Joy and Destruction

Last week in this space I talked about the joy of creation, and how it can sustain us and even focus us during chaotic times. Just writing about the power of creation made me feel better about our ability to overcome.

Just a few hours after that newsletter was sent out, I met with my UU colleagues for our quarterly ministers association chapter gathering. And what we did was the opposite of creation. You see, every time we gather, we plan something fun that will encourage participation and bring us a little closer together. Usually it's something cooperative. This time though, we thought we'd need something a little more *visceral*. Something responsive to the aggression and hostility we knew we'd be experiencing in early February.

We met in Plymouth to throw axes at wooden targets. We weren't competing against each other, nor were we working as a team. We just worked side by side in a space that looked like a firing range, or bowling alley, with high, heavy-duty chain link fencing between lanes. We each spent an hour hurling very sharp hatchets at walls covered with cedar.

The gesture of aiming and following through was met by the sound of hatchets sinking into the soft wood. Splinters of cedar would fall to the floor, adding to the pile of chips that looked oddly like soft bedding in a stable. Sometimes the hatchet was so deep in the wood that it required a fair amount of strength to pull it out. The air was filled with the sounds of grunting and whooping and cheering each other on.

As we left, everyone thanked our host Dan, each using the same word: cathartic. We all got the chance to "get out" something dirty. Our *own* aggression and hostility which had been building up since about January 20.

But it was more than that. To a person, each of us was surprised by how well we did; surprised that we could hit the target so often; surprised by our own strength. We were surprised that we could control deadly objects hurtling through space. It gave me the feeling that I can conquer anything — aggressively and violently if need be.

I've often said that the core of my theology is the understanding that creation and destruction are the same thing. After the last couple of weeks, I have a completely different and more nuanced understanding of that principle.

In Peace,
Rev Denis