“The world is a dangerous place to live, not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don’t do anything about it.”  
Albert Einstein

“Evil is always possible. And goodness is eternally difficult.”  
Anne Rice

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”  
Edmund Burke

“Most of the evil in this world is done by people with good intentions.”  
T.S. Eliot

“I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent.”  
Mahatma Gandhi

“May the forces of evil become confused on the way to your house.”  
George Carlin

“Science may have found a cure for most evils; but it has found no remedy for the worst of them all -- the apathy of human beings.”  
Helen Keller

“Evil will never find peace. It may triumph, but it will never find peace.”  
L.J. Smith

“As for monkeys, I would have five, and they would be named: See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil, Do Pretty Much Whatever the Hell You Want, and Expensive Attorney.”  
Tad Williams

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”  
Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

“Do not let us mistake necessary evils for good.”  
C.S. Lewis

“Evil begins when you begin to treat people as things.”  
Terry Pratchett

“I think our humanism is our best resource when it helps us understand that our freedom of choice means that all of us are capable of evil acts as well as wonderful acts. …We need religion not to protect us from this world but to enable us to engage in a way that repairs and restores life.”  
Rev. Rebecca Parker

“Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.”  
Blaise Pascal

“Real life’s nasty. It’s cruel. It doesn’t care about heroes and happy endings and the way things should be. In real life, bad things happen. People die. Fights are lost. Evil often wins.”  
Darren Shan

“The reason evil exists is not solely because people plot evil. The reason evil exists is not because people are making pacts with the devil – horns, hoofs, and all. The reason evil exists and persists is, in part, because people are frightened and don’t know what to do with the spiritual hole in their lives.”  
David Owen
Evil often has a demonic, that is, a possessive and compulsive, character. Demonic evil is more than a bad deed or singular sin. It is self-justifying, self-sustaining, and self-replicating. It is a perversity with a life of its own. . .Evil has been described as a moral virus that invades its host; unopposed, it tends to become radical. Radical evil is evil that justifies itself, and even exalts itself, as do fascism, extreme nationalism, or religious fundamentalism. **Rev. George Kimmich Beach**

Sometimes I think I use a very subjective, subconscious barometer in reading the paper or receiving the news of the day and deciding whether some event, some action, bears the weight of that word, evil. It’s not the size of the event, nor the cruelty or self-interest of those involved, or even historical impact. I find more and more that it’s the degree of heartbreak that I feel: beyond horror or shock or sorrow, that sense of something in me has been blasted apart, a shattering of hope, a collapse of what I thought I wished was true about the construction of the world and about human nature, the eclipse of optimism by a creeping cynicism, that I begin to call ‘realism.’ Some truths there are, some news there is, that breaks the heart not permanently, but utterly for a while. The wind’s knocked out of you, the light goes out, or flickers, as the realization forms perhaps for the hundredth time: this too is part of our humanity. Evil is the only word for this. And human is the only other for this.

**What do we do with evil?”** We can be compassionate with ourselves and others when bad things happen, and when there are larger systems contributing to suffering, we can work to dismantle them. We can cultivate communities of care and compassion today, and live in to our hope for a different tomorrow. **Rev. Victoria Stafford**

If we ever doubted the reality of the potential for human beings to do evil, we cannot face the last century without full and devastating knowledge of the reality of evil. Evil’s source? Maybe it’s inherent in human beings. Maybe it’s the effect of systemic forces upon us. Finally, I would say, that evil is like goodness in this. Its source is a mystery. That which contains so much beauty and goodness and so much suffering and pain is the nature of Life. And the nature of Life is a mystery. **Rev. Mary Katherine-Morn**

I’m convinced evil is real. It has an impact on the world. . .It’s a story of people killing the spirit of another, attacking their emotional and physical well-being, silencing them. **Rev. Carol Allman-Morton**

Our liberal, Unitarian Universalist, positive view of human nature as loving, compassionate, generous, caring and self-sacrificing—though it may not present the whole picture—is no lightweight, naïve, sheltered theology. It is a life-saving, life-giving, life-enhancing religious response to all those theologies that drive arbitrary wedges between people, that seek to frighten people into faith, and that teach people of their inherent sinfulness rather than their beauty, worth, and potential. **Rev. Josh Pawelek**
Demonizing an enemy, even a Hitler or a bin Laden, constitutes a victory for evil. We have thus, he argues, joined them in their dehumanizing evil. *UU, William Jones*

Victor Frankl, holocaust survivor and theologian, who experienced evil in his life, said beauty and love are the voices of Life that call to us, even in the deepest moments of despair…. I cannot imagine a stronger response to evil and despair than an affirmation of love and beauty.

“A fight is going on inside me,” said an old man to his son. “It is a terrible fight between two wolves. One wolf is evil. He is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other wolf is good. He is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you.”

The son thought about it for a minute and then asked, “Which wolf will win?”

The old man replied simply, “The one you feed.” *Urban Legend*

Religion becomes evil when it is arrogantly triumphalistic and says, “If you don’t agree with me you must be persecuted.” Many wars and terrorist acts have been the result of, or have at least been fueled by triumphalistic religion. . . . as it continues to divide people, to teach prejudice, and to encourage violence. *Rev. Marlin Lavanhar*

Evil corrodes our inner lives, manifesting in self-hatred, powerlessness, and fragmentation of the soul. Its effects are present in hunger, homelessness, and refugee camps, in the suffering of soldiers experiencing post-traumatic stress, or the wrenching grief of families who have lost loved ones to war. The consequences of evil are displayed by trouble in earth’s ecosystems—progressive theologies emphasize that these are the great threats to our lives and to future generations. Life needs to be saved from the harm that sin and evil cause in this world. . . . We are the cause, and we can be the cure. *Rev. Rebecca Ann Parker*

Evil is not rare. It’s never far away. We hold within us always the capacity to diminish life or enhance it, to do small or large amounts of good, or small or terrible amounts of damage, to do evil things, whose capacity is ready and waiting in us all the time. And we make choices all the time, choices which, I believe, depend greatly on the extent to which those “appropriate conditions of life” are available to us (food, water, shelter, compassion, respect and beauty…). Evil, like good, is cumulative. It usually starts small. Small decisions, small choices accumulate. Systemic evil – a project like the Holocaust – required uncanny leadership to instill terror and make the unspeakable articulate, it required concentrated power, but it also required thousands, millions of tiny, daily discernments, tiny, invisible acquiescence’s and compromises by so many ordinary, decent people, so many small acts of what seemed in the moment like regular patriotism
and basic citizenship, or seemed in the moment not so bad. W.H. Auden, the English poet, said, “Evil is unspectacular and always human and shares our bed and eats at our own table.” This is what makes it so frightening and sad. And the poet does go on, “And we are introduced to Goodness every day. Even in drawing rooms among a crowd of faults.” Good, it turns out, is not so spectacular either, most of the time – just ordinary, drawing room decency. Because we’re human, we bear within us always, in every moment, the capacity to curse or bless the world. 

Rev. Victoria Stafford

Bad things will happen to good people, maybe even us. Sometimes they will be by chance or nature, or any number of things out of our control. Sometimes they will be influenced by systems of corporate evil, those forces in our global community that hold us together in making choices that hurt other people or the environment, everything from racism to colonialism, to greed. “People do bad things, and bad things happen to people, so what are we going to do about it?” As part of our religious tradition we seek to understand the patterns of oppression and violence in the world, believe that people are good and able to make more compassionate choices, and then go about to do what we can to make the world better. Rabbi Howard Kushner

“What do we do with evil?” We can be compassionate with ourselves and others when bad things happen, and when there are larger systems contributing to suffering, we can work to dismantle them. We can cultivate communities of care and compassion today, and live in to our hope for a different tomorrow.

“Liberal theology, if it can be said to have an overriding weakness, tends toward a sometimes unrealistic optimism; hope is its central virtue. But essential as hope is, it is insufficient unless grounded in something deeper. A potent religion must address the darkness, inner and outer. That darkness is real. Moments of grace do come, but not easily or often, and it is most often those who acknowledge the darkness who recognize the grace.” Rev. Earl Holt

“Unitarian Universalism has tended toward optimism. In doing so, we have created an imbalance in our estimation of good and evil. As we have increasingly celebrated human goodness, we have correspondingly discounted the presence and power of evil. This tendency toward goodness was an appropriate response by our 19th C. forebears to the overriding pessimism preached by the Calvinists. Against its complete pessimism the thought of the 18th C. and of modernity in general was a necessary correction.” Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland
The Milgram experiment from the 1960s called “Obedience to Authority.” Milgram wanted to understand how regular people would react to a perceived authority figure and how far they would go to complete the demands asked of them. The participants believed they were in a room with a button and dial that delivered shocks to a subject in the next room. Some people in the experiment were willing to follow commands to shock the person that they could only hear in the next room, past the point where the person had begged for mercy and then eventually stopped making sounds and was apparently either unconscious or dead. Of course this experiment was completely staged.

When we are faced with certain systems, often the critical thinking skills and willingness to question authority that we think of ourselves as having, fly out the window. As post-modern Unitarian Universalists, I like to believe that we would not walk into such an experiment and follow blindly, BUT, there are many systems that we participate in because we have not yet found another way. The gasoline that we put in our cars is linked to violence, oppression, and environmental degradation around the world, and while we try and be as judicious with that resource as we can, we still participate in that system. I bet that for many of us, while we try to be conscientious in the products that we buy, we are unable to purchase fair trade, and eco-friendly everything. We cannot fully disentangle ourselves from corporate evil. In our lifetimes, we will make choices that bring us into closer relationship with each other and with creation, and we will make choices that break relationships. We will participate in systems that will help to make change towards justice, and we will participate in systems that cause suffering.