

A Positively Crazy Way to Heal the World

**Sermon delivered by Rev. Phillip Schulman
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As you know the church annex is undergoing major remodeling. Most days Jerry Best sits in there like the guy from the Colt 45 commercials from the 60's and 70's. If you have never seen them, the ads pictured a man sitting still amidst chaos and destruction, waiting calmly to be served a glass of Colt 45 beer.

Jerry is director of the project, and largely responsible for making the transformation possible. You may know him as the guy running sound for our services. Did you know that he was the sound man for Lynyrd Skynyrd?

Last week Jerry greeted me as he always does: "Rev. Phillip!" and told me he was looking forward to the service this Sunday. He suggested that I use Ozzy Osbourne's *Crazy Train* as our gathering music. I chuckled. Later I listened to *Crazy Train*. I found it powerful and thematically on target. Although we didn't use it as a gathering music, Jerry knows what he is talking about! Let me give you a sample.

[sung] "Crazy, that's how it goes. Millions of people living as foes. Maybe it's not too late to learn how to love and forget how to hate. Mental wounds not healing. Life's a bitter shame. I'm going off the rails on a crazy train."

Although I heard this iconic rock classic a thousand times, I never heard the lyrics. Today I'm asking: "Is our UU orientation to heal the world and build the beloved community Crazy? Are we out of touch with reality? Is our goal insane?"

Born too late for Woodstock, witness to the first Earth Day in '71, having rocked to replays of the 1980 "No Nukes" event, have learned about permaculture twenty years ago, and have witnessed humanity ignoring the

“global warming” alarms off for decades. It’s been about enough to make me crazy.

It was activism that brought me to this denomination forty years ago. Peace, love and tolerance was the UU cry. As a person of mixed religious heritage, the welcoming of diversity was the clincher.

More recently, a supreme bully became our 45th president. He was the Alt Right’s poster boy for warrior masculinity and Christian nationalism. Early in 2016, I predicted that hate and violence would soon sweep our nation; Charlottesville, January 6th, and the swelling numbers of mass shootings and other hate crimes have all sadly proven me right. Sometimes it does seem to me that we might as well be howling at the moon. [howls]

Are we mad to speak of a global community? To promote peace and justice for all? Is our effort a ride on the crazy train? My answer may surprise you. What we are doing makes sense, and it’s crazy. Positively Crazy!

My last sermon implored us to play. I said that play would be essential for our success. I’m playing with the words positive and crazy. I’m putting an emphasis on the positive. We are the true pro-life advocates. Our respect for life causes us to question established norms.

The norm of America is a prosperity built upon the kidnapping and enslavement of Africans, and attempted genocide of indigenous people. The prosperity has been denied far too many of us, and war has been part of our norm. The US norm has generated so much plastic it’s choking life in the oceans.

Now don’t get me wrong! I have nothing against normal people. I just have trouble believing in their existence. Norms have driven a legacy of human insanity.

When I say that we UUs are Positively Crazy, I’m using a phrase introduced to me by a friend and mentor, the legendary human rights activist David

Oaks. David and I have a favorite MLK quotation: “The kingdom of heaven will not be ushered in by a contented majority but by the creative discontent of a maladjusted minority.”

In a speech given to the American Psychological association King said, “You are saying that all must seek the well-adjusted life in order to avoid neurotic and schizophrenic personalities.

“But on the other hand, I am sure that we will recognize that there are some things in our society, some things in our world, to which we should never be adjusted...We must never adjust ourselves to racial discrimination and racial segregation. We must never adjust ourselves to religious bigotry. We must never adjust ourselves to economic conditions that take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few. We must never adjust ourselves to the madness of militarism, and the self-defeating effects of physical violence.”

UU tradition calls us to a creative discontent that dismantles oppression. It asks us to remove support from destructive norms. It's *Positively Crazy!*

George Bernard Shaw said, “The reasonable man adapts himself to the world: the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man.”

Hero activism is *Positively Crazy*. The world is a much better place because of *Positively Crazy* people who risked their lives, some whose lives were lost in the service of better future they would never see. King, John Lewis, the freedom riders.. Their hero activism was *positively crazy!*

As a teen I became deeply disturbed to realize how many of my heroes had been killed. I'm talking about Martin Luther King, Bobby Kennedy, Jesus and Gandhi. Seeing the movie 'Gandhi' and reading his autobiography, what struck me most was the 2,500 people who marched to the Dharasana Salt Works. There the British police beat them brutally with clubs. The protesters remained peaceful and did not retreat. The press reporting of

nonviolent protesters viciously attacked laid plain the brutality of British domination, and it led to Indian independence.

In preparing this sermon, I looked again at Positively Crazy hero activism. Revisiting events like US freedom rides and India's salt march, I felt tears on my face -- a few at first and then many more.

3,500 unarmed Indians received blows from British authority without fleeing or returning their violence! How is that possible? What made it possible for them to resist their biological fight or flight response? It's crazy right? And it's what defeated the British empire!

When I hear reports of protests by Russian citizens, I am similarly moved! What enables Russians to protest Putin's war on Ukraine knowing that there is a good chance they will be arrested, abused, poisoned -- killed?

How many of you have seen the 1989 video images of a lone unarmed citizen stopping a line of tanks in Tiananmen Square? European media referred to him as "tank man." It's believed that "tank man" was a 19 year old student Wang Weili. He climbed onto a tank, and was taken away by Chinese police. Wang Weilin was never heard of again.

By comparison, flying a rainbow flag outside a church is a lot less risky. For decades, our UU congregations have flown them proudly in solidarity with LGBTQAI people. In this era of MAGA-inspired hate crimes, it remains a Positively Crazy act! By flying a rainbow flag, we risk becoming targets of the hate and violence that is aimed at LGBTQ people.

It's relatively easy for us to repeat words about a global community with peace and justice for all, and to sing songs about a world transformed by our care. It's easy for me to criticize right wing attempts to prohibit the teaching of the nation's history of racism. It's harder for us to make changes necessary to make our congregations truly welcoming and attractive to people of color, LGBTQ, people with disabilities, youth and families, people who don't have master's degrees, neurodivergent people.

The UUA's Rev. Alicia Forde calls this our "soul work." Our work in this 21st century is the work of becoming honest about our participation, support and benefit from oppressive traditions. Our denomination is calling us to leave our comfort zones, to take some risks. Most of us probably won't allow ourselves to choose the kind of risks taken by the freedom riders. However, we will take some positively crazy steps. We will reflect, study and we will make changes.

UU faith compels us to continue prophetic witness and action. The prophets of the bible heard the voice of G*d urging them to speak truth to power. Prophets warned leaders and peers of the costs of remaining on their current course. They call for correction toward justice. They called for repentance, returning to right relationship with the Most High and neighbors. Prophets cried against the societal mistreatment of widows, disabled, impoverished, marginalized and oppressed.

Prophets have always been Positively Crazy. Prophetic voice addresses the insanity of established norms. As modern prophets we carry a similarly utopian vision capable of correcting normal human insanity.

Prophetic tradition directs us away from insanity, the delusions of normal society. It leads us in "a free and responsible search for truth and meaning."

Religion helps us to make sense of events that are impossible or close to impossible to grasp. Death is top of that list. Failure to come to terms with death or little deaths like loss and heartache can be crazy making, and not positively. Unhealed trauma causes us to lose flexibility, the ability to flow and integrate new experiences.

At its best, religion helps us put the fragmented pieces of life into a meaningful integrated whole. Religion can offer an antidote to meaninglessness, the great cause of suffering. Each religious tradition has its prescription for healing.

Albert Einstein said it this way: “A human being is part of the whole called by us as the universe, a part of limited time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. The striving to free oneself from this delusion is the one issue of true religion. Not to nourish it but to try to overcome it is the way to reach the attainable measure of peace of mind.”

Supporting peace of mind, a.k.a. nurturing souls, is only half of our UU mission. We are called to nurture souls in order **TO** help heal the world. Our tradition asks us to do inner work and outer work simultaneously. We have this outrageous faith that sets our sites on the Beloved Community and asks us to do whatever is needed to make it a reality.

Rev. Taqueena Boston said: “Beloved Community includes welcome, celebration, presence, and a sense that we are all in this together. It is knowing that wherever I find myself I am safe and all others are safe, and that justice, equity and compassion is extended to all. Beloved Community means that when the Other is encountered the response is the extension of hospitality and friendship rather than suspicion, mistrust, and regarding difference as a threat.”

We deliver a positively crazy message. We welcome you. We say “We love you just the way you are, now please join us in our effort to heal the world! Join us for learning, spiritual growth and creating justice. Join us in becoming more effective by acting courageously, growing self-awareness, compassion, and vulnerable honesty.”

“We love you! Now please change with us! We are trying to love the hell out of this world, and we are asking for your help.” Our plea comes not from a delusional fear of divine wrath. It’s a *positively* crazy plea of hope and courage, a call to love justice and walk humbly with spirit.

Taking license upon a song from *Les Mis*: “Do you hear the people sing? It is a song of *hope* again. ... there is a life about to start when tomorrow comes... (pause) We’ll see you out beyond the barricade!”

Amen and Ase’

(Ase’ is a Yoruba word pronounced ah-shay. It’s somewhat similar to Amen. Ashe represents the life force or power that each of us have to get things done, to make changes.)

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*For more about the intersection
between UU, disability & mind justice,
including resources & links for sermons
by Rev. Phillip Schulman and others on this topic:
<https://aciu.info/unitarian-universalism-disability-mind-justice/>*