

What do you do with your thoughts? Do you write them up for fear of forgetting or to make something with it? Do you trust they'll stick around if they are of any value? Do you bring them to life by sharing them with someone? Do you just let them go?

In January of this year, shortly after the Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris, our family was coming to the Sunday service for the first time. I remember how surprised I was to see the picture on the program. It was a photograph of the protest that followed the attacks on the Charlie Hebdo journalists. I thought: "What? Are we really going to talk about this? So I just needed to come to a Vermont town of 3000 souls to hear about something that just happened in my home town? This event had been on my mind the entire time. But realizing that it had been on Daniel Jantos's mind too and considered important enough to be devoted a reflection to was amazing. Sometimes we say that only the end result matters. It seems to me that in our case one could argue for the opposite. That it's all about the path. And the challenge it to stay the course in the midst of all the events that are punctuating our lives. So seeing this event that was still impacting me being addressed in front of this community on our very first day at North Chapel was quite an experience. Of course I had my own thoughts about this. As well as everybody who cared to try to process it at the time or who had to do so in many other occasions after similar events. Charlie Hebdo is a satirical magazine which is tough on religions. All religions. And Daniel chose to approach it from the perspective of laughter. Can we laugh at anyone? About anything? On that day I even realized that the philosopher Henri Bergson was actually French. But it also made me want to do more, because I had these thoughts that I was trying to piece together. Of course time went by, other things became more worthy of my everyday worrying and it pretty much all went away. Until a few weeks ago when my parents and I received a message from my sister saying: terrorist attacks tonight - the neighborhood was secured – I'm safe.

After calling her I rushed to the web for news, which were trickling on twitter and in a handful of video streams people were sharing with their cell phones. The following days, the same feelings as in January, only more acute: anger, tension, empathy, worry, disbelief, frustration, incomprehension. Who are these people? Why are they doing this? Who is making them do it? Where is our fault? Where is their reward? The truth is, when it comes to trying to figure this out there doesn't seem to ever be a straight explanation. I mean what do we really understand about this? What do we really know? And if we don't know much how can we even start considering action? The 'we' I am talking about is not the 'we' of a government. It's the 'we' of us who are gathered here today. And if we can't act, what do we do? We can't just rest and watch either. All we

have is words, thoughts. So is there something we can think that's helpful? Can we fight terrorism with ideas?

So here is one: I have heard in conversations and also read that what was going on was essentially related to the nature of Islam itself. That violence was somewhat in there by design. I don't know what Islam teaches or doesn't teach. But that basically suggests that there would be good and bad religions. Some with a mankind friendly design, and some not. So I tried to think of an example of a good religion. Buddhism sounded pretty good and peaceful. Does the concept of radical Buddhism even exist? What would that look like, I wondered. How far would a radicalized Buddhist be capable of going? I'm thinking: "Hey look, this guy just cut the line. – I know, it's a radicalized Buddhist." Just out of curiosity I did a quick web search. Stumbled onto a NYTimes article recounting the acts of some radical Buddhists in Myanmar, who happen to be persecuting... Muslims. And not lightly it appears. I don't really know anything about it but what then happens of our concept of good and bad religions?

The story is not one of spirituality but one of individuals using religion to turn people against one another. Why this need to force someone else to one's lifestyle? Why this need to eradicate different philosophies and traditions? Are these collaterals to the way our modern world economy functions? I don't know. But how can we hope to understand anything if we fall into the trap of blaming religion? It's like responding to the question of the origin of life by saying "It's extraterrestrial". That doesn't tell me much about the origin of life. Or like saying: "It's confidential". There is an answer but you are not allowed to know it. That's how I feel about the reply: "It's the religion".

So I'm thinking: Next time I hear this, maybe I can try to question the answer a bit, suggest that it actually might come from elsewhere.

Here is another idea: Some of the attackers in Paris were French. One of the San Bernardino shooters was born a US citizen. How does this happen? By which mechanism can one be turned against his own people to the point of being able to indiscriminately take lives? These people don't appear to have been coerced into doing what they did. That was executed in accordance with what they believed in.

I see the process of building one's identity as a continuous succession of interactions with the world, where one discovers him or herself bit by bit through parents, friends and many other encounters with people, events, or even objects. Each of these interactions is used to slowly build an identity and also a sense of togetherness. So what kind of succession of events can lead to the making of human beings such as the ones involved in these shootings? It seems to me that there has to be a favorable terrain in a

person. And an “engineer” to turn that person into what they ultimately get known as. An engineer that is taking advantage of humans’ need for recognition and the feeling of belonging, in a world that has become more individualistic.

Each event that leads us to become ourselves can be looked at it in two ways. I can grow up acknowledging the contributions others do to my becoming myself, by helping me describe what I like, how I think, what I want, what I fear. But I may also be tempted to attach judgment to the outcome of each of these interactions, by considering that what is not me is opposed to me, by belittling the other as if only one could prevail. A mode of thinking that leads to destroying the other to prove one’s own existence.

So for those of us who are raising kids, here is another possible action item. Make every effort to help our children discover their selves not by mounting them against otherness but on the contrary by building recognition of these many opportunities to achieve togetherness.

Here is a third and last idea: The lack of ways of expressing oneself can ultimately lead to physical violence. In your own experience haven’t you ever felt the relief of being able to accurately express your position and address a disagreement peacefully? In order to achieve this we need to have a special toolbox at our disposal. It is the toolbox that is provided by education and that we use to express ourselves, think by ourselves, and defend ourselves against ill-intentioned intellectual influences. All those things that make us reasonable beings. Just consider this. If one day, it is us, our children, their children, who have to face the temptation of violence to satisfy some suspiciously simple rhetoric, will we, will they, be able to think it over, and say: No?

I want to finish by thanking you for letting me hug the microphone for a few minutes today. That allowed me to feel like I was actually doing something, but also to finally put some thoughts together, and hopefully outline a couple of ever so small things that one can do in his or her everyday life. Thanks.