



United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem

INTERFAITH RESOURCE BOOK

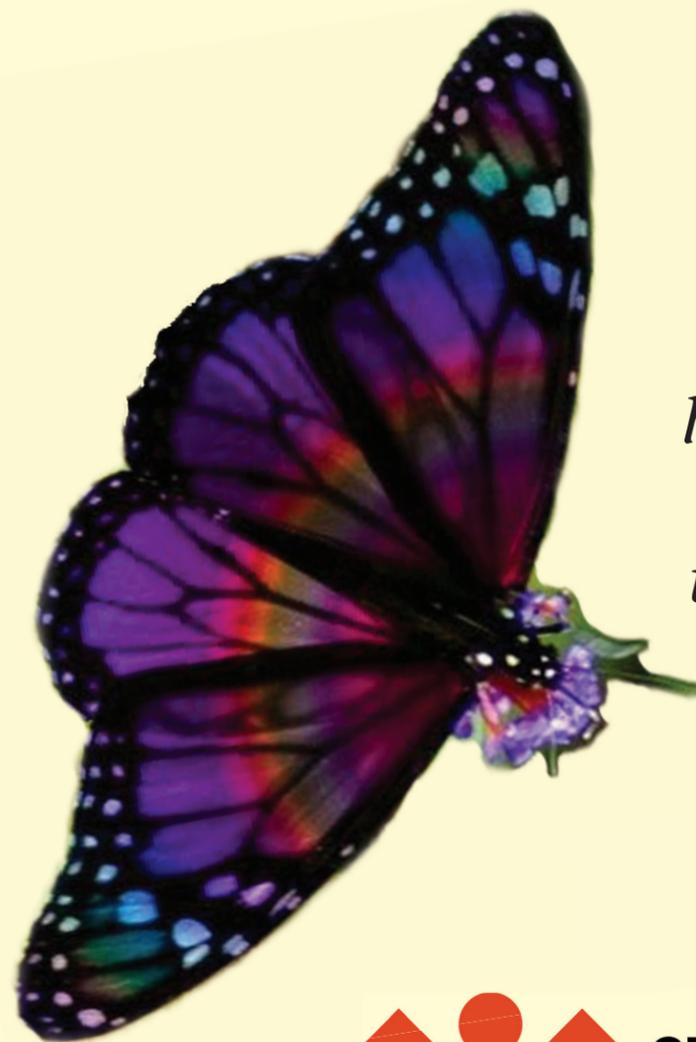
APRIL 2016

SAMUEL DEWITT PROCTOR CONFERENCE AND FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION

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APRIL 2016

SAMUEL DEWITT PROCTOR CONFERENCE

FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION

The things that are true in religion, are in religion because they are true; but they are not true because they are in religion.

Howard Thurman

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2016 Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference Consultation

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Introduction

The scourge of the drug trade contributes to untold human rights violations, massive corruption and violence that perpetuate brokenness and suffering on a worldwide scale. In 2009, the United Nations put forth a multilateral response to the global drug problems. The Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation Toward an Integrated and Balanced strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem identified two foundational solutions. There needs to be more development assistance to reduce supply and focus more attention on health to lower the demand. The Plan had broad support by Member States and engendered great hope for progress in this area.

The Plan suggested “framing collective responses against drugs less like a war and more like an effort to cure a social disease.” It encouraged a middle ground approach between criminalization and legalization. The Plan was laudable, but in its application, supply and use of some substances decreased, while supply and use of other substances increased. Now, seven years later, there is growing awareness that the implementation of the strategies related to the original plan, particularly in the United States, included widespread criminalization of addicts. And as a result of the drug trade and such failed strategies, many are still trapped in a life-time cycle of criminalization, greater drug dependency and violence linked to the drug trade.

The United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Program (UNGASS) is scheduled for April 19-21, 2016. UNGASS has been called to assess interim progress on the 2009 Plan. In the 2009 process, the role of civil society was affirmed and named; however, the specific point of view and experiences of the faith community were not engaged. Without the participation and leadership of the faith community, critical pieces of the answers to why addiction happens and what are the collateral consequences of drug policies upon families and communities world over will be missing. The faith community now has the opportunity to reflect on why the plan has not hit its mark and to suggest steps towards a course correction. The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, a United Nations Non Governmental Organization (NGO), has facilitated consensus building of interfaith leadership around the UNGASS meeting. As a global multi-faith coalition of organizations, faith communities and religious leaders, we submit that spiritual dimensions of the global drug problem must be considered.

It is clear that the over criminalization, in a retributive justice paradigm, will never lead to successful strategies to address global drug problems. What is needed are more responses of compassion and greater focus on a health paradigm that supports those who are addicted. What is needed are policy strategies of reform and transformation that support harm reduction. What is needed are holistic responses that acknowledge the intersectionality of policies related to HIV prevention; drug production and trade agreements; human rights and public health practices; law enforcement and sentencing policies; and compassionate models of care for the families and communities impacted by drug addiction. In short, we argue for elevating policies of compassion, care and harm reduction.

This Interfaith Resource Guide, reflecting a broad coalition of religious groups and communities, has been developed by the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. It includes a collection of reflections, sacred texts, liturgies, prayers, meditations and policy papers from a diverse group of faith leaders and communities. We are pleased that this resource will not only serve as a key tool in preparation for the 2016 UNGASS, but will be useful in the ongoing discourse engaging the faith community to address solutions to the global drug problem.

Dr. Iva E. Carruthers
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STOP THE HARM: HOPE SOMEBODY.

Rev. William Barber tells a story about his grandmother. She used to cook dinner, enough for the family and for “anyone who happened to stop by. She also had a ritual whenever the food was done...she would take a bottle of the anointing oil she rubbed on peoples’ heads when she prayed for them and slipped it into the front of her apron. She and the other ladies would take some money, a rag, and some of the food they’d cooked, and they would say, “We’ll be back. We’ve got to go and hope somebody.” (The Third Reconstruction, p. 3)

Of course, Rev. Barber, who was a little boy at the time, and who was smart, thought she was misspeaking. He thought she meant to say she was going to help somebody, but he was wrong. Grandmama knew what she was saying. She wanted to take some hope to people who, like herself and everyone she knew, were struggling to survive. She knew that “any prayers worth their salt had to be accompanied by food for the hungry.”

God tells us to seek God and live. It is a fact that if we DO NOT seek God, we will flail in the waters of injustice and run out of strength. God needs for us to seek God ...so that we go and “hope” somebody. The work you are doing is like being in the kitchen, preparing food for your flock and for people in the community who have been tossed and turned by corrupt and uncaring governments. The work you are doing demands the strength that hope gives, because the Empire will fight back, long, hard and dirty, in order to shut you down.

It cannot happen. It cannot go down that way.

“The one who made the Pleiades and Orion and turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and outs them out on the surface of the earth, the Lord is his name, who makes destruction flash out against the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress. (Amos 5:8)

On this day, we pray, O God, that we remember the purpose for which You put us here. The arms of evil are too short to fight you; strengthen our arms so that we force evil to lose its strength as our faith in you and our determination to fight evil back for the sake of “the least of these” who need to know that You are real. Help us to work to “hope” somebody.

Amen, and amen.

Rev. Dr. Susan K. Smith



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HUNGER FOR JUSTICE ABOUT DRUG POLICY

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Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness [justice]. Matthew 5:6a

Numbered among the many people who “hunger and thirst for righteousness” are men and women who are labeled criminals due to the “war on drugs.” Law professor Michelle Alexander observes in her book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color-Blindness* that convictions for drug offenses “are the single most important cause of the explosion in incarceration rates in the United States” and that “[d]rug offenses alone account for two thirds of the rise in the federal inmate population and more than half of the rise in state prisoners between 1985 and 2000.”

Alcohol and tobacco use and dependency are treated as public health issues. However, the United States treats other drug use and dependency as moral evils. The dissimilarity in treatment is obvious and deplorable. Sadly, people of faith are only now beginning to recognize the injustice of drug policy that deliberately mis-defines a public health issue and treats people suffering from drug use and dependency as public enemies.

Our neighbors who use and are dependent on drugs hunger and thirst for justice. Our communities hunger and thirst for treatment centers rather than jails and prisons. Homes and neighborhoods are terrorized by militarized law enforcement personnel bent on tracking, targeting, and capturing people who use drugs. Amid these realities, people are in desperate need of pastoral and prophetic help.

Unfortunately, faith leaders have not understood U.S. drug policies as a moral concern. Faith leaders have not taken up the cause of justice concerning drug policies. Faith leaders have, in many instances, been aligned with misguided approaches that treat drug use and dependency as threats to public safety, not issues involving public health.

Our neighbors who use and are dependent on drugs are treated as criminals because faithful people (a) often fail or refuse to see them as neighbors, and (b) often fail or refuse to see them as neighbors who need and deserve care. Unlike Jesus, who felt compassion for suffering people, the people who insist on treating the victims of drug use and dependency as criminals willfully refuse to care. Our refusal to care for others the way Jesus cared for suffering people explains how faithful people can allow so many men and women to be taken from families and communities, misidentified as dangerous, and condemned to lifetimes of social, political, and spiritual exile.

The life of Jesus shows how God cares for suffering people. God cares when suffering people are oppressed. God cares when weak people are victimized by the powerful. Because God cares, God calls us to care. Because God has acted on our behalf through Jesus, God calls us to act on behalf of our suffering brothers and sisters who hunger and thirst for justice and liberation from the oppression of draconian drug laws and mass incarceration.

Summary of Multi-Faith Consultation

Convened by the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, October 6 & 7, 2015

The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Inc. (SDPC), a 501(c)3 and United Nations Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), hosted a Multi-Faith Consultation on October 6 and 7, 2015, at the headquarters of the Open Society Foundation office in Washington, D.C. The convening was called in preparation for this United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on Global Drug Policy specifically related to harm reduction.

SDPC is committed to strengthening the leadership on harm reduction and other drug policy reform by engaging and mobilizing the African American faith community in collaboration with civic, corporate and philanthropic leaders who share a common belief in the basic tenet of harm reduction.

Harm reduction is broadly defined as “a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative and destructive consequences associated with drug use. Harm reduction is also a social justice movement founded upon the belief in and respect for, the humanity of people who misuse drugs. First and foremost, harm reduction seeks to approach this global dilemma by treating those battling addiction with compassion and care.

The multi-faith leaders spent a day and a half exploring and probing critical issues related to harm reduction and other drug policy reform in search of new paradigms and transformative models for those around the globe who are caught in a web of drug addiction and other drug misuse, dependency, global drug trafficking and related ills detrimental to human life and dignity.

The leaders engaged in provocative discussions about 1) the cost and service consequences of national and international drug policies; 2) points of engagement for civil society and non-governmental organizations to inform and impact deliberations of the United Nations; 3) effective harm reduction strategies based on humane and moral responses, and 4) the centrality of faith in finding common ground in a multi-faith context by which to address, adjudicate and mitigate destructive and punitive options related to drug treatment and criminal justice.

In laying the foundation for the UNGASS, the leaders identified five core content areas addressed by the faith leaders attending the pre-2016 UNGASS. The areas are not exclusive, but they do provide a sense of the scope and breadth of the dialogue that captured the most active articulation in support of the Multi-faith Consultation goals. The five areas include:

1. Why Faith Matters for Harm Reduction and Other Drug Policy Reform: A Moral Imperative and Ethical Mandate to Move from Shadow to Services.
2. Community Building, Common Ground and Civil Society.
3. Language, Cultural and Contextual Sensitivities
4. Advocacy and Activism for Harm Reduction and Other Drug Policy Reform
5. National and Global Initiatives: Points of Engagement

At the end of the pre-2016 UNGASS Multi-faith Consultation, the multi-faith leaders were presented with the SDPC Multi-faith Action Framework for Harm Reduction and Global Drug Policy Reform. All were invited to reflect on the day and a half proceedings and identify points of agreement and areas of concern to move forward.

The overall goal of the framework was designed to inculcate the multi-faith tenets of beliefs and actions explored during the pre-2016 UNGASS Multi-faith Consultation and shape a united national voice from the faith community on harm reduction and drug policy reform. Utilizing established multi-faith strategies, the framework provides a map for accomplishing three objectives:

1. Communication and Educational Outreach.
2. Advocacy for the Increase of Accountability at the Multi-faith Level, and
3. Collaboration of Faith Entities with Each Other and Non-Faith Communities.

A Litany for God's Power and Presence

Although the multi-faith leaders at the pre-UNGASS 2016 convening recognized that the world is at a Kairos moment as pertains to Global Drug Policy, they also realized that their job will not be an easy one; there is resistance world-wide to changing drug policy to emphasize compassion, care and the health of drug-users. They believe, however, that they have been placed at the intersection of the spirit and truth of the age – the Zeitgeist – when men and women pay homage to their destiny, as was the case with Martin Luther King, Jr., knowing that they are being called for “their deed,” their words to be the best of the time.” Seeking to honor the call of the moment, the multi-faith leaders took their first step as a collective in search of common ground and allowed the dialogue to carry them forward as they:

- [unanimously confirm] and affirmed the need to advocate harm reduction as a social justice movement and build a coalition of multi-faith advocates and activists to articulate an alternative to the punitive policies of the War on Drugs, utilizing Harm Reduction and Global Drug Policy Reform framework to organize efforts for effecting less punitive policies to include treatment, prevention, compassion and care.
- agreed that a more effective way to combat drug misuse is to reduce the collateral consequences that impede rehabilitation by distinguishing myth from reality and spending more on public education, treatment, and interventions that view drug addiction and drug misuse from a public health perspective.
- intentionally opened themselves to building community and seeking common ground to become better agents of personal and collective transformation willing to serve in a multi-faith context for just and humane policies and treatment for those vulnerable and exposed to global drug trafficking.
- demonstrated the capacity to welcome the creation of greater space at the faith communion table in humble recognition of other multi-faith leaders’ proclamations to serve as primary agents for interpreting the language and contextual harms of their theological and textual frameworks...
- expressed general agreement to affirm the rule to avoid the use of certain dehumanizing terms such as “addicts” and to be more sensitive about the selection of key phrases and terms used to describe harm reduction and other drug policy reform...
- revealed a decided unanimity that current harsh policies need to be changed and that activism must always accompany policy changes in creating a more just and humane reality by recognizing the intersection of policies related to HIV prevention, drug production and trade agreements, human rights and public health policies, law enforcement and sentencing policies, and compassionate models of care for men, women, children, families and communities impacted by drug addiction and the resulting collateral consequences ...
- acknowledged the need to repeal certain laws against personal conditions or individual misconduct and support decriminalization which advocates the “removal of criminal sanction of certain public and private acts where there is no intent to harm or injure another person or groups of people,” while also addressing the impact of each remedy upon individuals and communities.
- accepted the responsibility to engage in greater study about the involvement of targeted communities and the nuances of nationhood, language, culture and context associated with pursuing and implementing harm reduction and other drug policy reform ...
- welcomed the opportunity to share in community with faith leaders and others who are guided by moral imperatives and ethical mandates, manifesting a common belief in something higher than themselves and recognizing their responsibility as leaders of houses of worship and multi-faith organizations to send forth prophetic messages of health and well-being embedded in harm reduction and drug policy reform from a faith perspective.

The entire synthesis of the pre-2016 UNGASS Multi-faith Consultation can be found on the SDPC website, www.sdpconference.info.

- L: The Hindus ask, “What sort of religion can it be without compassion?”
- P: *The God of all Creation desires us to love each other as God loves us.*
- L: God, as creator of us all, has a vested interest in our well being.
- P: *The God of all Creation desires us to care for each other as God cares for us.*
- L: Islam says that those who act kindly in this world will have kindness. Not one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.
- P: *The God of Creation desires us to treat each other as God treats us.*
- L: The Native Americans say, “This we know: all things are connected, like the blood which unites one family, all things are connected. Our God is the same God whose compassion is equal for all.
- P: *The God, who created community, desires us all to be connected - one to the other.*
- L: The Jews say that the world stands upon three things: upon the Law, upon worship, and upon showing kindness.
- P: *The God who is the author of kindness desires us all to show kindness to each other.*
- L: In Taoism, the holy words say “regard your neighbor’s gain as your own gain and your neighbor’s loss as your own loss.
- P: *When laws and policies are punitive without compassion, we rub against the will of the God of all Creation.*
- L: Christian scripture reminds us to do to others as we would have done to us. The scriptures say for us not to oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor. Let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.
- P: *The drug laws have made people suffer unduly. The drug policies and the war on drugs have been a war on people.*
- L: And so, Creator God, we look to You to melt hardened hearts so that they might shape and write policy which will help and heal the afflicted, not harm them further.
- P: *The Dalai Lama says it is not enough to be compassionate. He says we must act.*
- L: Creator God, we hear You calling us to compassion and care.
- P: *We stand before you, seeking Your wisdom, Your presence, Your help, and Your strength.*
- L: We declare that the War on Drugs has failed...and we declare our commitment to create an awareness of the Divine demand that we Stop the Harm and show compassion and care.
- A: Creator God, in Your mercy, hear our prayers and strengthen us for this work.**

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Multi-faith sources:

Hinduism: *Basavanna, Vachana, 247*

Islam: *Qur’an 39.10; Forty Hadith of an-Nawawi 13*

Native American: *From an oration of Chief Seattle, Native America, USA, 19th Century*

Judaism: *Mishna, Abot 1.2*

Taoism: *Lao Tzu, T’ai Shang Kan Ying P’ien, 213-218*

Christianity: *Matthew 7:12; Zechariah 7:10*

Dalai Lama: *The World of Tibetan Buddhism*



Javier Sicilia, Mexico

Sicilia's son, 24-year old Juan Francisco Sicilia Ortega, was murdered along with six other victims.

Juan Francisco was a 24-year old in the final year of a business studies course when violent, drug-dealing gang members killed him.

“There was a row at a nightclub in Temixco, Morelos – Juan wasn’t even there at first, but then a friend of his called him and he went to see what was going on,” says Javier. “No one really knows what happened next but by the end of it, Juan

and six other young people were dead.”

This, says Javier, is what drugs have done to his country. “The violence is now so widespread that an everyday event - like a row in a nightclub - can escalate within minutes into mass murder. It’s a country out of control; people are dying everywhere the whole time ... and many are young, like Juan, at the threshold of their lives.”

Mexico has borne the brunt of the war on drugs and is at the forefront of pushing for reform to global drug policy. So many people have died and there seems to be no end in sight to this completely unnecessary situation. The insecurity and violence in Mexico cannot be allowed to continue and the answer is not more guns, police and prohibition - we all know that hasn’t worked.

Grace, The Philippines

Brother was murdered because drugs are left in the hands of criminals.

“People called my brother names and I did too. I grew up knowing and seeing that drug use is bad and is something to be ashamed of. Still I felt how those labels made him feel, how the way people looked and treated him wounded him. He was the most caring and loving sibling and from him I learned how to live simply, because he withstood whatever came his way.”

Their mother tried to remove her son from temptation, sending him to places where she thought drugs were not accessible. He was a generous and kind young man who would do whatever his friends would ask of him – his mother thought he was too gullible. The wider family also looked down on him, including the boy’s uncle, a police officer. His nephew would try to kiss his uncle’s hand to show respect, but his uncle poured scorn on him, leaving him feeling crushed and unloved.

“We grieved for the death of my brother’s dreams, for the death of hope in him. His dignity died and a part of me died too. I was that little sister who saw her brother’s agony, who only wanted to see him happy and safe, whether he was using or not. I loved him for all that he was.”

Grace’s brother was only thrown into jail when his own parents had him arrested for his drug use, and in 1999, he was murdered. She has been told it was due to a drug deal he messed up and the family did not seek justice for him in an environment where he would receive sympathy or even fair, humane treatment.

It is this ostracizing that Grace feels so strongly: “Death is not just physical. We die in many ways and we kill without intending to. Addiction kills when we make drug users feel unworthy, helpless and hopeless; when we treat them with animosity, stigma and prejudice. The war on drugs creates greater wars inside the people who mostly need

The Drug War From An Islamic Perspective

Imam Abdul Malik Mujahid is president of Sound Vision, an Islamic not-for-profit organization.



“It will lead to the escalation of the social and armed conflict, fail to solve the drug trafficking problem, endanger the peace process, attack indigenous populations’ culture and lifestyles, seriously hamper the Amazon eco-system, worsen the humanitarian and human rights crisis, promote forced displacement, and further worsen the social and political crisis,” wrote a coalition of 73 Colombian non-governmental organizations to the United States 15 years ago.

With such dire warnings and dangerous rhetoric, what “it” could they be referring to? None other than the so-called American “War on Drugs.” These far-reaching social implications mirror those of the War on Terror, another example of military rhetoric that some United States officials use to describe social policy agendas.

I am against terrorism but cannot support the War on Terror. The same is true about the drug war. I am against drugs but oppose the War on Drugs. It seems that any time we use the term “war,” we mean a license to be lawless and, shall I say, valueless. We have declared something as an enemy and become ruthless toward it. That is how the world used to be, but we were supposed to have become better now! That’s why we came up with laws of war, treaties, international law, the United Nations, and the International Criminal Court.

I have not consumed any drugs in my entire life, but the racial injustice of mandatory minimum laws infuriates me. The form of cocaine primarily used by poor black Americans carries a far higher judicial sentence than the form of cocaine primarily used by wealthier whites. Rich, white Americans are allowed rehabilitation instead of prison, and their records are cleared, almost as if they were never convicted of drug possession. Poor African-Americans enjoy neither of these privileges.

The attitude our society has toward drug offenses is militaristic and black-and-white. As truth-out.org puts it, “When you define something as war, it dictates the use of the military (or militarized police forces, prisons, and other forms of coercion) as the primary instruments of policy. Violence becomes the means of decision, total victory the goal. Anyone who suggests otherwise is labeled a dreamer, an appeaser, or even a traitor.”

The War on Terror and the War on Drugs are both high in rhetoric and use a set of confusing measures to fight their nemeses in a way that, evidence suggests, is counter-productive. Contrary to the war mentality, dreaming is exactly what is needed to solve the systemic issue of mass incarceration for nonviolent offenses.

Calming down this mentality of “war” is also needed where we are legitimately at war. There were comparatively few suicide bombings in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Yemen before the United States started bombing in these countries. Professor Robert Pape of the University of Chicago establishes this fact in his research, which has been funded by the U.S. Defense Department. When we make war on a group of people, it is natural that they will respond in kind. We should keep this in mind when establishing American foreign policy in any part of the world – violence will likely be met with more violence, torture will likely be met with terrorism, as documented by many, whereas peaceful interactions are likely to bring about more and better results.

While the international War on Terror has destroyed five countries and killed millions of people, the War on Drugs has devastated a whole minority in the U.S. Despite the fact that there's little difference in drug use between blacks and whites, blacks have a much greater chance of going to prison for it.

The War on Drugs and the War on Terror have both given way to legalized injustice. Using the rhetoric of "war" tends to subvert constitutional safeguards in the legal system, thus eroding our commitment to democracy. For example, secret evidence is often used against immigrants, so they are unable to rebut the points made against them at trial. And this evidence tends not to hold up under traditional court standards for evidentiary support of claims. Putting the nation on the alert with cries of "war" derails our ability to act rationally and humanely toward our fellow human beings – something the Due Process Clause of the constitution was specifically implemented to promote.

Although Muslim chemists gave the world the term "alcohol", an Arabic word, it is a sin in Islam to consume intoxicants. It was also declared a criminal act for Muslims in the peace sanctuary of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him.

However, the Prophet did not move to illegality the way we do in the U.S. today. He was a leader of the peace movement of his time. He used a combination of spiritual connection with God and a message of mercy and forgiveness, serving humanity around him, along with providing a minimum set of laws, to achieve a peaceful society. That is probably why he was honored by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1935 as one of the 18 greatest lawgivers of the world. But the merciful Prophet implemented God's Ten Commandments very differently. His aim was not to punish people, but to save them from their wrong behavior. If one approached him confessing that he or she had committed a major crime, the Prophet would seek excuses to avoid punishing them. Instead, he wanted them to feel remorse and reconnect with God. He did not define sinners as existential threats.

Out of about 6,000 verses of the Quran which mostly deal with the development of human character and alignment with God's guidance, fewer than 40 deal with the criminal law of Islam.

Since Muslims ran a civilization for over 1,000 years, they naturally developed a body of laws to deal with governing society. These laws deal with issues ranging from fighting neighborhood crime to international laws of war and peace. It is true that Islamic criminal law has at times been implemented harshly, and even wrongly. Such an application of Islamic criminal law is void of God's mercy, which is considered His primary attribute in Islam. The primary purpose of law in Islam is to preserve life and order in society, not to create a machine of incarceration and punishment.

It was, therefore, character-building, not the ruthless, merciless execution of laws, which changed the behavior of people. Character-building seeks to investigate complexity, not oversimplify. It seeks to heal, not to avenge. So let us abandon the War on Drugs, which has failed. Instead, let us adopt a model which has worked: anti-smoking. This health threat and social vice has definitely been reduced in our country. But it is not because we were throwing people in prison for smoking. Rather, we used widespread education, raised awareness, and used the power of persuasion to convince Americans to stop smoking. So let us apply the methods of our campaign against smoking to our War on Drugs.

shop had his sentence reduced, by implicating others, to 36 months. Although neither brother had a prior conviction, they were sent to separate prisons hundreds of miles apart for Lamont to serve 19 years and Lawrence 15 years.

"After they were found guilty in June they never came back home," their mother recalled. "I didn't think stuff like this happens. If I had other children, how could I tell them 'stay in school, be good and nothing bad will happen to you,' because that's not true."

Ms. Garrison has become an advocate for reform of drug policy and change to the sentencing laws – despite the fact that any alteration would not retroactively change the fate of her only twin sons. She said she aims to help the sons and daughters who have been victims of the law which has claimed many – whether innocent or guilty – as a result of the racial disparity and collateral consequences that arise from the unfair sentencing guidelines.

"I hope I can be halfway effective in helping," said Ms. Garrison. "It's not getting better; it seems to be getting worse."



Lugard Abila, Kenya

Friend died during a drug raid, leaving behind her now orphaned seven-year-old daughter, Tina.

"My mother was a beautiful, caring and always supporting mother. Yes, she was hooked on heroin, but one thing I learned from her is that she was still my mother – and a very loving one. May her soul rest in peace." Little Tina, who is just 7 years old, describes the loving relationship she had with her mother, who died as a result of the war on drugs.

We all know that drug use can cause great damage to individuals, their families and communities, but bad drug policies and policing causes greater damage to individuals. It leaves them isolated from society and suffering from the stigmatization of being judged negatively by their community.

"Tina is just one among many children who have been orphaned by the war on drugs; their parents are locked up, mistreated, abused, beaten and – as in the case of Tina's mother – even killed. She met her death as a result of how policies and policing effect people who use drugs in our country and around the world. We think of her as a silent hero. Tina's mother was a friend and a sister to me. My personal connection and memories of her make me feel that if something could have been done to help her, she would be enjoying her gift of life right now just like anyone else."

One day in March 2013, the county askaris and the Kenyan police were told to raid a drug-user site in the name of cleaning up the town. This was a place Njeri used to call her home and where she would find comfort. Terrified by the appearance of police officers throwing tear gas, in an attempt to secure the building, Njeri jumped from the second story, fracturing her spine and two limbs, and losing her ability to walk. As a result of her injuries, she experienced excruciating prolonged pain and her efforts to get health care support were ineffectual due to the stigmatization of drug use. This is despite the fact that health providers take an oath to save lives while on duty. Tina died in February 2015, leaving behind a helpless daughter just seven years old.

"Are we paying too high a price in the name of protecting individuals, families and communities? We all come from diverse walks of life, and I believe we are all here for some unique purpose, some noble objective that will allow us to manifest our higher human potential while we at the same time, adding value to the lives around us. This is why I believe in drug policy reform. We must treat people who use drugs as individual human beings with respect for human rights and their health if we are to really protect our families."



Murtaza Majeed, Afghanistan

Grew up in war-torn Afghanistan, where he lost his cousin to an opiate overdose.

“My family was poor, like most Afghan families who lived in Kabul city during the civil war and under the Taliban regime. As a youngster, I had guns, and used bullets and burnt out tanks as toys. Schools were empty and us kids studied under fear of bullet fire and bombs.”

Murtaza has grown up in a period when drugs were widely available on the streets. He and his friends were first exposed to cannabis when they were 14. Most of them went on to use opium and heroin while they were in school. There was no information or education about drugs, with the only message being that drugs are bad and forbidden (“haram” in Islam). Yet around them, the young men witnessed many adults taking drugs openly, even some of their politicians and police officers.

“Every day, drug users face abuse and hatred in Afghanistan. Families shun their own children because of the stigmatization. I had a cousin who used heroin, but since we had no information about drugs, we forcefully urged him to quit, unaware that drug addiction is a complex phenomenon and not just about willpower. Of course, it didn’t work and one day we found him dead, covered in blood, with a needle in his groin.”

Murtaza has lost his closest friends to overdose or imprisonment because of the war on drugs - in some cases just for carrying a small amount of drugs. He believes that prohibition and the criminalization of drug users have made drugs a force of evil, leading to stigmatization and marginalization. In Afghanistan, addiction is seen as shameful and a mother will often rather her child die than use drugs.

“My cousin and my closest friends have died because of wrong-headed drug policies. I carry the burden of their death, and it motivates me to stop the unjustifiable deaths of others who use drugs. Our generation is living in the midst of a drug war. We face physical and mental trauma everyday for conditions forced upon us by a war, which can never be won. Rather than keep fighting this war, we need to change tack. We need to put health and human rights – rather than punishment and stigmatization – at the heart of our approach to drugs.”



Karen Garrison, USA

Sons, Lawrence and Lamont, were imprisoned on mandatory minimum sentences of 15 and 19 years.

Identical twins Lawrence and Lamont Garrison were inseparable. In elementary school, one would rush to the other’s classroom and wait until he was dismissed. Living in the same house in Washington, D.C. that their mother and grandmother had grown up in, they attended Howard University together. Both worked part-time, to help pay their tuition, and they graduated together in May 1998.

A month before their graduation, the police came to the door one night and arrested Lawrence and Lamont. They were charged with conspiracy as part of a 20-person powder and crack cocaine operation, implicated by the owner of a Maryland auto body shop.

“My boys never missed a day in school, they never stayed out all night and then one night, the police knocked on the door and said they were drug dealers,” recalled the twins’ mother, Karen Garrison.

In court, they maintained their innocence and would not accept a plea bargain. Although no drugs, paraphernalia or drug money were found in their house or on their person, they were separately convicted of conspiracy to distribute powder and crack cocaine on the testimony of members of the conspiracy, and records showing calls they made to the body shop. According to Lawrence and Lamont, the phone calls related to a botched repair job on their uncle’s car. The owner of the body

AHIMSA : Non-Harming (On Non-Harming)

By Gil Fronsdal

Devotion to being harmless is a core principle of Buddhist religious life. One ancient text states that “non-harming is the distinguishing characteristic of the Dharma.” For unenlightened Buddhists the commitment to non-harming is carried in the ethical precepts; for enlightened Buddhists non-harming becomes integral to their nature and they are said to “delight in harmlessness.”

While the principle of non-harming is a noble one, its application in daily life raises many questions about when the principle is relevant, and in which circumstances it might be discarded. Is harmlessness an absolute precept for Buddhists? Does it prohibit any use of violence for the purposes of self-defense or when it can prevent a greater harm?

In the surviving teachings of the Buddha we find that in certain circumstances the principle of non-harming is absolute while in others it is not.

It is absolute in regard to killing. The first precept for lay Buddhists is to abstain from intentionally killing any animate life. In the recorded teachings of the Buddha no exception to this precept is given.

For Buddhist monastics the prohibition against killing people is one of the four most serious precepts for which, again, no exception is allowed. Explicitly included is a prohibition from encouraging others to commit either murder or suicide, or to have an abortion. To break any of these entails a permanent expulsion from the monastic order.

In the minor monastic rules the prohibition against killing is extended to include animals, living beings one knows are in one’s water, and even plants. This latter prohibition explains why some monks and nuns will not eat whole fruit unless a lay donor has ceremoniously “killed” it with a cut from a knife.

The principle of non-harming is not absolute when it comes to striking others. For example, among the five lay precepts there is no precept against hitting, perhaps because, even with the Buddhist emphasis on being harmless, there may be situations where this is appropriate.

Among the 227 monastic rules, a precept against hitting does exist. However, the rule is not absolute and so helps us understand the Buddhist attitude on this issue. The prohibition for monastics is against hitting when one is “angry or displeased,” meaning that when these states are absent, hitting is permitted. The monastic however, is limited to doing so with only their hands or fists since monks and nuns cannot possess weapons.

The canonical explanation of this rule explicitly allows a monastic to hit a person (or animal) in self-defense if they are not angry or displeased. More precisely, the commentary allows such self-defensive hits for the purposes of escaping danger. Monastics are thus not expected or encouraged to stand their ground when under attack. This would perhaps require a greater amount of violence than what is needed to escape danger.

The prohibition against hitting while being angry or displeased puts a fairly high standard for when violence may be allowed. The monastic must be careful that he or she has no intention to harm another since to have such intentions requires the presence of anger or displeasure.

From a Buddhist point of view, the reasons for this care may be more for the welfare of the monastic than it is for the welfare of those they may want to strike out at. One has not escaped danger if one has strengthened the habitual and karmic forces of one’s own anger in the process of escaping an external threat.

For the Buddha, even under the threat of death, a monastic must not succumb to hate. Using a dramatic example, the Buddha insists that “even if hoodlums were to cut off your limbs, if you become hateful toward them, you would not be carrying out my teachings. Rather you should ... maintain compassion and loving kindness toward them.” While this does not preclude striking at someone in order to try to escape such dramatic harm, the Buddha is clearly more interested in the quality of one’s mind than he is in perpetuating one’s current life at the cost of sacrificing that quality of mind.

In fact, the importance of upholding one’s personal well being is so great that the Buddha emphasized “one must not give up one’s own welfare for the sake of other people’s welfare, however great.” In saying this, the Buddha clearly meant working toward one’s highest spiritual welfare, which for him meant Liberation or Awakening. In his view of life, this is not necessarily selfish since it is only when one has experienced Awakening that one can help others attain their highest welfare. To explain this, the Buddha used the analogy of the people stuck in quicksand. As long as they were all stuck they could not help each other. But if one person could get out on solid land, he or she could reach back to pull out the others.

So while the precept against hitting is not absolute, the precept against acting on anger or hate is. The nature of one’s intention and state of mind takes prominence over the act. Perhaps because of this, the Buddhist emphasis on being harmless has not led Buddhism to pioneer sophisticated strategies of non-violent action, as for example was done by Mahatma Gandhi. Rather, its strength has been in developing techniques of mindfulness and calm that helps us to clarify and improve our intentions and states of mind.

It is well known that Buddhist ethics is centered on intentions. In fact, the distinction between the Jain and Buddhist emphasis on harmlessness has to do with intentions. In Jainism any act of harming creates detrimental karma. In Buddhism, it is only those acts where one intends harm that are detrimental, not those that are accidental. For this reason the Jain ideal is a much more thorough dedication to harmless living than the Buddhist ideal. In fact, some of the saints of the Jain tradition took the ideal to such extremes that they slowly starved to death.

The Buddhist emphasis on harmlessness is explicitly directed toward both oneself and others. That is, one should “not intend harm to self, to others, or to both self and others.” Rather one should “intend benefit for self, for others, for both, and for the whole world.” So while the ideal of harmlessness literally refers to the absence of harm, it also implies a loving concern for both self and others. The motivation for being harmless can come from our love of others. As the Buddha said,

“One who neither kills or makes others kill,
Neither steals nor makes others steal,
Is one who has love for all living beings.”

In one Sutra a man claims that the supreme spiritual goal is attained simply by abstaining from evil actions, evil speech, and evil intentions. The Buddha counters this – perhaps with a sense of humor – by claiming that if this were so, a young baby would have attained the supreme goal. Abstention is not enough; one also needs the presence of right intention and the other elements of the Eightfold Path.

The Buddhist word for non-harming is *ahimsa*, the same word Mahatma Gandhi translated as “non-violence.”

Donna is the founder and facilitator of the campaigning site, Jac’s Voice, which focuses on living with addiction and mental illness. She works with mumsDU, a coalition of Canadian mothers who have lost sons and daughters to overdose and other drug related harms; the Canadian FED UP! Rally; and Anyone’s Child International, campaigning to end the war on drugs.



Maricela Orozco, Mexico

Two sons kidnapped and murdered by drug traffickers in Mexico’s drug war.

Maricela and her family are experiencing the nightmare that is the drug war in Mexico at first hand. In March 2014, Maricela’s 19-year-old son, Gerson Quevedo Orozco, studying architecture at the university, was kidnapped while in a convenience store with a couple of friends in Veracruz. The first Maricela and her husband heard about it was when they received a call asking for 80,000 pesos in exchange for their son.

They paid the ransom and were waiting for their son to be returned, when a “supposed friend” of their son stopped by and told them he knew their son’s location. Maricela’s other son, Alan, and her daughter’s boyfriend, Miguel, went immediately to find him, but a van followed them and the people in it shot them dead. Alan and Miguel became part of the more than 100,000 deaths in Mexico since the drug war began.

Because this happened in their local neighborhood, the family decided it would be unsafe to return home. They have been back only once – with police protection – to grab the clothes Alan would wear at his funeral. Maricela’s family is now the victim of forced internal displacement. They are just one family out of more than 280,000 people displaced in Mexico, and her son is just one of more than 20,000 missing because of drug-war violence. Maricela is still demanding justice for her family and searching for her son. She knows personally how devastating the war on drugs has been for her family and her country, and is working tirelessly for a drug policy that respects human rights.



Peter Muyshondt, serving senior police officer from Belgium

Brother, Tom, died as a result of an opiate overdose.

“Being a police officer, I was supposed to obey and impose the law. Having and using drugs is still a felony, so being with my brother was always very confusing to me as it forced me to face the contradictions of drug policy. Should I be a policeman first (which you are assumed to be 24 hours a day) or should I be his brother?”

Peter definitely found himself avoiding some situations because of this confusion with his work and home role. For example, he didn’t dare go on holiday to Thailand with his brother because he was afraid they would be checked and searched in case he had drugs on him. He knew that Thailand had severe penalties for the possession of drugs and, as a policeman, Peter didn’t want to end up in a ‘career threatening’ situation.

“I was a coward then. The fact that I didn’t actively help my brother was mainly due to my position as a police officer. We could never be just normal brothers because I wanted to be the perfect cop and he was often a threat to my career. I think my family reacted similarly - they were also thinking of my career and would probably have reacted otherwise towards my brother if I hadn’t been a police officer. I wouldn’t act that way today. If Tom had not been labeled a criminal, he might still be here. If I had not been obliged to do my job with my hands tied, it might have worked out differently.”

STOP THE HARM: The War on Drugs' Direct Effect on Families



Anne-Marie Cockburn, UK

Daughter Martha died of an ecstasy overdose.

"On 20th July, 2013, I received the phone call that no parent wants to get. The voice said that my 15-year-old daughter was gravely ill, and they were trying to save her life. On that beautiful, sunny Saturday morning, Martha had swallowed half a gram of MDMA powder (more widely known as ecstasy) that turned out to be 91% pure. Within two hours of taking it, my daughter died of an accidental ecstasy overdose. She was my only child."

Anne-Marie was blissfully ignorant about the world of drugs before Martha died. She looked at her daughter's Internet history and found that she had been researching ways to take drugs safely. While no one wants drugs being sold to children, if Martha had got hold of legally regulated drugs meant for adults, labeled with health warnings and dosage instructions, she would not have gone on to take 5-10 times the safe dose.

"When I hear the news that a young person has died, and yet another family has joined the bereaved parents club, I feel helpless as I wonder how many more need to die before someone in government will actually do something about it. As I stand by my child's grave, what more evidence do I need that things must change? Isn't this loss of precious lives an indicator of a law that is past its sell-by date and in need of urgent reform? A good start would be to conduct the very first proper review of our drug laws in over 40 years and to consider alternative approaches. But the people in power turn away from it. They play an amazing game of 'Let's pretend.' Well there's no way for me to hide – every day I wake up, the stark reality of Martha's absence hits me once again."

To represent her beloved Martha, it is Anne-Marie's quest to align herself with those who can help progress this conversation. That is why she's involved with the Anyone's Child project. This unique chorus of voices cannot be ignored; there is nowhere to hide from their harrowing stories.

Donna May, Canada

Daughter Jac died as a result of an opiate overdose.



Donna is a mother of three children, who almost learned too late about the real effect the practice of tough love has on addiction. Donna found her daughter's drug use difficult to understand or cope with and had not been able to engage with her successfully. Their relationship had suffered as a result. Late one evening, she received a call informing her that her daughter, Jac, was going to lose her life from complications of her substance use. That call led to Donna May reconsidering her views and her actions around addiction.

"I realized too late. It wasn't until she was dying that it became clear to me that her addiction was covering up an undiagnosed mental illness. Using illicit drugs had been the only relief she ever had from the constant confusion going on in her mind. The drugs were what she depended on in order to simply function on a day-to-day basis. But, what began as enough to feel relief stopped being enough. The amount she needed grew and grew and grew, until it became bigger than she was."

Before she died, Jac was able to speak to her mother and let her know her only wish: "Don't let my life and the way I lived it be for nothing."

As a result of this direct appeal, Donna is now dedicated to being an advocate for global drug policy reform to ensure no other substance user, or their loved ones, have to go through the hard-taught lesson that she underwent herself.



Resolution on Criminal Justice and Drug Policy Reform

Adopted at the October 2015 JCPA Town Hall

Over the last four decades, this country has pursued a drug policy that has done little to curtail usage and has had significant negative impact on our society. Drug arrests comprise half the arrests in our criminal justice system, and approximately half of those are marijuana arrests—the vast majority of which are for simple possession for personal use. There are more marijuana arrests each year in this country than for all violent crimes combined. Overall levels of incarceration in the U.S. have increased dramatically since the 1970s.

Arrests and prosecutions for drug offenses fall vastly disproportionately on African-Americans and Latinos, despite usage among Caucasians at similar rates. Recent police/citizen encounters resulting in the deaths of black men in Ferguson, Baltimore, and other cities have highlighted the degree to which our law enforcement systems focus disproportionately on minority communities. The events in Ferguson and Baltimore underscore the dangers of continuing our policing emphasis on drug possession, since the drastic increases in arrests for drug possession and other low-level non-violent crimes have fueled the increase in negative police-community interactions.

Long sentences and mandatory incarceration for minor drug offenses, including marijuana possession, have not significantly deterred drug use or reduced addiction rates, which are in any event low for marijuana compared with other drugs—both legal and illegal. Instead, mass arrests and incarceration have removed large numbers of people from productive engagement in their communities. Criminalization degrades the conditions that can aid in recovery for people who are addicted—such as access to treatment and support networks, gainful employment, and education. Mass incarceration is a significant contributing factor to poverty, income inequality, and family instability. African-American and Latino leaders with whom we serve in coalitions routinely point to racial disparities in the criminal justice system as one of their highest priorities. Major civil rights organizations regularly call for changes in drug laws as one strategy to address these concerns and have backed efforts in federal and state legislatures to change policy on marijuana in particular.

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs believes:

- Unrest in American cities is a matter of tremendous concern, as is the sentiment among minority communities that our nation's law enforcement systems unfairly result in arrests, prosecutions, and convictions of minorities to a disproportionate degree. The huge investment of law enforcement resources devoted to arrests and prosecutions for minor drug offenses have produced little societal benefit, while the cost and negative fallout are extensive.
- Redirecting the focus of our law enforcement systems away from minor drug offenses would free up resources to combat more serious and dangerous crimes, resulting in improved public safety, reduced perceptions among minority communities that the system is biased against them, and a fairer and more effective criminal justice system. Treating personal marijuana use as a public health issue and not a criminal justice one is a more appropriate and effective way to address the issue.
- Among the possible reform measures that may warrant study and consideration are decriminalization; community program diversion; and greater government investment in services such as drug counseling, treatment for mental health issues, and other rehabilitation and social supports services. Avoidance of incarceration should be the default approach for low-level drug possession.

- Incarceration should be reserved for more serious offenses. And, for persons who are incarcerated, adequate funding for, and increased access to, re-entry programs can assist their successful reintegration into the community, foster public safety by reducing recidivism, and promote responsible citizenship. Reentry planning should include educational programs and job training, access to medical and mental health care, and continuing substance abuse treatment where appropriate. Supportive programs should be provided before and after release from incarceration, to ease transition into the workforce. Denying access to public assistance, food stamps, subsidized housing, professional licensure, student loans, and other programs to individuals who would otherwise qualify is short-sighted and counterproductive.

The community relations field should:

- Urge state and federal government agencies and officials to evaluate and support where appropriate measures to replace criminalization with responsible regulatory policies. These include but are not limited to community program diversion; and greater government investment in services such as drug counseling, treatment for mental health issues, and other rehabilitation and social support services.
- Urge state and federal government agencies and legislators to adopt policies and legislation designed to reverse mass incarceration, including but not limited to reducing mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent offenses; eliminating certain enhancements for prior nonviolent offenses; granting judges greater sentencing discretion; pretrial and bail reform; ending the practice of incarceration for minor or technical violations of parole or probation conditions; and offering new pathways to reduce prison sentences (such as participation in community-based treatment programs for drug and alcohol addictive disorders and mental health conditions, early release programs, and alternatives to incarceration). A current example of this type of legislation is the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015 (S. 123).
- Advocate and encourage our coalition partners to advocate in favor of recognition and adoption of policies based on the following principles:
 - Long sentences and mandatory incarceration for minor drug offenses, including marijuana possession, are not effective to deter drug use or reduce addiction rates. Avoidance of incarceration should be the default approach for low-level drug possession. Incarceration should be reserved for more serious offenses;
 - Redirecting the focus of our law enforcement systems away from minor drug offenses can serve to free up resources to combat more serious and dangerous crimes, resulting in improved public safety, reduced perceptions among minority communities that the system is biased against them, and a fairer and more effective criminal justice system;
 - Treating personal marijuana use as a public health issue, rather than a criminal justice issue, is a more appropriate and effective way to address issues associated with drug use;
 - Patients should have full access to marijuana for medical uses, and researchers should have full access for research purposes;
 - For persons who are incarcerated, reentry planning should include educational programs and job training, access to medical and mental health care, and continuing substance abuse treatment where appropriate. Supportive programs should be provided before and after release from incarceration, to ease transition into the workforce; and
 - Denial of access to public assistance, food stamps, subsidized housing, professional licensure, student loans, and other programs to individuals who would otherwise qualify is unacceptable
 - Federal laws should be modified to reduce the numerous legal conflicts and impediments for states that have legalized medicinal marijuana or decriminalized or legalized marijuana.

The Boggs Act of 1951 drastically increased the penalties for marijuana use. The Narcotics Control Act of 1956 then created “the most punitive and repressive anti-narcotics legislation ever adopted by Congress. All discretion to suspend sentences or permit probation was eliminated. Parole was allowed only for first offenders convicted of possession, and the death penalty could be invoked for anyone who sold heroin to a minor.”⁶

Anslinger was critical of judges for being too easy on drug dealers and called for longer minimum sentences. He established a punitive drug policy with a focus on drug law enforcement. This priority on enforcement has addressed only symptoms, but not the illness itself.

Conversely in Portugal, for over a decade now, “the decriminalization of drugs has been a success,” according to the Mises Institute in Austria. It is evidence that when countries look beyond drug policies based on law enforcement, they begin to exhibit compassion that creates greater altruism and ultimately address the broader challenges of poverty. Compassion is the beginning of healing. Policies create order. Compassion has the power to change the patterns of social behavior.

Out of nations of plenty should pour rivers of altruism; out of societies marked by bravery should flow streams of care. Let us be reminded of the need for compassion and selflessness throughout the world, and be attentive to the consequences of social decline should we continue to turn our backs to this most terrible human condition.

Finally, let us contemplate ever so consciously the mantra expressed by Reverend Dr. King, when he himself was speaking from a jail cell: “In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be...this is the inter-related structure of reality. ” Namaste.

Bushi Yamato Damashii is an African-American Zen Buddhist monk and teacher who lives at Daishin Zen Buddhist Temple and Monastery in Thomasville, North Carolina. Educated in Eastern religion and social theology, Bushi has a global following in the practice of Zazen (meditation) as a means of creating mind/body connection.

¹Referencing a defense application in Aikido, specifically Seishidokan form, which is the author’s life-long practiced martial art. Aikido is a Japanese martial art founded by O’Sensei, Morihei Ueshiba.

²Nichiren Buddhist mantra honoring the *Lotus Sutra: The Universal Law of Cause and Effect*.

³Thich Nhat Hanh in *Peace is the Way: Writings on Nonviolence from the Fellowship of Reconciliation*, edited by Walter Wink (2000, Orbis Books)

⁴Martin L. King, Jr., “*Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution*,” March 31, 1968 at the Washington National Cathedral

⁵Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche and Khechen Palden Sherab Rinpoche, *The Buddhist Path: A Practical Guide to the Nyingma Tradition* (2010, Shambhala/ Snow Lion Publications)

From North Carolina: Compassion as a Social Remedy to Poverty

By Bushi Yamato Damashii

One of the most basic truths of the human condition is the constant state of suffering. It is a universal condition and besets us from the inception of our first breath.

Suffering is cosmic and continuous. Yet, the human condition of suffering is not an absolute condition. It varies by degree. A broken bone hurts, and is a painful reminder that we all exist impermanently – shifting from shore to sea as grains of sand on a beach.

Aikido's defensive application of Kotegaeshi¹ upon an aggressive assailant can be a paralyzing lesson of our physical limitations. But the human conditions likewise change. Heavy weights are lifted. True Love is found. Crippling ideas are shed and often resurrected in bigger ideas and philosophies. People are free to be who they were born into and to Love from their own Truth.

Flowers do bloom in spring. Just reflect on your life. See your own summer, fall, winter, and spring. The changes in your own life have been many. *Nam Myoho Renge Kyo!*²

In "Being Peace," Buddhist mystic Thich Nhat Hanh wrote: "Life is full of suffering, but it is also full of wonderful things like the blue sky the sunshine, the eyes of a baby. To suffer is not all."³ Indeed, it varies by degree.

But to live in a state of poverty is an unfortunately common and dangerous condition of humanity today. Poverty creates in the individual the feeling of insignificance, and as a system it violently attacks and disrupts the karmic exchange of human beings.

Martin Luther King, Jr., four days before his assassination, said: "There is another thing closely related to racism that I would like to mention as another challenge. We are challenged to rid our nation and the world of poverty. Like a monstrous octopus, poverty spreads its nagging, prehensile tentacles into hamlets and villages all over our world. Two-thirds of the people of the world go to bed hungry tonight. They are ill-housed; they are ill-nourished; they are shabbily clad. ..."⁴

Compassion is our answer to the age-old cancer of impoverishment. Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche writes, "Pure compassion has the power to remove all karmic obscurations and obstacles to enlightenment. As inner wisdom is uncovered, your understanding of relative and absolute truth increases as you progress toward enlightenment. The Buddha said many times that compassion is the most powerful tool for removing ignorance and increasing wisdom."⁵

Within the United States, the suffering masses who are incarcerated are often "repeat offenders" due to ill-conceived policies rooted in a lack of compassion. This social stigma creates structural impediments to financial sustainability. Poverty underpins social decay and moral collapse within our society and others.

In this context, we have seen the abject failure of the "War on Drugs" to eradicate drugs from society. In 1930, the U.S. Treasury Department created the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. Led by Harry J. Anslinger until 1962, drugs were increasingly criminalized.

¹Referencing a defense application in Aikido, specifically Seishidokan form, which is the author's life-long practiced martial art. Aikido is a Japanese martial art founded by O'Sensei, Morihei Ueshiba.

²Nichiren Buddhist mantra honoring the *Lotus Sutra: The Universal Law of Cause and Effect*.

³Thich Nhat Hanh in *Peace is the Way: Writings on Nonviolence from the Fellowship of Reconciliation*, edited by Walter Wink (2000, Orbis Books)

⁴Martin L. King, Jr., "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," March 31, 1968 at the Washington National Cathedral

⁵Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche and Khechen Palden Sherab Rinpoche, *The Buddhist Path: A Practical Guide to the Nyingma Tradition* (2010, Shambhala/ Snow Lion Publications)



Alternatives to the "War on Drugs" 2002 Statement of Conscience

Background: This final draft Statement of Conscience of the Unitarian Universalist Association builds upon four social witness statements on drug policy adopted by the Unitarian Universalist Association between 1965 and 1991. In June 2000, the General Assembly of the UUA selected "Alternatives to the 'War on Drugs'" as the Study/Action Issue (SAI) suggested to congregations for two years of study, action, and reflection. The Commission on Social Witness (CSW) received initial reports from congregations and districts in March 2001. In June 2001, the CSW held a workshop on this issue at General Assembly. An initial draft Statement of Conscience was distributed to all congregations and districts for their reflection and feedback. At its March 2002 meeting, the CSW prepared a revised draft. It was placed on the final agenda of the June 2002 General Assembly. A mini-assembly was held on Friday, June 21, where proposed amendments were received. Friday evening, June 21, the CSW produced this final draft Statement of Conscience, based on the mini-assembly and the proposed amendments. The delegates present at the Saturday, June 22 plenary adopted this Statement of Conscience with the required two-thirds majority.

OUR CALL TO END THE "WAR ON DRUGS" AS A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE

For more than thirty years, American public policy has advanced an escalating "war on drugs" that seeks to eradicate illegal drugs from our society. It is increasingly clear that this effort has failed. Our current drug policy has consumed tens of billions of dollars and wrecked countless lives. The costs of this policy include the increasing breakdown of families and neighborhoods, endangerment of children, widespread violation of civil liberties, escalating rates of incarceration, political corruption, and the imposition of United States policy abroad. For United States taxpayers, the price tag on the drug offensive has soared from \$66 million in 1968 to almost \$20 billion in 2000, an increase of over 30,000 percent. In practice the drug war disproportionately targets people of color and people who are poverty-stricken. Coercive measures have not reduced drug use, but they have clogged our criminal justice system with non-violent offenders. It is time to explore alternative approaches and to end this costly war.

The war on drugs has blurred the distinction between drug use and drug abuse. Drug use is erroneously perceived as behavior that is always out of control and harmful to others. Illegal drug use is thus portrayed as threatening to society. As a result, drug policy has been closed to study, discussion, and consideration of alternatives by legislative bodies. Yet many people who use both legal and illegal drugs live productive, functional lives and do no harm to society. As Unitarian Universalists committed to a free and responsible search for truth, we must protest the misguided policies that shape current practice. We cannot in good conscience remain quiet when it is becoming clear that we have been misled for decades about illegal drugs. United States government drug policy makers mislead the world about the purported success of the war on drugs. They tell the public that success is dependent upon even more laws restricting constitutional protections and the allocation of billions of dollars for drug law enforcement. They mislead the public about the extent of corruption and environmental degradation that the American war on drugs has left in its wake in other countries.

As Unitarian Universalists committed to affirming the inherent worth and dignity of every person and to justice, equity, and compassion in human relations, we call for thoughtful consideration and implementation of alternatives that regard the reduction of harm as the appropriate standard by which to assess drug policies. We seek a compassionate reduction of harm associated with drugs, both legal and illegal, with special attention to the harm unleashed by policies established in the war on drugs.

As Unitarian Universalists committed to respecting the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part, we find irresponsible and morally wrong the practices of scorching the earth and poisoning the soil and ground water in other countries to stop the production of drugs that are illegal in the United States.

As a community of faith, Unitarian Universalists have both a moral imperative and a personal responsibility to ask the difficult questions that so many within our society are unable, unwilling, or too afraid to ask. In asking these questions and in weighing our findings, we are compelled to consider a different approach to national drug policy.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH

To conceive and develop a more just and compassionate drug policy, it is necessary to transform how we view drugs and particularly drug addiction. Drug use, drug abuse, and drug addiction are distinct from one another. Using a drug does not necessarily mean abusing the drug, much less becoming addicted to it. Drug abuse issues are essentially matters for medical attention. We do not believe that drug use should be considered criminal behavior. Advocates for harsh drug policies with severe penalties for drug use often cite violent crime as a direct result of drug use. Drugs alone do not cause crime. Legal prohibition of drugs leads to inflated street value, which in turn incites violent turf wars among distributors. The whole pattern is reminiscent of the proliferation of organized crime at the time of alcohol prohibition in the early twentieth century. That policy also failed.

We believe that the vision of a drug-free America is unrealistic. Many programs for school children have misled participants and the public by teaching that all illicit drugs are equally harmful in spite of current scientific research to the contrary. “Just Say No” is not a viable policy. The consequences of the current drug war are cruel and counterproductive. At issue here are the health and well-being of our families and our communities, our society, and our global community. Alternatives exist.

ALTERNATIVE GOALS

Based on this perspective, we believe appropriate and achievable goals for reformed national drug policies include:

- preventing consumption of drugs, including alcohol and nicotine, that are harmful to the health of children and adolescents;
- reducing the likelihood that drug users will become drug abusers;
- minimizing the harmful effects of drug use, such as disease contracted from the use of contaminated needles and overdoses resulting from the unwitting use of impure drugs;
- increasing the availability and affordability of quality drug treatment and eliminating the stigma associated with accessing it;
- significantly reducing violent and predatory drug-related crime;
- minimizing the harmful consequences of current drug policy, such as racial profiling, property confiscation without conviction, and unnecessary incarceration; and
- reducing the harm to our earth now caused by the practice of destroying crops intended for the production of drugs.

We strongly urge the world leaders to embrace both Orí Iré and Iwa Pelé as driving forces of their public and international policies. We encourage leaders to support and create programs such as El Punto en la Montaña in all parts of the world as a way to combat HIV and Hepatitis C, but most importantly, to create much-needed spaces of healing.

Take a walk, look around, look at the human faces of the numbers and statistics that constantly bombard us, as you make decisions that affect millions. Embrace the sublimity of love’s spirit and contribute to a world by leaving a memorable legacy. A legacy of healing. A legacy of love.

Ashé, To Iban Eshu.

Joseph Carroll-Miranda, Ph.D., is a professor of graduate studies at the College of Education in the University of Puerto Rico. He has worked with the harm reduction community in Puerto Rico since 2010, and serves as spiritual counselor of the Yoruba Faith at the Metropolitan Detention Center of Puerto Rico since 2008.

Healing Spirits in Struggle: Lessons from a Harm Reduction Endeavor in Puerto Rico

By Joseph Carroll-Miranda (Awo Ni Orunmila Oyekunbikalomi)

In Puerto Rico, we live in times of collective agony and strenuous mental stress that are taking a toll on the collective spirit of our island. The burdens of financial collapse, the pervasive violence that minimizes spaces of dialogue, and the mental fatigue of day-to-day struggles leave many grasping for air in search of spiritual fortitude. Others look for venues to escape the spaces of anguish and alienate themselves in cycles of false happiness through “chemical bliss” and other self-destructive activities.

As a Babalawo priest in the Yoruba religion, the cultivation of spirit is at the forefront of my practice. My experience of working with El Punto en la Montaña – a public health program in rural Puerto Rico – have taught me many important things about the plight of the spirit.

There have been many lessons gained through our model of harm reduction. Harm reduction is truly a beautiful methodology to work with intravenous drug users as a way to proactively reduce the propagation of HIV and Hepatitis C. The importance of not judging our participants, as well as sharing with them the importance of taking care of themselves and others, has a huge impact in our communities in Puerto Rico.

As the program has grown, so has the culture of harm reduction; the number of people sharing needles has dropped considerably and our participants have had access to new syringes through El Punto’s needle exchange program. Furthermore, our peer education program is testimony to a multiplying effect drawing from a relational sense of being: the care for self and others. In this sense, harm reduction is solidarity as praxis. If we had to summarize our lessons, in one essence, it would be the importance of self-love and dignity.

Within the Yoruba spirituality we have a concept that reflects a state of self-destructive consciousness. It is called Orí Burukú. Orí Burukú has a huge influence into how we perceive the world, how we act and how we make decisions. Symptomatic of this state of consciousness is that we blame outside factors for all of our hardships. We do not look for answers from within. Quite the contrary, we constantly look for something or someone to blame.

This state of consciousness is dangerous because a deity known as Elenini feeds from it. Elenini is a spirit responsible for misfortune and any obstacle we may encounter in life. It serves a purpose; it teaches us how feelings of hate, rage, sadness, obsession, control, and loneliness are all truly self-destructive in nature. Such feelings fuels misfortune and nurture a self-destructive consciousness. It is in this state that we self-create the “demons” that haunt, torment, and torture us. At times, they become so strong we look for ways to escape into other realities that appear to be blissful.

The antidote to Orí Buruku is Orí Ire. Contrary to Orí Burukú, Orí Ire is a state of consciousness that brings good fortune and inner peace. In order to achieve this inner peace, we need to tap into our higher selves that reside in the cosmic Ilé Ifé. Ilé Ifé is the house of expanding love where God resides. Within this state of consciousness, pure love, we develop Iwa Pelé: good character. Good character is measured by the fact that we must treat the earth, and everything in it, with love, reverence and respect. In doing so, we leave our communities and the earth in a better state than it was when we arrived.

For us, all relations are sacred, and therefore our relations with the afflicted, who are struggling with spirit, are a sacred act. Consequently, supporting projects that promote self-love and healing is a historical imperative. Our communities and the world need it!

ALTERNATIVE POLICIES

Instead of the current war on drugs, we offer the following policies for study, debate, and implementation:

- Shift budget priorities from spending for pursuit, prosecution, and imprisonment of drug law offenders to spending for education, treatment, and research.
- Develop and implement age-appropriate drug education programs that are grounded in research and fact and that promote dialogue without fear of censure or reprisal.
- Undertake research to assess the effects of currently illegal drugs. Ensure that findings and conclusions are publicly accessible, serving as a basis for responsible decision making by individuals and in arenas of public policy and practice.
- Research the sociological factors that contribute to habitual, addictive, and destructive drug use, such as poverty, poor mental health, sexual or other physical abuse, and lack of education or medical treatment.
- Research and expand a range of management and on-demand treatment programs for drug abuse and addiction. Examples include nutritional counseling, job training, psychiatric evaluation and treatment, psychological counseling, parent training and assistance, support groups, clean needle distribution and exchange, substitution of safer drugs (e.g. methadone or marijuana), medically administered drug maintenance, disease screening, and acupuncture and other alternative and complementary treatments. Publish the results of studies of these programs.
- Require health insurance providers to cover in-patient and out-patient treatment for substance abuse on the same basis as treatment of other chronic health conditions.
- Make all drugs legally available with a prescription by a licensed physician, subject to professional oversight. End the practice of punishing an individual for obtaining, possessing, or using an otherwise illegal substance to treat a medical condition. End the threat to impose sanctions on physicians who treat patients with opiates for alleviation of pain.
- Prohibit civil liberties violations and other intrusive law enforcement practices. Violations of the right to privacy, such as urine testing, should be imposed only upon employees in safety-sensitive occupations.
- Establish a legal, regulated, and taxed market for marijuana. Treat marijuana as we treat alcohol.
- Modify civil forfeiture laws to require conviction before seizure of assets. Prohibit the eviction of family, friends, and co-habitants or the loss of government entitlements based on drug law violation.
- Abolish mandatory minimum prison sentences for the use and distribution of currently illicit drugs. Legislation should specify only maximum prison sentences.
- Remove criminal penalties for possession and use of currently illegal drugs, with drug abusers subject to arrest and imprisonment only if they commit actual crimes (e.g., assault, burglary, impaired driving, vandalism). End sentencing inequities driven by racial profiling.
- Establish and make more accessible prison-based drug treatment, education, job training, and transition programs designed for inmates.
- End the financing of anti-drug campaigns in Central and South America, which promote the widespread spraying of herbicides, contribute to the destruction of rainforests, and are responsible for uprooting peoples from their homelands.

OUR CALL TO ACT AS A PEOPLE OF FAITH

We must begin with ourselves. Our congregations can offer safe space for open and honest discussion among congregants about the complex issues of drug use, abuse, and addiction. Through acceptance

of one another and the encouragement of spiritual growth, we should be able to acknowledge and address our own drug use without fear of censure or reprisal.

We can recognize that drugs include not only currently illegal substances but also alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, over-the-counter pain relievers, and prescription drugs. We can learn to distinguish among use, abuse, and addiction. We can support one another in recognizing drug-related problems and seeking help. We can seek to understand those among us who use drugs for relief or escape. With compassion, we can cultivate reflection and analysis of drug policy. In the safe space of our own congregations, we can begin to prevent destructive relationships with drugs. We can lend necessary support to individuals and families when their loved ones need treatment for addiction problems. We can encourage our congregations to partner with and follow the lead of groups representing individuals whose lives are most severely undermined by current drug policy--people of color and people of low income. We can learn from health care professionals what the unique patterns of substance abuse are in our local areas. We can go beyond our walls and bring our perspective to the interfaith community, other nonprofit organizations, and elected officials.

Our Unitarian Universalist history calls us to pursue a more just world. Our faith compels us to hold our leaders accountable for their policies. In calling for alternatives to the war on drugs, we are mindful of its victims. Drug use should be addressed solely as a public health problem, not as a criminal justice issue. Dependence upon any illegal drugs or inappropriate use of legal drugs may point to deep, unmet human needs. We have a moral obligation to advocate compassionate, harm-reducing policy. We believe that our nations have the imagination and capability to address effectively the complex issues of the demand for drugs, both legal and illegal.

We reaffirm the spirit of our social witness positions taken on drugs in resolutions adopted from 1965 to 1991. Recognizing the right of conscience for all who differ, we denounce the war on drugs and recommend alternative goals and policies. Let neither fear nor any other barrier prevent us from advocating a more just, compassionate world.

largest prison population allows for the assumption that the government has a “handle” on how to properly rehabilitate its inmates; however, we have seen consistently that this is not the case.

Countries within the Norwegian and Scandinavian regions of Europe show an ever-decreasing prison population. Those countries also have more lax drug policies that don’t tend to criminalize drug users or distributors. They also tend to not engage in structural racism to the degree that we see in the United States (though researchers do find instances of discrimination in Europe based on race and religion).

While the need for dramatic criminal justice reform is most evident in the United States, these concerns for proper reintegration policies are just as necessary in the global context. Whereas most criminal justice reform policy focuses on “lower level” drug offenders, who might seem to more easily reenter their societies, it must not be forgotten that while incarcerated this population has been criminalized. The trauma that is experienced during incarceration, no matter what country or institutional form it takes, will remain upon and after release, as will the stigma from the general public of being formerly incarcerated.

Attitudes and social norms do not instantly adjust to policy shifts; progressive change takes time and effort. It also takes the inclusion of policies that allow for those societal norms to authentically shift into everyday practices. Time must be given to the returning citizen to heal before returning to the community. Workforce and educational programs must be funded and put into place, as well mental health and wellness initiatives that allow the returning citizen to cope with the life changes that he or she had to endure including the loss of freedom, family, and ability to be self-sustaining.

To a large extent, many of the 6,000 released will have to “re-learn” society. And often, they will remain marked as “ex-offenders” to those who welcome them back. Those family members, faith congregations, and communities must also have some recourse in terms of how to best assist returning citizens, and do so without further criminalizing those who have been “set-free” but lack the proper means to fully participate in their communities.

Dr. Rolanda J. West is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Belize and a former instructor in the Justice Studies Department of Northeastern Illinois University. Her work in Chicago and Los Angeles has concentrated on underrepresented populations, specifically formerly incarcerated youth and adults. Dr. West is practicing the African Spiritual Tradition of Yoruba to study her cultural roots and honor the traditions of her ancestors and descendants of the African Diaspora.

Chicago/Belize Perspective: Criminal Justice Reform, the War on Drugs, and Community Reintegration: A Social Justice Approach

By Rolanda J. West

The “war on drugs” has been bad for the world’s health. Despite two decades of policies concentrated on criminalizing the producers, traffickers, and consumers of narcotics, this global “war” has failed to reduce supply.

United Nations figures show that drug consumption during the decade after 1998 rose, with a 34.5% increase in the number of opiate users, 27% rise in cocaine users, and 8.5% rise in cannabis users. Most drug users do not receive effective treatment and care, and where treatment is available; it is often inferior to that afforded to other diseases. Experts are now calling for an orientation away from the punitive strategy – especially for users – towards a public health approach that could help reduce the damage .

Prison reform has been a hot topic in the United States for more than a decade; however, it was not until 2015 that the first sitting U.S. president had the foresight to visit a maximum-security federal prison in order to get a true sense of the struggles of those who are incarcerated today. Because of that visit, President Obama now plans during his final year in office to implement a criminal justice reform initiative that will offer educational services, job training, and the ability to seal juvenile records to offenders, in an effort to make formerly incarcerated youth and adults more viable in the labor market.

While these are all necessary components for criminal justice reform, the lack of focus on community reintegration services and programs should remain cause for alarm. It must be pointed out that those who are preparing for release receive no presumption of innocence, meaning that it is understood a crime was in fact committed; however, the sentences imposed for those crimes were often unfair and unjust.

The overwhelming majority of federal drug offenders have been convicted of non-violent charges; simultaneously, racial and economic disparities in sentencing oftentimes find lower-income African-American males being overcharged and over-sentenced, while programs designed to rehabilitate them are egregiously underfunded. Therefore, upon release there is a gross lack of reintegration assistance for non-violent offenders that make recidivism a veritable inevitability. Without proper assistance, criminal behavior tends to escalate unnecessarily into violent criminal behavior, and one consequence has been the hyper-criminalization of people of color.

Obama’s announcements of the criminal justice reform initiative came after the United States Sentencing Commission decided in October 2015 to grant early release to about 6,000 federal prisoners based on reduced penalties for drug charges. The glaring oversight in this decision stems from the fact that 6,000 men and women will be released into communities without options to meaningfully participate in society. The program shows no viable strategy to assure that these thousands of formerly incarcerated citizens will have the ability to work or attain a higher education degree once released. It also does not indicate how the families and communities will be prepared to assist in the reintegration and rehabilitation process.

While Obama’s new policies focus on a fraction of incarcerated populations (there are 2.2 million people in U.S. prisons or jails), they can have a long-term impact on how drug sentencing and reintegration policies will be implemented worldwide. The understanding that the United States has the world’s

Sacred Text

The moral imperative for compassion is universal in all religions and calls us to act compassionately concerning drug policy.

These texts compel us to come to grips with the 40 years of a war on drugs has been a war on poor people who use drugs.

The texts of universal truths require us to increase funding for prevention endeavors to help prevent the start of drug abuse among youth and young adults.

The moral voice of faith challenges us to advocate for treatment and recovery instead of prison and indifference. We are expected to challenge policy that will not help reduce harm by stemming the spread of deadly communicable disease, prevent drug overdose deaths and improve the health of those who continue to use drugs.

And compassion from the moral religious perspective encourages us to help build bridges between law enforcement, health services and other agencies in order to strengthen public safety, public order and peace!

Baha’i

It is your duty to be exceedingly kind to every human being, and to wish him well; to work for the uplift of society...until ye change the world of man into the world of God.

Abdu’l-Baha: Selections From the Writings of `Abdu’l-Baha, Page: 90

Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship

Bahá’u’lláh.

Buddhism

Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.

The Buddha, Udana-Varga 5.18

It is not enough to be compassionate. You must act.

Dalai Lama

What is compassion? It is not simply a sense of sympathy or caring for the person suffering, not simply a warmth of heart toward the person before you, or a sharp clarity of recognition of their needs and pain, it is also a sustained and practical determination to do whatever is possible and necessary to help alleviate their suffering.

Sogyal Rinpoche

Christianity

In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

Jesus, Matthew 7:12

Confucianism

Try your best to treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself, and you will find that this is the shortest way to benevolence.

Mencius VII.A.4

Hinduism

What sort of religion can it be without compassion?

You need to show compassion to all living beings.

Compassion is the root of all religious faiths.

Basavanna, Vachana 247

Not one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.

Forty Hadith of an-Nawawi 13

Jainism

Have benevolence towards all living beings, joy at the sight of the virtuous, compassion and sympathy for the afflicted, and tolerance towards the indolent and ill-behaved.

Tattvarthasutra 7.11

Judaism

what does the Lord require..... love mercy, seek justice walk humbly with your God

Micah 6:8

Native African

Kindness is a language which the blind can see and the deaf can hear.

Native American

*This we know, all things are connected...
Our God is the same God, whose compassion is equal for all.*

Chief Seattle

New Thought

Compassion and caring are the ties that bind us together in mutual understanding and in the unified attempt to uncover the Divinity in each other. [Compassion is the most gentle of all human virtues, for it is the outpouring of the Divine Givingness through all.]

Ernest Holmes

Zoroastrianism

Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself.

Shayast-na-Shayast 13.29

Unitarianism

By offering compassion and peace to someone else, we gain peace for ourselves.

Anne Hines, UU minister

We...bring our love and our compassion to the world because doing so is the holiest thing we know.

Michael Tino, UU minister

Sikhism

Keep your heart content and cherish compassion for all beings; this way alone can your holy vow be fulfilled.

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and social enterprise, people are able to recover their passion and discover their purpose.”

Beit T’Shuvah houses 140 residents and 100 employees (80 percent of whom are former residents) and provides treatment to people who have limited or no financial resources, as well as prevention services and education for parents and youth groups. What makes this place really remarkable is that BTS is also a fully-functioning religious congregation “in which anyone is welcome and everyone matters.” This has a stabilizing effect because there doesn’t have to be a loss of community when “treatment is over.”

Until there are enough communities like Beit T’Shuvah (of all faiths, as well as secular ones), we must facilitate the reduction of the harm caused by drug use, and remove the blame placed on the addicted person by society. Clean needle programs, supervised injection locations, and decriminalization are examples.

This will remove a very basic level of spiritual distress experienced by the drug user, and is a most fundamental social gesture of care and concern. In doing this, a sense of safety and acceptance can be experienced by the addict, which can open a door to recovery for many individuals.

Elizabeth Hess is a Family Nurse Practitioner in New York who has worked and volunteered with diverse organizations for over 30 years. She is currently co-president of the Temple Beth El Sisterhood in Ithaca, New York.

From New York: Treating Addiction by Embracing the Human

By Elizabeth Hess

The root of addiction is pain. Addiction is not the problem (for the addicted person); it is the solution to the problem of unrelenting physical, spiritual, or mental pain. Physical addiction can be cured in days or weeks, but it is the ongoing yearning for comfort, or relief from pain that perpetuates addiction in people's lives.

What is the initial cause of pain, that leads a person to desperately, unceasingly seek relief? It is not moral deficiency or depravity. It is not a desire to do evil. The cause of the pain can be life experiences that may be the sad accidents of history, environment, or birth.

These experiences can result from physical or emotional trauma, abuse, neglect, or rejection by a person, group, or society. They can be the sad answers to universal questions: Am I needed in this world? Am I loved and respected? What is my importance? Am I truly seen by others? Am I free to be an effective human being and live to my potential? Underneath all addiction is the unrelenting human longing for peace, protection, purpose, and belonging. Addiction manifests as a substitute for fulfillment, where real fulfillment cannot occur.

Whether a person becomes and stays addicted is influenced by whether a social structure embraces, ignores, or vilifies the person who finds relief from pain in drugs. The experience of lack of caring, alienation, or harm by family or community, and/or the lack of opportunity and respect within society, increase the likelihood that the fulfillment of these essential human needs will be sought elsewhere.

A social structure that truly embraces all people – regardless of age, race, physical attributes, religion, sexual orientation or identity – would go a very long way toward preventing and treating addiction.

Most faith traditions understand healing as a communal enterprise, not a solely individual responsibility. Health is seen as not only physical, but as a wholeness of body, mind, and spirit. Faith traditions encourage the community to visit and support the weak and ill, pray for healing, and embrace the person who is afflicted. As we gain more understanding of how to prevent and cure illness, it is the community's responsibility to join in the work of healing.

Addiction is a public health issue and should be treated as such. It is a sign of disease in the social order as well as of the individual. When it was found that living in places contaminated with human waste was the cause of much illness and death, societies devised systems that isolated the waste away from people and created healthier living conditions. Trauma, social isolation, and marginalization are often the causes of the pain that finds its solution in addiction. Social systems can and must change to prevent and treat the vicious cycle.

We need to create social systems that do not marginalize and punish those in spiritual and physical pain who have found solace in an unhealthy, illegal substance and lifestyle, but embrace the individual who can be made whole.

Beit T'Shuvah ("Returning home" or "House of Redemption") has done this in Los Angeles. BTS started as a "halfway house" to help Jewish individuals released from prison to re-enter society. Over the course of three decades it has become a nationally-recognized faith-based comprehensive recovery community for people affected by addiction. It provides intensive inpatient recovery and phased reentry into society. In the words of its founder Harriet Rosetto, "Through work therapy, creative expression

From Afghanistan: The Reality That War Doesn't Work

By Hakim

Why can't governments manage drugs like they regulate cigarettes? Opium poppy, marijuana, coca, and tobacco are plants, so governments have the choice of managing them as plants, instead of incarcerating and killing human beings over them.

Both the useful and harmful qualities of the individual plants and their products could be emphasized to the general public, and, like with the ample warnings and advice about the medical consequences of cigarettes, people then can choose as free human beings.

Perhaps, the harder question is: why can't governments relate to drug addicts as human beings, like they do with cigarette smokers?

Twenty-seven-year-old Afghan farmer Safdar was my neighbor in a village in Bamiyan Province. He is gentle, works hard on his father's land, and is an unassuming young man.

A war has been going on in the country, and Safdar and his family earn an insufficient pittance from farming. Moreover, there was a land ownership dispute that impoverished his family due to the many financial bribes they were forced to pay.

Safdar was unhappy that the education and economic system held nothing promising for him. One winter, with no farming or any means of employment to make income, he decided to go to Iran to work as a laborer, like many young Afghans do.

"There, I can earn some money, and perhaps even meet some girls," Safdar had confided in me, sounding like many other lonely young Afghans who similarly have no safe social spaces to interact appropriately with anyone.

By the time he returned from Iran, he was a listless heroin addict.

Because I know Safdar personally, I know that he is not a bad person or a criminal. But we don't have to know Safdar personally to understand that drug addicts and drug smugglers are not inherently "evil." We all recognize that none of us are above the range and scourge of human addictions, so it doesn't make sense to be judgmental.

What does make sense is for each of us to examine the investigations and reports on global drug policy and use reason and empathy to address its failures.

Clearly, the evidence shows that militarizing or policing the drug problem does not work, as indicated in new reports by the Global Commission on Drug Policy¹ and John Hopkins Hospital in the Lancet². An ex-heroin addict I interviewed years ago³ in the village Safdar lives in had a similar perspective, describing how the police and authorities are themselves often drugged and corrupt.

Looking at the "War on Drugs" in Afghanistan, John Sopko, the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan, explained that despite spending a staggering \$7.6 billion on drug eradication programs

¹Global Commission on Drug Policy, "Public statement on the 2016 UNGASS process and draft outcome document" (March 11, 2016), <http://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/docs/GCDP-Position-UNGASS-2016.pdf>

²The Lancet Commissions, "Public health and international drug policy" (March 24, 2016), <http://press.thelancet.com/DrugsPolicy1.pdf>

³Afghan Peace Volunteers (Our Journey to Smile) video, "Recovering from the narcostate of Afghanistan" (uploaded May 15, 2010), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=III6_Q8_vml

⁴James Rosen, "U.S. Inspector: Billions in failed programs wasted in Afghanistan" (Sept. 12, 2014, McClatchy), <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/national/national-security/article24773107.html>

during the previous decade, “by every conceivable metric, we’ve failed. Production and cultivation are up, interdiction and eradication are down, financial support to the insurgency is up, and addiction and abuse are at unprecedented levels in Afghanistan.”⁴

Sayed Jawid Badakhsh, head of addiction treatment at the Afghan health ministry, recently cited research showing that 3.5 million Afghans have substance abuse problems⁵, amounting to 11 percent of the Afghan population. Of the total, between 650,000 and 890,000 are women and an estimated 100,000 are children.

The “War on Drugs” in Afghanistan has a “parent” war, the “War on Terrorism.” Both “wars” are equally counter-productive, and have increased, not decreased, drug addiction and “terrorism.”

What unprecedented levels of human, environmental, and psychosocial losses are needed to shake us into being sensible? It is my and everyone’s human responsibility to end these wars.

Continuing a failed political and military experiment indicates that today’s leaders are themselves addicts: addicted to the “good-versus-evil,” militarized, video-gaming world of “surveying everything and killing anything that moves.”

Here lies a root challenge: governments aren’t budging, so you and I must.

Communities everywhere, independent and free of stubborn government policies, should begin mass-scale public conversations and actions to change course, particularly with the farmers who grow the drug crops to make ends meet and with drug addicts. We can start by asking, “How do we want to love, and live?”

As human beings, we shouldn’t allow irrational subservience to ineffective government policies to suppress our ability to change; our obedience must never be to the elite’s unaccountable, moneyed power.

Hakim (Dr. Teck Young, Wee) is a medical doctor from Singapore who has done humanitarian and social enterprise work in Afghanistan for the past 10 years, including being a mentor to the Afghan Peace Volunteers, an inter-ethnic group of young Afghans dedicated to building nonviolent alternatives to war.⁶ He is the 2012 recipient of the Pfeffer International Peace Award from the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

We know that racism in the United States contributes to worse education, worse sentencing, and fewer opportunities for people of color upon release from prison. We wish it were different. And we shake our heads that it isn’t.

But one person saying, “It can be different,” is all it takes. Maybe we can have in Oakland what our visionary partners in Los Angeles have created, helping young people move from prison into good paying jobs with dignity, treating their addiction and also helping them locate their power within a society that helped to create their addiction. Maybe we can even help them locate their power so they can change that society.

In the Christian faith we talk about having faith the size of a mustard seed. In my experience, “realism” and cynicism and lack of imagination seek to stop that mustard seed from being watered or receiving sunlight or even making it into the soil. Realism and cynicism and lack of imagination generally end up being self-fulfilling prophecies: new things can’t work because we don’t believe they could ever work.

And yet, the very thing we say could never happen is thriving in other places.

For me, that is the possibility beyond the prison walls. That is the redemption of Huey Newton’s tragic death. Treating a sick society as well as young people who are more than their history is how we break the hold of the “war on drugs” and its intentional effort to destroy our community.

Rev. Sandhya Jha is director of the Oakland Peace Center in Oakland, California. An anti-racism/anti-oppression trainer with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), she is author of Pre-Post Racial America: Spiritual Stories from the Front Lines (2015, Chalice Press) and other books.

⁵Ahmad Seyad Yazdani, “Tackling Addiction Among Afghan Women” (Dec. 3, 2015, Institute for War & Peace Reporting), <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/tackling-addiction-among-afghan-women>

⁶Afghan Peace Volunteers: <http://ourjourneytosmile.com/blog/enough/>

From Oakland: A Failure of Imagination: Proposing a Mustard Seed Approach to Heal a Sick Society

By Sandhya Jha

My intern is working in Oakland, California for a year. She thinks we are crazy. Good, but crazy. Crazy for how we shut down streets for workers' rights and yell at the police chief about police brutality during public forums. Crazy for protesting the beatification of a man who participated in the genocide of indigenous peoples hundreds of years ago, Junipero Serra, who helped found the California missions. Crazy for loving people who use vinegar instead of honey and therefore catch fewer flies. Crazy, in short, for living out of generations of oppression.

Recently we were talking about why people go to prison. So, very cautiously, I said, "You know, a lot of the folks who work with the Oakland Peace Center believe the government created crack in order to destroy the Black community." Despite her skeptical look, I pushed on. "I mean, we know that the government infiltrated the Black Panthers [which started in Oakland], and drugs destroyed Huey Newton [who cofounded the Black Panthers in 1966, and died in 1989]." Just then a staff member from the immigration law program at the Oakland Peace Center came in. "Hey, friend! I was just telling our intern that some people believe crack was introduced by the government to destroy the Black community."

Without a pause to reflect, she said, "Oh absolutely. No doubt about it."

My intern tried not to look skeptical.

A week later, John Ehrlichman, who served as a senior aide to President Richard Nixon, said "The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin. And then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities."¹

Unemployment rates in the neighborhood I work in are as high as 35-40%. The levels at which Black and Latin@ children get pushed out of school in those neighborhoods are even higher. Those statistics, in turn, are connected to the rates at which they get arrested for selling drugs when no avenues to survive are left to them or for using drugs to self-medicate against the hopelessness of their situations. These arrests then lead to incarceration rates that decrease their odds of good housing or a decent job. All of this evidence fits into the narrative within our community that all of this was by design.

For many people outside of this community, it seems implausible. It seems paranoid. It seems to come from "a victim mentality." In a strange way, being outside of my community limits people's imaginations.

I met with a clergy colleague of mine the other day. We were envisioning a support program for young people in Oakland. "You know, [important local union leader] believes in getting formerly incarcerated people into union jobs, but union rules mean they have to test clean for marijuana," I said, shaking my head sadly at that dead end.

"Yeah, that's stupid," said the pastor. "When they're self-medicating and we're trying to create hope, how can we not create a program that gives them treatment and training and additional chances to get on board by the time the job is available?" she asked. Later we learned there is a program that does exactly this, based in Los Angeles, called Community in Schools. Many of the dead ends we face are a failure of imagination, an assumption that the way things are is the way they have to be.

¹Dan Baum, "Legalize It All: How to win the war on drugs" (*Harper's Magazine*, April 2016)

From Aotearoa New Zealand: Being God's Gospel People in Response to Global Drug Policy

By Jenny Te Paa Daniel

As a citizen of God's world blessed to live in the still largely-peace-filled South Pacific, the issues arising from now-outdated global drug policy have slightly less dramatic impact than that so readily observed in the larger cities of the world's dominant nation states. Notwithstanding the difference in scale and intensity, it is still the case that throughout the South Pacific those most negatively affected are those to whom society at large remains indifferent, if not hostile toward, those to whom Jesus insists upon an extending a preferential option toward.

And yet it is, instead, the punitive option that is being extended, the option that insists upon avoiding the deep and expansive complexities surrounding drug use and abuse. It is the option that prefers to criminalize and thus to delimit life chances for afflicted individuals, the option which prefers to punish severely and thus to crush the human spirit, the option which seeks not to understand but merely to judge.

The faith community, however, knows and understands issues of justice and injustice from the vantage point of being God's people. The faith community knows that drug use and abuse is so often mired in issues of power and greed, of vulnerability and poverty, of desperation and determination, and of political chicanery and opportunism. Now is as perfect a time as ever to find our voices of courage and confidence, of compassion and challenge, of creativity and imagination as we insist upon a new and inclusive public discourse by way of rethinking global drug policy for the 21st century.

At its heart, good global drug policy should proceed from the basis of recognizing that all in society are deserving of security, social and economic justice, opportunities for flourishing and succeeding, access to quality education, healthcare, meaningful employment, and for spiritual wellbeing.

Good global drug policy should critically examine the direct connection between the structural absence of any or all of these fundamental human rights and the statistical propensity for drug use and or abuse, and it should ask why it is that those traditionally marginalized in societies the world over are also those continuously over-represented as drug law offenders, as victims and casualties.

Good global drug policy should examine the economic obscenities which reveal just who actually benefits from global drug production (both legal and illegal), and it should insist upon partnering with health care, education, justice, with community-based agencies, as well as with faith-based communities, to ensure appropriate preventive, rehabilitative, and restorative services were readily available.

Good global drug policy should not tolerate the continuous disproportionate representation of those most vulnerable in any society as the perpetrators, casualties, and victims of drug offending, without critical interrogating causal factors.

April 2016 – at the occasion of this U.N. Special Session – is indeed as perfect a time as ever for us all to find our voices of courage, confidence, and compassion, drawing on our spirits of creativity and imagination as we insist upon a new and inclusive public discourse as we seek compassionate global drug policies which seek to heal and not harm drug users in the United States and around the world.

I therefore willingly offer my voice, my heart, and my hands into that conversation and into the actions which must surely follow as together we seek to build societies characterized by the most simple of Christian values: to love mercy, to show kindness, and to act always with justice.

Dr. Jenny Te Paa Daniel (Te Rarawa) is a public theologian who writes extensively on gender justice, theological education, and race politics. Until 2013 she was Ahorangi (dean) of Te Rau Kahikatea, at The College of St. John the Evangelist in Aotearoa New Zealand. She taught at the college from 1992 and was appointed Ahorangi in 1995, becoming the first Indigenous laywoman to head a theological institution in the worldwide Anglican Communion.

From Chile: Drugs, Poverty, and Youth

By SERPAJ, Chile

Servicio Paz y Justicia (SERPAJ: serpajamericalatina.org) is a network of communities in 14 Latin America and Caribbean countries working together for justice and peace through nonviolence. Founded in 1974 by Christians committed to a liberation theological framework amidst the “dirty wars” precipitated by military juntas throughout the hemisphere, SERPAJ’s launch and development was influenced by its partnership with the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. Adolfo Pérez Esquivel served as SERPAJ’s first coordinator general; in 1980, he received the Nobel Peace Prize for his outspoken human rights advocacy in his home nation of Argentina.

We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute a reflection to this global dialogue, based on our history of working with the most impoverished people in our country, Chile. We have seen the devastating intractability of drugs amongst this population and the agonizing ineffectiveness of policies proposed to eradicate the social problems they cause.

Our perspective is rooted in our history of work in these communities, and we will herein emphasize elements we believe are important for creating new models of action and organizing. Although some might consider this viewpoint to be pretentious, we wish to clarify that we seek only to provide a view from what we in Chile call “the bases,” in other words, the most impoverished sectors.

In SERPAJ Chile our work is focused on violations of human rights and violence, particularly among infants and minors from the poorest sectors of the regions where we live and work, since they require the most support and solutions responsive to their pressing needs. This moment is an opportunity for their voices to be heard.

The children and youth with whom we have worked for the past 30 years – full of ideas, demands, complaints, and dreams – are all, without exception, characterized by being highly exposed and susceptible to criminalization.

In the context of discussing ineffective global drug policies, we identify the particular negative impacts of poverty, juvenile incarceration, and drug use, with the understanding there is a strong relationship between these three topics. Therefore it is critical, in our experience, to always consider this: an integrated approach to the role of drugs and the criminalization of youth.

We argue that the main root of this situation is the unequal distribution of wealth and resources. This analysis is based on, especially, the fact that the majority of youths with whom we work each year (for more than three decades) are drawn from underprivileged sectors, which receive few resources from the state and society; meanwhile, the attention and support given to youths from wealthier sectors is exceptional. From a historical perspective, this can be seen as a continuance of decades of structural repression of the most impoverished sectors of society, particularly poor children.

Unfortunately, we have found it difficult to statistically document the phenomenon of the policing and profiling of poor, young, and Indigenous persons. This typically occurs out of the public eye, within the hidden jurisdiction of law enforcement. It is important that we recognize and name this problem: this is where it is decided who should be detained and who should not – in a process that arguably could be compared to a lottery – and thereby becomes the first step towards prosecution and, ultimately, incarceration.

The variables in this subjective process of criminalization include being young, poor, and a drug addict, none of which indicate a good prognosis. Furthermore, if the individual is Mapuche [an Indigenous culture, which comprises approximately 9% of the Chilean population], that characteristic adds further challenges to the prospect of attempting to avoid our complex justice system’s subjective enforcement.

Based on our observation of the consumption and trafficking of drugs in our country, especially in its poorest sectors, we can tell – from experience and analysis in at least 13 of the 15 Chilean regions where SERPAJ is present – that this phenomenon applies the ideas of the free market. The role of young people prosecuted for drugs is to reproduce one of the key components of a capitalist system, in which the drug is just another mechanism for the individual to engage in the market – whether as consumer or trafficker – thereby continuing to feed the needs of the system.

We might also add a historical perspective. Those who have prior experience of travel to Chile and who have returned recently will clearly recognize that drug use in poor areas has increased significantly – and that this social factor is clearly tied to the environmental impacts of a society where streets are still unpaved, shacks are still used as housing, and groups of young people spend their days on street-corners inhaling inexpensive solvents.

Hence today, we testify to UNGASS participants, ad portas or in situ of the economic development of Chile, that the ineffectiveness of our government’s public policies has made it possible to maintain the violence of trafficking, ugliness of misery, and economic poverty in our communities for years. Among populations where consumption and trafficking remain and proliferate, time does not exist. This limits the construction of a collective and local memory of the people, and reflects the symbolism of consumption that corresponds to this environment and its networks of political, aesthetic, and economic control.

Consequently, we conclude that the geopolitical framework of our country is determined by the constitution of subjects as consumers, rather than political subjects who are able to exercise their rights as an empowered citizenship. Whether or not the disenfranchised young people of Chile ultimately decide to participate in the political discourse to seek change, as is their rights as citizens, remains to be seen.

SERPAJ Chile (serpajchile.cl), based in Valparaiso and coordinated by executive director Patricio Labra Guzman, is the national branch of the Servicio Paz y Justicia international network. Regional director Carlos Martinez prepared this report, and he will represent the SERPAJ network as part of an international Fellowship of Reconciliation delegation to the U.N. General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem during its April summit in New York City.