIDENT,

--that ALL MEN are CREATED EQUAL,

--that they are ENDOWED by their CREATOR with CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS,

--that AMONG these are LIFE, LIBERTY, and the PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.

--that to SECURE these rights, GOVERNMENTS are INSTITUTED among men, DERIVING their JUST POWERS from the CONSENT of the GOVERNED.

--That WHENEVER any FORM OF GOVERNMENT becomes DESTRUCTIVE of these ENDS, it the is RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE to ALTER or to ABOLISH it, and to INSTITUTE NEW GOVERNMENT, LAYING its FOUNDATION on such PRINCIPLES and ORGANIZING its POWERS in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to EFFECT their SAFETY and HAPPINESS.

PRUDENCE, indeed, will DICTATE that GOVERNMENTS LONG ESTABLISHED should NOT be CHANGED for LIGHT and TRANSIENT CAUSES; and ACCORDINGLY ALL EXPERIENCE HATH SHEWN that MANKIND ARE MORE DISPOSED TO SUFFER, WHILE EVILS ARE SUFFERABLE, THAN to RIGHT THEMSELVES by ABOLISHING the FORMS to which they are ACCUSTOMED. BUT WHEN A LONG TRAIN OF ABUSES AND USURPATIONS, PURSUING INVARIABLY the SAME OBJECT, EVINCES a DESIGN to REDUCE THEM UNDER ABSOLUTE DESPOTISM, it is their RIGHT, it is their DUTY to THROW OFF SUCH GOVERNMENT...

WE, therefore, the REPRESENTATIVES of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in GENERAL CONGRESS ASSEMBLED, APPEALING to the SUPREME JUDGE of the world for the RECTITUDE of our INTENTIONS, DO, IN the NAME, and BY the AUTHORITY of the good people of these COLONIES, SOLEMNLY PUBLISH and DECLARE, that these UNITED COLONIES ARE, AND OF RIGHT OUGHT TO BE, FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES...

And for the SUPPORT of this DECLARATION, with a FIRM RELIANCE on the PROTECTION of DIVINE PROVIDENCE, WE MUTUALLY PLEDGE to each other OUR LIVES, OUR FORTUNES, and OUR SACRED HONOR. [Practical, 835-7]

THESE WORDS are part of THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, WRITTEN by UNITARIAN THOMAS JEFFERSON, SIGNED by 56 COLONIAL REPRESENTATIVES, and ANNOUNCED TO THE WORLD on JULY 4, 1776 from "INDEPENDENCE HALL," in PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA.

OUR GREAT NATION was BORN IN REVOLUTION!
 The CAUSE of FREEDOM-FROM-TYRANNY EVENTUATED
 in a CALL-TO-ARMS. A TERRIBLE STRUGGLE ENSUED.
BUT OUT of the ASHES of that CONFLAGRATION a NOBLE
PHOENIX AROSE: the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
 OUR HOMELAND, a BASTION of DEMOCRACY, and a
SOURCE of INSPIRATION and HOPE for the REST of the
WORLD.

The BIBLE speaks of “WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS.”
[Mt.24:6] ACCORDING to HISTORIANS WILL and ARIEL
DURANT, DURING the LAST 3,400 YEARS of
HUMANITY’S WRITTEN HISTORY, ONLY 168 YEARS
 have passed with NO RECORDED WARS! [Jones359] EVEN
WITHIN the RELATIVELY BRIEF LIFETIME of our own
NATION, AMERICANS have been CALLED TO ARMS to
FIGHT in 10 MAJOR WARS:

1. The REVOLUTIONARY WAR (1775-83).
2. The WAR OF 1812 (1812-15).
3. The MEXICAN WAR (1846-48).
4. The CIVIL WAR (1861-1866).
5. The SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR ((1898).
6. WORLD WAR I (April 6, 1917-Nov. 11, 1918).
7. WORLD WAR II (Dec. 7, 1941-Dec. 31, 1946).
8. The KOREAN WAR (1950-53).
9. The VIETNAM WAR ((1964-1973).
10. The PERSIAN GULF WAR (1991),

--AND NOW we are FIGHTING the “WAR ON TERROR.”

The SAD TRUTH IS that **HUMAN BEINGS** have
 --NOT YET DISCOVERED PARADISE; we have
 --NOT YET CREATED UTOPIA; and we have
 --NOT, IN THIS LIFE, BECOME RESIDENTS of
HEAVEN.

The INEVITABLE CONSEQUENCES are that
 --DISAGREEMENTS AMONG NATIONS ARISE,
 --AGGRESSORS OVERSTEP their BORDERS, and
 --DEFENSE AGAINST HOSTILE FOREIGN
FORCES is an UNAVOIDABLE NECESSITY.

To that END, NATIONS MAINTAIN STANDING ARMED
FORCES, CAPABLE of MILITARILY PROVIDING the
SECURITY their people DEMAND and DESERVE. The
UNITED STATES is NO DIFFERENT: it has OVER ONE
AND A HALF MILLION MEN and WOMEN, of EVERY
RACE and EVERY CREED serving IN UNIFORM, ON
ACTIVE DUTY, throughout the WORLD. [W.Al.163,asof1994]

In ADDITION, there are OVER 26 MILLION VETERANS
now living as CIVILIANS; and of these over 20 MILLION
HAVE SERVED THEIR COUNTRY IN TIME OF WAR,
OFTEN AT GREAT, EVEN MORTAL DANGER TO
THEMSELVES.

SOME of these PATRIOTS are in this SANCTUARY. IF YOU ARE ABLE, and IF YOU WISH TO DO SO, let me ask that ALL PERSONS HERE WHO DO NOW OR HAVE EVER SERVED IN ANY BRANCH of the UNITED STATES' ARMED FORCES, PLEASE STAND so that we may RECOGNIZE and HONOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION... [Applause.]

OF OUR VETERANS, WE MUST SAY that it is DUE IN LARGE PART to THEIR BRAVERY, DEDICATION, and HARD-WORK that OUR NATION RECEIVED ITS BIRTH, and that it has CONTINUED TO ENDURE for MORE THAN 2 CENTURIES. CERTAINLY NOTHING COULD BE MORE APPROPRIATE than for US to ANNUALLY SET ASIDE SOME SACRED TIME in which WE HONOR and REMEMBER their SERVICE and SACRIFICE.

TODAY is ONE SUCH SACRED TIME BECAUSE of the TERRIBLE ANNIVERSARY we OBSERVE TOMORROW. PRESIDENT FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT EXPLAINED WHY in a MESSAGE to CONGRESS. In WORDS WE SHOULD NEVER FORGET, he said: "DECEMBER 7, 1941—a DATE which WILL LIVE IN INFAMY—the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA was SUDDENLY and DELIBERATELY ATTACKED by NAVAL and AIR FORCES of the EMPIRE of JAPAN." [Bartlett's, 649:19] Their TARGET was the AMERICAN BASE at PEARL HARBOR, HAWAII.

SINCE THAT TIME, it has ALWAYS BEEN APPROPRIATE for us to STOP and REMEMBER our VETERANS WHO SUFFERED and DIED DURING THAT ATTACK, AS WELL AS the MANY OTHER MEMBERS of our ARMED FORCES WHO FOUGHT AND HELPED WIN what came to be called the SECOND WORLD WAR. As FORMER PRESIDENT CALVIN COOLIDGE said, "The NATION WHICH FORGETS ITS DEFENDERS WILL BE ITSELF FORGOTTEN." [CoolidgeSpinIV,56]

VETERANS COME IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES. Their VARIETY is ENDLESS. So too is the DIVERSITY OF MEMORIES THEY have about their SERVICE, and WE have about THEM.

Naturally, HARDSHIP, TRAGEDY and DEATH are among our STRONGEST MEMORIES: AS IF MILITARY DISCIPLINE WERE NOT ENOUGH OF A BURDEN to AMERICANS, ACCUSTOMED as we are to the RELATIVELY CHAOTIC FREEDOM of CIVILIAN LIFE, many VETERANS WILL TELL YOU that, SECOND ONLY TO THEIR FEAR OF DYING, the MOST DIFFICULT ASPECT of WARTIME SERVICE is the BOREDOM, the FEELING of LIMBO SO FAR AWAY FROM HOME, the DREAD of RECEIVING BAD NEWS and BEING UNABLE TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT, the WEIGHT of LONELINESS in the MIDST of OTHER

LONELY PEOPLE. All of these things are **PART** of the **ALIENATION of war.** [SpinIV56] **ECHOING THESE SENTIMENTS,** **CONFEDERATE GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE** wrote in a **LETTER** to his **WIFE** (1862):

What a CRUEL THING is WAR: to SEPARATE and DESTROY FAMILIES and FRIENDS; and MAR the PUREST JOYS and HAPPINESS GOD has GRANTED for us in the world; to FILL OUR HEARTS with HATRED instead of LOVE for our NEIGHBORS, and to DEVASTATE the FAIR FACE of this BEAUTIFUL WORLD. [Rel's"1044]

The **SAME FEELING** was **SHARED** by **UNION GENERAL WILLIAM TECUMSAH SHERMAN** who said:

I am TIRED and SICK of WAR. Its GLORY is ALL MOONSHINE. It is ONLY THOSE WHO have NEITHER FIRED A SHOT NOR HEARD the SHRIEKS and GROANS of the WOUNDED, WHO CRY ALOUD FOR BLOOD, MORE VENGEANCE, MORE DESOLATION. WAR [he concluded] **IS HELL.**

[Rel's"1044]

The **HIGH COST of WAR to AMERICANS** can be **TABULATED in so MANY WAYS.** The **DOLLAR AMOUNTS ALONE** are **STAGGERING:**

--**\$140 MILLION** for the **AMERICAN REVOLUTION;**
 --**\$140 BILLION** for the **VIETNAM WAR;** and
 --**\$360-BILLION** for **WORLD WAR II.** [W.AL.163]

BUT the GREATEST COST has always been in the LIVES of those who have given, in the words of ABRAHAM LINCOLN, "the LAST FULL MEASURE of DEVOTION." [SpinIV56] The NUMBER of AMERICANS KILLED during TEN MAJOR WARS reaches JUST BEYOND the ONE MILLION MARK. [W.AI.166] This is NOT TO DENY that SOME OTHER NATIONS have SUFFERED MUCH GREATER NUMERICAL LOSSES. But that fact does NOT at all DIMINISH the TERRIBLE BURDEN of GRIEF we BEAR for our own FALLEN COMRADES.

WAR is CERTAINLY "HELL." We CAN'T CHANGE THAT, and we SHOULD NEVER FORGET IT. BUT, THANKS to

--our INDOMITABLE HUMAN SPIRIT AND the
 --PRECOCIOUSNESS of our AMERICAN CHARACTER,
 SOMETIMES our VETERANS have ALSO BEEN ABLE TO SAY: WAR is "HECK!" The ABILITY TO LAUGH, EVEN IN THE FACE OF DANGER, is one of the GREATEST SURVIVAL SKILLS we possess. For OVER 200 YEARS it has SERVED our MILITARY VERY WELL. IT, TOO, OUGHT TO BE REMEMBERED on VETERANS' DAY. TOWARD THAT GOAL, LET ME JOG YOUR MEMORIES with THESE BRIEF TIDBITS:

From the KOREAN WAR you may **RECALL REMARKS SUCH AS THESE** which **EMERGED** from DARK and DESPERATE SITUATIONS:

--“We’ve got the ENEMY on our RIGHT FLANK, our LEFT FLANK, IN FRONT of us, and BEHIND US. THEY WON’T GET AWAY THIS TIME!” reported MARINE GENERAL LEWIS PULLER. [SpinI,25]

--“RETREAT HELL! We’re just ADVANCING IN ANOTHER DIRECTION,” explained MARINE GENERAL O.P. SMITH. [SpinI,25]

ASK a VETERAN HOW DIFFERENT LIFE IN THE SERVICE IS COMPARED to CIVILIAN LIFE, and you may hear a **STORY LIKE THIS ONE** from the CIVIL WAR.

--As 6-FOOT, 4-INCH TALL PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN, COMPLETE WITH BLACK STOVE-PIPE HAT, was CONDUCTING a TOUR of UNION FORCES, the CONFEDERATE ARMY SUDDENLY ATTACKED. Seeing his COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FULLY EXPOSED to the FIRE of ENEMY MUSKETS, LIEUTENANT OLIVER WENDELL HOMLES, JR. SCREAMED at LINCOLN: “GET DOWN, YOU FOOL!” LATER, as LINCOLN was LEAVING, he BADE FAREWELL to the FUTURE SUPREME COURT JUSTICE by saying: “Goodbye, CAPT. HOLMES. I’M GLAD TO SEE YOU KNOW HOW TO TALK to a CIVILIAN!” [Anec.359/Jones19]

Then there is this **APOCRYPHAL STORY** which has, **NEVERTHELESS, PROBABLY TAKEN PLACE IN SOME FORM IN EVERY WAR** America has ever fought:

--An **EXCITED ARMY RECRUIT ASKED** his **COMPANY COMMANDER** for an **IMMEDIATE FURLOUGH**. **His WIFE was GOING TO HAVE A BABY. PERMISSION** was **GRANTED**, and when the **SOLDIER** was about to leave, his **OFFICER ASKED EXACTLY WHEN THE BABY WAS DUE**. **“ABOUT 9 MONTHS AFTER I GET HOME, SIR,”** replied the **RECRUIT!** [Miller149f]

In a **RELATED VEIN, YOU MIGHT HEAR A STORY** like this:

--**TWO GRAY-HAIRED RESIDENTS** of a **VETERANS’ OLD FOLKS’ HOME** were **REMINISCING** about their **WORLD WAR ONE EXPERIENCES** in **FRANCE**.

--**BILLY** **REMARKED:** **“REMEMBER THEM PILLS they GIVE US so we WOULDN’T CHASE the FRENCH GIRLS?”** --

--**“SURE DO,” JAKE** replied, **“AND, you know, I think they’re BEGINNING TO WORK, TOO!”** [Priests459]

PEARL HARBOR DAY MIGHT SEEM to be an OCCASION to be OBSERVED ONLY BY SOME PEOPLE, and NOT BY OTHERS. The TRUTH is, however, that ALL OF US OUGHT TO OBSERVE IT, as WE SHOULD VETERANS' DAY and MEMORIAL DAY. Even IF WE, PERSONALLY, were NOT INVOLVED in FIGHTING the SECOND WORLD WAR, the CHANCES are GREAT that SOMEONE WE KNOW and LOVE WAS, and IN ANY CASE, the EVENTS of DECEMBER 7, 1941 HAVE ALREADY PROFOUNDLY AFFECTED OUR LIVES. That MEANS that PEARL HARBOR DAY MUST BE a DAY FOR US, TOO.

There are, of course, INNUMERABLE ISSUES that CRY OUT for DISCUSSION:

--IS ANY WAR EVER ETHICALLY JUSTIFIABLE?

--HOW is the BIBLICAL COMMANDMENT, "THOU SHALT NOT KILL," to be INTERPRETED? [Ex. 20:13]

--WHAT RESPONSE should we give to MILITARY ATROCITIES such as the ABU GRAHIB?

--WHY would a FORMER GENERAL and EX-PRESIDENT WARN us about a so-called "MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL-COMPLEX"?

- HAVING RELUCTANTLY, BUT SUCCESSFULLY
INTEGRATED BLACKS and WOMEN into the
 MILITARY, HOW SHOULD we NOW DEAL
 with GAYS in the MILITARY?
- WHAT ATTITUDE SHOULD we take in relation to
CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS?
- SHOULD a DRAFT be RE-INSTATED
 to "DEMOCRATIZE" MILITARY SERVICE,
 ~~or is the ALL-VOLUNTEER APPROACH BEST?
-

There are TWO OTHER ISSUES I HOPE we WOULD
 THINK ABOUT whenever the TOPIC of VETERANS ARISES.
 They are: PATRIOTISM and PEACE.

PATRIOTISM has GONE OUT OF FASHION for SOME.
 It WAS NOT THAT WAY in our PAST, and MAYBE it
WON'T BE in our FUTURE, IF ONLY we REMINDE
OURSELVES that, as THEODORE ROOSEVELT once said,
PATRIOTISM "is a PIOUS and HONORABLE DUTY." [Rel''s,720]

PATRIOTISM is BEST LEARNED from the MASTERS who have ACTUALLY PRACTICED IT. For that reason, I **ENCOURAGE anyone **PONDERING** **PATRIOTISM** to **STUDY the BIOGRAPHIES of FAMOUS AMERICAN VETERANS**. **LEARN WHAT** they did, **WHY** they did it, and **HOW** they **SPOKE** about this **COUNTRY THEY LOVED**. **IF** this **SEEMS TOO TRITE** an **EXERCISE FOR YOU**, **THEN DO IT FOR AND WITH** your **CHILDREN or GRANDCHILDREN** for **THEY MAY NOT YET HAVE LEARNED ALL** the **LESSONS** of **RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP** that **YOU ALREADY KNOW SO WELL!****

ONE such individual you might try could be the **U.S. REVOLUTIONARY SPY, NATHAN HALE** who, just **BEFORE** he was **HANGED by the BRITISH** in **1776**, is **REPUTED TO HAVE SAID: “I ONLY REGRET THAT I HAVE BUT ONE LIFE TO LOSE FOR MY COUNTRY.”** [Anec.262]

PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY might be someone else to **CONSIDER**. A **SAILOR** in the **PACIFIC** during **WORLD WAR II**, **KENNEDY** gained **FAME** after a **JAPANESE DESTROYER RAMMED his SHIP, forcing him and his COMRADES to SWIM to a NEARBY ISLAND. KENNEDY HUMOROUSLY DISMISSED** his **“HERO” CELEBRITY** by saying, **“It was INVOLUNTARY. They SANK MY BOAT,”** [Anec.326f] **NEVERTHELESS**, he **WENT on to serve** in the **U.S. CONGRESS** and as **PRESIDENT of the UNITED STATES**, until his **ASSASSINATION** in **1963**.

HEAR AGAIN these WORDS from his **PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURAL ADDRESS**, and see **IF NOT AT LEAST A LITTLE TINGLE of PATRIOTIC FEVER CARESSES YOUR SPINE**:

We DARE NOT FORGET TODAY that **WE are the HEIRS of that FIRST [AMERICAN] REVOLUTION.**

LET THE WORD GO FORTH

--FROM THIS TIME and PLACE,
--TO FRIEND AND FOE ALIKE,
--that the TORCH HAS BEEN PASSED
--TO A NEW GENERATION of Americans,
--BORN IN THIS CENTURY,
--TEMPERED BY WAR,
--DISCIPLINED by a HARD and BITTER PEACE,
--PROUD of our ANCIENT HERITAGE,
--and UNWILLING to WITNESS or PERMIT
the SLOW UNDOING of THOSE HUMAN RIGHTS
to which this NATION has always been COMMITTED,
and to which we ARE COMMITTED TODAY, AT
HOME and AROUND THE WORLD.

LET EVERY NATION KNOW,

*--WHETHER IT WISHES US WELL or ILL,
 --that WE SHALL PAY ANY PRICE,
 --BEAR ANY BURDEN,
 --MEET ANY HARDSHIP,
 --SUPPORT ANY FRIEND,
 --OPPOSE ANY FOE, to ASSURE the
 SURVIVAL and the SUCCESS of LIBERTY.*

THIS MUCH WE PLEDGE, AND MORE!**NOW the TRUMPET SUMMONS US AGAIN--**

*--NOT as a CALL TO BEAR ARMS,
 THOUGH EMBATTLED WE ARE;
 --BUT [as] a CALL TO BEAR the BURDEN of
 a LONG TWILIGHT STRUGGLE,
 YEAR IN and YEAR OUT,
 “REJOICING in HOPE,
 “PATIENT in TRIBULATION”;
 --a STRUGGLE AGAINST the COMMON
 ENEMIES OF MAN: TYRANNY, POVERTY,
 DISEASE, and WAR itself.*

AND SO, MY FELLOW AMERICANS:

**--ASK NOT WHAT YOUR COUNTRY CAN
DO FOR YOU;**

**--ASK WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR
COUNTRY!** [Practical.855f]

As for **PEACE**:

--**“The MERE ABSENCE of WAR is NOT PEACE.”** So
said the very same man, **JOHN F. KENNEDY**. [SpinIV,10]

--**AS TRUE** as that **CERTAINLY IS**, it is **ALSO
TRUE**, as our **FIRST AMERICAN PRESIDENT, GEORGE
WASHINGTON**, RECOGNIZED: **“TO BE PREPARED FOR
WAR is one of the MOST EFFECTUAL MEANS of
PRESERVING PEACE.”** [Thgts485]

--**BEING PREPARED FOR WAR to PRESERVE the PEACE...**

--**FIGHTING WARS to REGAIN the PEACE...**

BOTH of these ACTIVITIES INVOLVE the CREATION, the TRAINING, the SUPPORT, the HARD WORK, and the SACRIFICE--SOMETIMES EVEN UNTO DEATH--of MEN and WOMEN we call "VETERANS."

--**WITHOUT THEM,**

this NATION WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN BORN.

--**WITHOUT THEM,**

this NATION WILL NOT LONG SURVIVE.

--**WITHOUT THEM, there IS NO PEACE.**

JESUS said, "BLESSED are the PEACEMAKERS, for they shall be CALLED SONS OF GOD." [Mt. 5:9]

YOU and I OWE our LIVES and our LIBERTY to SUCH VETERANS.

As we PAUSE to OBSERVE PEARL HARBOR DAY, LET US--to PARAPHRASE the WORDS of LINCOLN'S GETTYSBURG ADDRESS:

- REDEDICATE OURSELVES
to the UNFINISHED WORK
for which so many VETERANS
have FOUGHT and DIED.
- LET US HIGHLY RESOLVE
that THEY shall NOT HAVE
SERVED or PERISHED IN VAIN, and
- LET US CONSECRATE OURSELVES
to SEEING TO IT
that THIS NATION SHALL HAVE
a NEW BIRTH of FREEDOM,
SO THAT GOVERNMENT
OF the people,
BY the people, and
FOR the people
SHALL NOT PERISH from the earth. [Practical853]

Amen!