

"A Broken Heart"
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Reverend Alison Hyder
First Unitarian Church of Wilmington

Opening Words: Chaim Stern (SLT #633)

Once more Atonement Day has come.
All pretense gone, naked heart revealed to the hiding self,
We stand on holy ground, between the day that was and the one that must be.
We tremble.
At what did we aim?
How did we stumble?
What did we take?
What did we give?
To what were we blind?
Last year's confession came easily to the lips.
Will this year's come from deeper than the skin?
Say then: Why are our paths strewn with promises like fallen leaves?
Say then: When shall our lust be for wisdom?
Say now: Love and truth shall meet, justice and peace shall embrace.

MEDITATION: by Reverend Victoria Safford - "At One"

Imagine this.

On the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, every fall, every year, the people make their peace with anyone they have wronged or slighted or injured or in any way neglected in the past twelve months. The task is not to patch things up, smooth things over, reach a compromise, or sweep mistakes and uneasy memories under the rug; the task is not to feel better. The task is ownership. The goal is truth, for its own redemptive sake. *I did this. I said this to you, and it was wrong. I neglected this. I botched this. I betrayed you thusly.*

I demeaned you, whether you ever knew it or not.

This is the truth in which both of us are living. I ask you to forgive me.

Imagine how many deep breaths you would need to take. Imagine how many doors you'd have to knock on, how many phone calls you'd have to make, how many letters, how many lunches and coffees, how many awkward moments with your children and your parents, and with strangers (that cashier to whom you spoke so sharply). Awkward is irrelevant. The task is not about comfort, it is about truth, about wholeness and holiness. Restoration.

Imagine this.

Joanne Greenberg - "In Praise of Another Year"

In heaven and on earth,
In a clap of thunder, in a whisper of the soul,
In praise on yellowed parchment in an ancient tongue,
In the yearning of the heart, in the blessing of a child,
Blessed be the Holy.

Taste of tears and wine, sight of starry skies,
Old men's voice warping the chant, children singing,
All the web of creation shining in bright sunlight...
Scientist asking, artists proclaiming,
Blessed be the Holy.

Grant us another year in the book of Life,
With its peril, injustice,
And the good daylight.
Blessed be the Holy. Aymen and Aymen.

READING: Sy Safransky writes:

I don't know what is harder to fathom: the atrocities committed by the Nazis, or a prayer found written on a piece of paper in Ravensbrück, the largest concentration camp for women in Nazi Germany. The prayer asks God to remember "not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted on us. Remember the fruits borne of this suffering: the loyalty, the humility, the courage, the generosity, the greatness of heart that has grown out of this. And when they come to judgment, let all the fruits which we have borne be their forgiveness."

SERMON: "A Broken Heart" - Rev. Alison Hyder

Yesterday was the most sacred day in the Jewish calendar. It was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This weekend Jews everywhere ask for forgiveness for all of their failures of love and compassion, for their ignorance, their pettiness, for bitterness or wrath; for inaction in the face of injustice, for indifference to others' needs. For all of their sins, of omission or commission, as a person and as a group. For promises broken, goals unmet. And they vow to do better. This process doesn't happen overnight. These are not like New Year's resolutions about losing weight or being better organized. It is more than an individual laundry-list of improvements. It is a collective awareness of imperfection.

Unitarians used to proclaim the inevitable progress of humankind, onward and upward forever. I don't know whether this was based on faith or arrogance, but it was obviously wrong. Unitarians were about as flawed as anyone else. They just kept it to themselves like proper New Englanders. But, as Rabbi Rami Shapiro says, "Yom Kippur is designed to break your heart over the suffering you have caused others. If your heart is broken you have compassion for both self and others, and that is the key to entering the Gates of Repentance. To be broken before God is to be embraced by God."

Almost every major religion has a ritual of confession and repentance. The Koran, for example, says "To those who repent ... and make amends - god is All-forgiving, All-compassionate." Hindus have a confessional hymn to Varuna. In the Christian Scriptures, Jesus began his ministry with a call to repentance. Acknowledging sin was the first condition of divine forgiveness.

But Unitarians have always approached imperfection from the other angle. We believe in taking personal responsibility for our behavior, and putting our faith into action. God already accepts us. So we can direct our energies toward each other.

Still, Yom Kippur speaks to something within me. I think we need to acknowledge our complex and often destructive natures. It's both powerful and healing. Repentance lets us get past the denial that keeps us stuck in ignorance and guilt. And it situates us firmly in the world, this world as it is, in all of its

pain and messiness and chaos. We are a part of it, one with it, struggling to find our better natures. On the Day of Atonement, Jews acknowledge that they are not alone, that each one of them, each of us, matter in the world. We affect each other. How we live makes a difference to the health of the planet, our communities. We are accountable to each other, responsible for our relationships to each other and to God.

The fact that such soul-searching is done in the midst of the congregation during services does more than provide moral support. It creates a context. Just think about it. You might be praying next to your bitterest enemy, some one you've wronged, a love turned hard. And there they are, too, in all their imperfection, with flaws and fears and wisps of hope, praying as well. Trying to change. The communal atmosphere puts a human face on the worst of inclinations, and encourages people to rectify their relationships for the sake of the whole group, so that escalating tensions and slights don't cause permanent rifts and divide the community into factions. It is in the creation of holy spaces, where we can share and name our broken hearts, that the possibility of healing begins.

But it does even more. It sets ethical standards, and by doing so implies a collective responsibility for behavior, an awareness of the power of the community to create change, and its responsibility to do so. Just as every person has a role in supporting each other's moral growth and relationships with God and other beings, so too every person is responsible for the ethical direction of the community. Together, we must engage in concrete action to take care of those who need help, to work for social justice, to speak out against wrongs and to address pain and suffering in concrete ways.

Confession can be a personal affair between a person and priest, or a prayer to God. But atonement is directed at other beings. It's not about salvation, but justice. It takes sin out of the ego and puts it right where it belongs, in our relationships. Atonement asserts that we are all connected to each other, inextricably linked by our needs and actions. We cannot separate ourselves from our community. For it is both the teacher and the result of our interactions.

This is a very powerful idea. It has the ability to transform a society from isolated sinners, from helpless, passive individuals, to agents of change. Collective acts of atonement change a formless, disorganized mass into an aware, ethical, motivated people: people who feel responsible and vigorous; whose own failings produce compassion and not blame.

Leonard Nimoy, the actor, contributed a piece to *The New York Times*, Sunday, December 22, 1996, as part of a series on "What Being Jewish Means to me." He wrote:

I have very warm memories of growing up in Boston in a secure and loving home, of being surrounded by relatives, all of whom had fled from Eastern Europe, of attending a local Orthodox synagogue, and of studying at an after-school cheder (Jewish school). Judaism was very much alive in our home. So, too, Yiddish. All of this gave me a very strong sense of pride, of spirituality, of connection to an extended Jewish family. I learned early on about street-level anti-Semitism, but I also learned that America is a diverse country in which anti-Semitism is not condoned by the larger society. I felt a sense of security as a Jew; I felt I could aspire to do or be anything I wanted. And I wanted to be an actor.

Arthur Miller, the playwright, once posed a challenge which I paraphrase: How can we make the outside world a home? How do we find a sense of belonging in that larger world? For me, being part of the larger Jewish family and a member of a congregation in Los Angeles have provided a means. Being Jewish ...has been a source of the most important values of all - family, charity, wisdom, compassion, social justice, culture - those values that form the foundation of a civilized society....

When I was a boy, there was a particular blessing used in our local shul (our synagogue). The four fingers of each hand were split to create the Hebrew letter shin representing Shad-dai, the name of the Almighty. [Years later,] when we were creating the television program Star Trek, we needed a salute. I thought back to that hand symbol and proposed it. The rest, as they say, is history.

Maybe ... it was the convergence of my spiritual and artistic lives. Maybe, in a way, I can call that salute my Vulcan shalom, my greeting of peace, my yearning for the blessing of peace - the age-old quest of the Jewish people, my people.

You know, I don't think there were any Jewish crew members of the Starship Enterprise. No Lieutenant Goldfarb or First Mate Shlomo Levi. How fitting, then, that Nimoy's character Spock was half-Vulcan, the only outsider on the crew. For Jews have always been outsiders, and it has made them strong and compassionate, but also brittle, anxious, and edgy. Israel is a product of this history and the pressure to survive against vast odds, outnumbered by allies and enemies alike.

No country can exist for long without a relationship with other countries. Nations have learned that it is in their best interests to maintain allies to keep their borders safe, and to balance their own natural resources with the products and innovations from other cultures. Israel wouldn't have survived for long without aid from the United States and Britain. Many of us here remember the historic meeting between Monacham Begin and Anwar Sadat that brought peace between Israel and its Muslim neighbor. That peace was brokered through the offices of other countries who could act as neutral forces.

The United Nations was founded to help maintain communications between nations and to help broker agreements on trade, the environment, and conflicts between countries and peoples. One of their most important works was the UN Declaration on Human Rights, and the corresponding Declaration of the Rights of Children, which, by the way, the United States does not fully honor. We do not guarantee, or even strive, to make sure that all our children have enough food or adequate healthcare. We can't assure them a quality education. They don't have to worry about war or genocide, but they could still die at any time from gun violence and abuse.

The United Nations was formed after World War II, in response to the horrific genocide of the Nazis, who targeted not only the Jews, but Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, gay men and lesbians, and the mentally retarded, who they just killed outright as a waste of resources. The shocking result of the Atomic Bomb proved the need for some international consortium to monitor conflicts and try to respond to crises. Many of us were raised Trick- or Treating for Unicef, and UUs participate in the "Guest at Your Table" Thanksgiving program, where we contribute the value of our meal towards eliminating hunger.

But how many of you know that Unitarian Universalists are the only religious denomination that has an office at the United Nations? We have been involved with the UN since 1946, and have been both active and influential as a voice for liberal values and ethics. In 2008, when the UN had its first overseas conference with the topic of Human Rights, it was the UU-UNO that put LGBT rights on the UN table for the very first time. We led a workshop and co-moderated a larger breakout session that started a continuing conversation. We have also been very active supporters of the right and welfare of women as both as stabilizing influence and economic force. Studies have shown that when women control their means of production, poverty falls, and children benefit.

It has been a long time since First Unitarian Church had a representative of the Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office. For a long time Hetty Franke held this role and kept members apprised of UN initiatives and projects that needed our support and participation. We'd be happy to help someone take up that mantle, so if you are interested in international affairs or the rights of woman and marginalized people, the fate of the environment or any number of other issues, go online to UU-UNO.org and learn more. They also have programs and internships for young adults. I've got information about that.

As you may know, American fundamentalist Christians have spent a lot of time in Uganda convincing the government there that being gay is a choice, and that it is dangerous and evil. As a consequence of this American interference, there is widespread homophobic zeal from both preachers and politicians. A bill that would have mandated death for gays and lesbians was introduced into the Ugandan parliament this year, but was not taken up and has, blessedly, expired. But that does not make it

safe for GLBT people or their allies in Uganda. Although members of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Uganda in Kampala are working to protect LGBT citizens, their minister, the Rev. Mark Kiyimba, had to flee to the United States after receiving death threats. He's being sponsored by the UU Church of Tulsa and going around the States speaking to UU congregations to raise awareness and support. That's just one reason why we should keep ourselves informed about the work of the UU-UNO. It's a source of pride as well as of action.

We cannot expect countries or governments to be any better than the people who run them. Every one of us falls short in our behavior, much less in our goals. We want to be good - most of the time - but we get tired and cranky, we get anxious and afraid. The problems right on our doorstep are overwhelming enough. Sometimes we just have to focus on our own situation.

But only for so long. We must not live in isolation. We live in a global community. A crisis overseas brings immigrants to our shores. Homophobia here becomes violence overseas. Corporations have no national allegiance. And the world wide web lets us all be neighbors, sharing pain, sorrow, and hope. We will never be able to forget that again. Thank goodness.

Artist M.C. Richards laments, "I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the ...great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is... the moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice; who prefers ...the absence of tension to a positive peace, which is the presence of justice... True peace is not merely the absence of war, but the presence of justice.

"Love is not a doctrine. Peace is not an international agreement. Love and Peace are beings who live as possibilities within us." *[Centering]*

And that is why I honor Yom Kippur every year. I have made mistakes, hurt people's feelings, failed to act. I've kept to myself when I could be reaching out to others. I've missed the mark. I know I will never be perfect. But I still have to try.

"On Rosh ha-Shana [the Jewish New Year], we listen" *explains* Rabbi Rami Shapiro:

... on Yom Kippur we respond: "Henneni: Here I am!" Right here in the center of things: muddling through, learning a little from the mistakes of others, and more from my own; seeking to make sense out of life and establish a bit of purpose and peace. Here I am. To say [this] fully, from the depths of our being, is At-one-ment. We heal ourselves and the world by embracing ourselves and our world. We move from the impersonal "I-It" and the antagonistic "Us-Them" [stance] to the deeply compassionate at-one-ment of 'I - Thou."

At-one-ment, however, will not bring an end to suffering. It will not fill the bellies of the hungry or empty the rifles of the violent. But it will awaken us to their hunger and their pain, and to our own deepest hungers, hurts, and violence. By seeing ourselves as parts of a divine Whole, we move into a deeper appreciation of Life: we gain the divine perspective that allows for the pain of life even as it seeks to ease that pain. [Behold this Day, by Rami Shapiro].

Part of atonement, of forgiveness, is blessing the world. We must choose for wholeness and peace. We must practice gratitude by witnessing to goodness and courage and creativity, and trust in the transforming power of love - even when we have been betrayed or disappointed, when we have every right to feel angry.

Here's an example. Roberto de Vincenzo, a famous Argentine golfer, won a tournament one day. After all the congratulations he was walking to his car with the winnings when he was approached by a young woman. She congratulated him on his victory. Then she told him that her child was seriously ill and very likely to die. De Vincenzo was touched by her story, so he took out a pen and endorsed the check for his winnings over to the young woman. "Make some good days for the baby," he said as he pressed the check into her hand.

The next week he was having lunch in a country club when a PGA official came to his table. He said, "some of the guys in the parking lot last week told me you talked to a young woman after you won the tournament. De Vincenzo nodded. "Well," said the official. "I have news for you. She's a phony. She's not married. She has no sick baby. It was all a story. She fleeced you, my friend."

De Vincenzo asked, "You mean there is no baby who is dying?"

"That's right."

De Vincenzo sighed, "That's the best news I've heard all week!"

For De Vincenzo, less suffering, less despair, vastly outweighed any trickery. The woman was not grieving because her baby was sick. No one was in pain. He would rather be happy for the world than angry about it. Because he knew that his welfare was linked to everyone else.

As the Kotsker Rebbe said, "There is nothing as whole as a broken heart." There is nothing as whole as a broken heart. For that is the heart that feels with other people, that understands hurt and betrayal, and that is not too proud to seek healing.

"The task is ownership," Writes Victoria Safford. "The goal is truth, for its own redemptive sake. *I did this. I said this to you, and it was wrong. I neglected this. I botched this. I betrayed you thusly. I demeaned you, whether you ever knew it or not.*

This is the truth in which both of us are living. I ask you to forgive me.

"The task is not about comfort, it is about truth, about wholeness and holiness. Restoration. Imagine this."

CLOSING WORDS: "Some Wishes for You" from *The Gift of the Ordinary* by Rev. Charles S. Stephens

I wish for you a troubled heart at times
As woes of world and friend come close beside
And keep you sleepless.
I wish for you the thrill of knowing who you are,
Where you stand, and why.
Especially why.
Not prosperity but dreams I wish for you:
... Full today's I wish for you, and full tomorrows.