



*Soul Matters*

**October 2016**

***What Does It Mean To Be  
A Community of Healing?***

**Worship Resources**

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## Ideas for Worship

### Healing within Congregations

It is no accident that our theme of healing comes after our theme of covenant. After all, healing is what's needed when covenants are broken. This is true both for individuals and for communities.

Are there wounds in your congregation that need to heal? Are there ways your congregation's covenant has been broken that have not been repaired?

For reference, this story and reflection in the *Safe Congregation Handbook* is about a congregation healing after clergy misconduct; its lessons are applicable to many situations: <http://www.uua.org/safe/handbook/justice/166329.shtml>

## Threads of Healing

The children's book *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst could be paired with William Safford's poem "The Way It Is" in a service about what people might hold on to that guides them towards healing.

Consider the ritual possibilities for this! For example, you might incorporate actions of unraveling and mending, or have people weave together individual strings into a community fabric, or have each person receive a piece of string cut from the same longer length. If you create a ritual around this, please post it to our closed Soul Matters Support Facebook page so others can be inspired by your ideas!

*The Invisible String* children's book:

[https://www.amazon.com/dp/0875167349/ref=wl\\_it\\_dp\\_v\\_nS\\_ttl?encoding=UTF8&colid=](https://www.amazon.com/dp/0875167349/ref=wl_it_dp_v_nS_ttl?encoding=UTF8&colid=)

"The Way It Is" by William Safford

There's a thread you follow. It goes among  
things that change. But it doesn't change.  
People wonder about what you are pursuing.  
You have to explain about the thread.  
But it is hard for others to see.  
While you hold it you can't get lost.  
Tragedies happen; people get hurt  
or die; and you suffer and get old.  
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.  
You don't ever let go of the thread.

## The Prophetic Side of Healing

Healing is also the work of justice. There are a number of resources in this packet for healing as it relates to racial justice work and for healing the earth.

For inspiration, see the sermon "Choosing Hope" by the Rev. Elaine Tenbrink. It includes a beautiful cycle of life prayer, a reading, and Rev. Tenbrink's prophetic sermon, all related to what healing means in the wake of Philandro Castile's death in Minneapolis. (Castile, an African American man, was shot by a police officer after a traffic stop.)

## Forgiveness

Yom Kippur (October 11th & 12, 2016; <http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday4.htm>) is one of the most important days of the Jewish calendar. It is the Day of Atonement -- a day set aside for forgiveness and reconciliation, certainly central to the Soul Matter's theme of healing. Some ideas for worship inspired by Yom Kippur:

- The sermon "A Pattern So Vast" by the Rev. Kate Tucker:  
<http://firstuniv.podbean.com/e/2010-01-10-rev-kate-tuckera-pattern-so-vast/>

- Rev. Tucker's sermon links forgiveness to this poem by Rick Fields:  
 Behind the hardness there is fear  
 And if you touch the heart of the fear  
 You find sadness  
 And if you touch the sadness  
 You find the vast blue sky
- The sample sermon in this packet: "The Healing Power of Forgiveness" by Rita Schiano
- **Responsive Reading #637** by Rev. Rob Eller-Isaacs  
 For remaining silent when a single voice would have made a difference  
*We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.*  
 For each time that our fears have made us rigid and inaccessible  
*We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.*  
 For each time that our greed has blinded us to the needs of others  
*We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.*  
 For the selfishness which sets us apart and alone  
*We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.*  
 For falling short of the admonitions of the spirit  
*We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.*  
 For losing sight of our unity  
*We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.*  
 For those and for so many acts both evident and subtle which have fueled the  
 illusion of separateness  
*We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.*

## Lament as a Pathway to Hope

Sometimes, just giving people permission to feel hurt is healing. One idea: pair a Hebrew Scripture lament from the Psalms (there are some listed later in this packet) with this Facebook post by bestselling author Glennon Doyle Melton:

Here's the truth I've learned: you are not supposed to be happy all the time. Life hurts and it's hard. Not because you're doing it wrong, because it hurts for everybody.

Don't avoid the pain. Don't numb it, don't run from it. Pain is not a hot potato. Pain is traveling professor.

All the wisdom and courage you need to become the person you are meant to be is inside your pain. Be still with it, let the pain come, let it go, let it leave you with the fuel you'll burn to get your work done on this earth.

<https://www.facebook.com/glennondoylemelton/videos/10154459419004710/>

A possible song to use in a service on lament: "Beautiful Dawn" by the Wailin' Jennys. The refrain is "there's only one way to mend a broken heart" -- by allowing it to break.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBYrRPSG-Rs>

Another idea is to connect lament with racial justice work and have the theme become more prophetic in addition to pastoral. Rev. Tenbrink's sermon in this packet ("Choosing Hope") and these readings are possible places to start:

**Healing** by Adam Lawrence Dyer

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/healing>

**A Litany for Those Who Aren't Ready for Healing** by Rev. Yolanda Pierce

<http://kineticslive.com/2014/11/28/a-litany-for-those-who-arent-ready-for-healing%E2%80%8F/>

## October Calendar Ideas

- In the United States, election season will be in full swing.
  - Autumn as a time of letting go in preparation for new growth in the spring:  
<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/naming-the-days/view/10950/autumn-reflections-on-the-season>
  - Muharram (Islamic new year) - October 1
  - Rosh Hashanah - October 2-4
  - Indigenous People's Day (Columbus Day in many states) - October 10th
  - Yom Kippur - October 11-12
  - Diwali (Hindu festival of lights) - October 30
  - Dia de los Muertos and All Saints' Day - Nov. 1st, closest Sunday is October 30th
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## Chalice Lightings

**For Every Time We Make a Mistake** by Maureen Killoran

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/chalice-lighting/every-time-we-make-mistake>

(May be read responsively)

For every time we make a mistake and we decide to start again:

We light this chalice.

For every time we are lonely and we let someone be our friend:

We light this chalice.

For every time we are disappointed and we choose to hope:

We light this chalice.

**Struggle and Joy** by Vance Bass

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/chalice-lighting/struggle-and-joy>

Every day brings struggle, every day brings joy. Every day brings us the opportunity to ease the struggle of another, to be the joy in another's life. May this flame remind us to carry our light to each other and to the world.

**Let there be light!** By Gordon Mckeeman

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/chalice-lighting/let-there-be-light>

"Let there be light!"

Let it shine in dark places,  
in moments of pain,  
in times of grief,  
in the darkness of hatred,  
violence,  
oppression,  
where there is discouragement and despair.  
Wherever darkness is to be put to flight,  
"Let there be light!"

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## Readings to inspire sermon preparation

***For much more inspiration, see also the Soul Matters Small Group packet!***

### **11th Hour Preacher Party: #what2preach when blood is running in the streets**

On 14 December 2012 (my father's birthday) I posted an angry tweet about pastors who didn't know what to say in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook shooting sit down rather than preach something stupid like God needed more angels. Someone asked me what to preach instead, a serious question as they were struggling with the horror and the assigned texts in the preaching lectionary used by many Christian denominations. I held my first-ever tweetchat using the hashtag #what2preach.

I have brought that hashtag back after shooting after shooting and atrocity after atrocity. I realized today that it has become a macabre protocol for me as a priest, seminary professor and biblical scholar to help other priests and pastors who are struggling to proclaim a meaningful word in God's name.

And Goddammit– yes, may God damn and curse the murderous violence in our society to the pits of hell – God damn it we are here again.

See this link for the rest of the post and the author's ideas about #whattopreach:

<https://revgalblogpals.org/2016/07/08/11th-hour-preacher-party-what2preach-when-blood-is-running-in-the-streets/>

### **Native American elders offer a simple message for healing the Earth**

We may have a number of technological solutions to our problems at our disposal, but what good are they without respect for natural laws?

<http://www.mnn.com/home-blog/guest-columnist/blogs/native-american-elders-offer-a-simple-message-for-healing-the-earth>

### **Cure vs. Healing**

by Fred Recklau, *Partners in Care: Medicine and Ministry Together*

*Note: these refer to physical cure and healing, but ring true spiritually as well: too often, we seek to “cure” our emotional and spiritual pain instead of taking the longer road to healing.*

Cure may occur without healing; healing may occur without cure.

Cure alters what is; healing offers what might be.

Cure is an act; healing is a process.

Cure seeks to change reality; healing embraces reality.

Cure takes charge; healing takes time.

Cure avoids grief; healing assumes grief.

Cure speaks; healing listens.

Full list here: [http://www.spirituallygrowingwithcancer.org/Cure\\_vs\\_Healing\\_page.html](http://www.spirituallygrowingwithcancer.org/Cure_vs_Healing_page.html)

**Lament Psalms from Hebrew Scriptures.** Psalm summaries by Mary Ann Koresh.

Note: this is one recommended translation of the Psalms that “favors beauty before theology, breathing new life into the ancient texts”: [https://www.amazon.com/Complete-Psalms-Prayer-Songs-Translation/dp/1608191206/ref=sr\\_1\\_12?ie=UTF8&qid=1472941146&sr=8-12&keywords=psalms+translation](https://www.amazon.com/Complete-Psalms-Prayer-Songs-Translation/dp/1608191206/ref=sr_1_12?ie=UTF8&qid=1472941146&sr=8-12&keywords=psalms+translation)

[https://www.amazon.com/Complete-Psalms-Prayer-Songs-Translation/dp/1608191206/ref=sr\\_1\\_12?ie=UTF8&qid=1472941146&sr=8-12&keywords=psalms+translation](https://www.amazon.com/Complete-Psalms-Prayer-Songs-Translation/dp/1608191206/ref=sr_1_12?ie=UTF8&qid=1472941146&sr=8-12&keywords=psalms+translation)

- **Psalm 13: 1-6**

This passage is an individual petition/lament, in which the author is pleading for an answer about how long his/her suffering will continue. Four repetitions of “how long” in verses 1 and 2 indicate significant distress. The psalmist feels forgotten by God, while the pain continues. Here we see a pattern similar to other psalms of lament: orientation/disorientation/new orientation. The new orientation is most clearly heard in verse 5, when the anguish converts to trust in God, who is the holder of a hopeful future

- **Psalm 56:1-13**

This psalm of trust in the midst of oppression has a powerful message of hope. The repeated verses (vv. 4 and 10-11) are a promise that God is present to individuals as well as to nations in spite of the oppressive practices that prevail. The psalmist brings his grief to God, knowing that God attends to those who are brokenhearted. The word of wounding (*sha-aph*), meaning trample, crush, or thirst for blood) is juxtaposed with the tender image of the psalmist putting tears in God’s bottle. The enemy will retreat. In spite of suffering and vulnerability, God is present with the oppressed, and the psalm concludes with the promise of walking with God “in the light of life”.

- **Psalm 88:1-18**

This psalm of lament is an individual petition filled with desolation and angst. We are aware of dire conditions and pain: “my soul is full of troubles” (v. 3), “why do you hide your face from me?” (v. 14), “I suffer your terrors; I am desperate” (v. 15). The rhetorical questions add to a sense of hopelessness. This psalm “gives voice to all who are in the depths of suffering, without light, unable to express hope, almost at the end of their strength. Embedded in the psalmist’s misery and lament is a sense of trust in God. There is an element of safety in pouring out one’s pain and anguish in a trusting relationship. Even though the psalmist expresses deep personal or communal pain, the reality of God’s love is present even without a direct statement of trust in God.

**Healing** By Adam Lawrence Dyer

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/healing>

Don't speak to me of "healing" racism,  
or "wounded souls" or the "painful hurt"  
until you are willing to feel the scars  
on my great-great-grandmother Laury's back.  
Don't speak to me of "values"  
or "justice" or "righting wrongs"  
until you are able to feel the heartache  
of my great-grandfather Graham  
whose father may have been his master.  
Don't speak to me of "equity" or "opportunity" or the "common good"  
until you are able to hear the fear from my grandmother Mae  
as the only black woman in her college.  
Don't speak to me of "passion" or "longing" or "standing on the side of love"  
until you know the shame felt by my mother Edwina  
mocked by teachers for the curve of her back.  
Don't speak to me of "together" or "understanding" or "empathy"  
until you know my rage as a young actor hearing the direction  
to "be more black . . . more male."  
The pain you are trying to heal has no real name.  
This "pain" you speak of has no story; it is anonymous, vague, and empty.  
Don't speak to me of "healing" for I heal the second I am ripped apart.  
My wounds self-suture, and like the clever creature I am,  
I just grow new legs to outrun the pain ever faster.  
It is something I have had to practice for generations,  
that feel like an eternity.  
So, please don't speak to me of "healing"  
because you cannot know what healing means until you know the hurt.

**The Grit and Tender Gravity of Kindness**

By Parker Palmer

<http://www.onbeing.org/blog/parker-palmer-the-grit-and-tender-gravity-of-kindness/8723>

**Safe Congregation Handbook**

A story about clergy misconduct and a process for congregational healing

by Anna Belle Leiserson and Phil Thomason

<http://www.uua.org/safe/handbook/justice/166329.shtml>

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## Stories for All Ages

**The Heart and the Bottle Hardcover** by Oliver Jeffers

[https://www.amazon.com/dp/0399254528/ref=wl\\_it\\_dp\\_v\\_nS\\_ttl?encoding=UTF8&colid=39N5UTK7073E6&coliid=I39H1CD8U7FEMU](https://www.amazon.com/dp/0399254528/ref=wl_it_dp_v_nS_ttl?encoding=UTF8&colid=39N5UTK7073E6&coliid=I39H1CD8U7FEMU)

There is a wonder and magic to childhood. We don't realize it at the time, of course . . . yet the adults in our lives do. They encourage us to see things in the stars, to find joy in colors and laughter as we play. But what happens when that special someone who



encourages such wonder and magic is no longer around? We can hide, we can place our heart in a bottle and grow up . . . or we can find another special someone who understands the magic. And we can encourage them to see things in the stars, find joy among colors and laughter as they play. ... Oliver Jeffers delivers a remarkable book, a tale of poignancy and resonance reminiscent of *The Giving Tree* that will speak to the hearts of children and parents alike.

**Have You Filled a Bucket Today?** A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids by Carol McCloud (Author), David Messing (Illustrator)  
[https://www.amazon.com/Have-Filled-Bucket-Today-Bucketfilling/dp/099609993X/ref=dp\\_ob\\_title\\_bk](https://www.amazon.com/Have-Filled-Bucket-Today-Bucketfilling/dp/099609993X/ref=dp_ob_title_bk)

This heartwarming book encourages positive behavior by using the concept of an invisible bucket to show children how easy and rewarding it is to express kindness, appreciation and love by "filling buckets." Updated and revised, this 10th anniversary edition will help readers better understand that "bucket dipping" is a negative behavior, not a permanent label. It also explains that it's possible to fill or dip into our own buckets.

**The Invisible String** by Patrice Karst (Author), Geoff Stevenson (Illustrator)  
[https://www.amazon.com/dp/0875167349/ref=wl\\_it\\_dp\\_v\\_nS\\_ttl?encoding=UTF8&colid=](https://www.amazon.com/dp/0875167349/ref=wl_it_dp_v_nS_ttl?encoding=UTF8&colid=)

"That's impossible", said twins Jeremy & Liza after their Mom told them they're all connected by this thing called an Invisible String. "What kind of string"? They asked with a puzzled look to which Mom replied, "An Invisible String made of love." ... *The Invisible String* is a very simple approach to overcoming the fear of loneliness or separation ... and reminding children (and adults!) that when we are loved beyond anything we can imagine. "People who love each other are always connected by a very special String, made of love. Even though you can't see it with your eyes, you can feel it deep in your heart, and know that you are always connected to the ones you love."

**The Tree Lady: The True Story of How One Tree-Loving Woman Changed a City Forever** by H. Joseph Hopkins (Author), Jill McElmurry (Illustrator)  
[https://www.amazon.com/dp/1442414022/ref=wl\\_it\\_dp\\_v\\_nS\\_ttl?encoding=UTF8&colid=39N5UTK7073E6&coliid=I3KSLQXOD3KKG5](https://www.amazon.com/dp/1442414022/ref=wl_it_dp_v_nS_ttl?encoding=UTF8&colid=39N5UTK7073E6&coliid=I3KSLQXOD3KKG5)

Unearth the true story of green-thumbed pioneer and activist Kate Sessions, who helped San Diego grow from a dry desert town into a lush, leafy city known for its gorgeous parks and gardens.

**Rachel Carson and Her Book That Changed the World** by Laurie Lawlor (Author), Laura Beingessner (Illustrator)  
[https://www.amazon.com/dp/0823431932/ref=wl\\_it\\_dp\\_v\\_nS\\_ttl?encoding=UTF8&colid=39N5UTK7073E6&coliid=IC0PT8Z5WS60X](https://www.amazon.com/dp/0823431932/ref=wl_it_dp_v_nS_ttl?encoding=UTF8&colid=39N5UTK7073E6&coliid=IC0PT8Z5WS60X)

"Once you are aware of the wonder and beauty of earth, you will want to learn about it," wrote Rachel Carson, the pioneering environmentalist. She wrote "Silent Spring," the book that woke people up to the harmful impact humans were having on our planet.

**Seeds of Change: Wangari's Gift to the World** by Jen Cullerton Johnson (Author), Sonia Lynn Sadler (Illustrator)

[https://www.amazon.com/dp/160060367X/ref=wl\\_it\\_dp\\_v\\_nS\\_ttl?encoding=UTF8&colid=39N5UTK7073E6&coliid=I65QABJFTQFZ6](https://www.amazon.com/dp/160060367X/ref=wl_it_dp_v_nS_ttl?encoding=UTF8&colid=39N5UTK7073E6&coliid=I65QABJFTQFZ6)

As a young girl in Kenya, Wangari was taught to respect nature. She grew up loving the land, plants, and animals that surrounded her -from the giant mugumo trees her people, the Kikuyu, revered to the tiny tadpoles that swam in the river. Although most Kenyan girls were not educated, Wangari, curious and hardworking, was allowed to go to school. There, her mind sprouted like a seed. She excelled at science and went on to study in the United States. After returning home, Wangari blazed a trail across Kenya, using her knowledge and compassion to promote the rights of her countrywomen and to help save the land, one tree at a time. *Seeds of Change: Planting a Path to Peace* brings to life the empowering story of Wangari Maathai, the first African woman, and environmentalist, to win a Nobel Peace Prize.

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## Meditations and Prayers

**Prayer** by St. Francis

Lord, make us instruments of your peace;  
Where there is hatred, let us sow love; Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is discord, harmony;  
Where there is error, truth;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
And where there is sadness, joy.

**Blessing for a friend, on the arrival of illness** by John O'Donohue

<http://bealightcfsawareness.blogspot.com/2011/02/blessing-for-friend-on-arrival-of.html>

**Blessing: May You Find Deep Relief** by Alexis Engelbrecht

May you find deep relief in the hope that comes from knowing your own inner strength and the comfort that comes from being loved.

May you experience the sacred in completely regular but absolutely beautiful day to day occurrences and - as you breathe in the breath of life - may you be full of the peace that is beyond understanding.

**Meditation on Broken Hearts** By Thomas Rhodes

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/meditation-broken-hearts>

Let us enter into a time of meditation, contemplation, and prayer.  
Feel the earth beneath your feet as it supports you.  
Feel the love of this community as it surrounds and enfolds you.  
Feel your breath as it flows in and out of your body.  
Listen to your heartbeat.  
Listen to your heart . . .

And how is it with your heart?

Does your heart feel whole, shielded by intellect, cocooned by reason, closed to feeling?

Or is it broken, fragile to the touch, brimming with the pain of loss?

*See link for full text.*

**A Litany for Those Who Aren't Ready for Healing** by Rev. Yolanda Pierce  
<http://kineticslive.com/2014/11/28/a-litany-for-those-who-arent-ready-for-healing%E2%80%8F/>

Let us not rush to the language of healing, before understanding the fullness of the injury and the depth of the wound. ...

Let us not offer clichés to the grieving, those whose hearts are being torn asunder.

Let us mourn black and brown men and women, those killed extrajudicially every 28 hours. ...

Let us listen to the shattering glass and let us smell the purifying fires, for it is the language of the unheard.

*See link for full text.*

**“A Prayer of Healing”** from U.N. Environmental Sabbath Service, Earth Day 1990  
(responsive prayer)

Leader: To bring new life to the land

To restore the waters

To refresh the air

Response: We join with the earth and with each other.

Leader: To renew the forests

To care for the plants

To protect the creatures

Response: We join with the earth and with each other.

Leader: To celebrate the seas

To rejoice in the sunlight

To sing the song of the stars

Response: We join with the earth and with each other.

Leader: To recall our destiny

To renew our spirits

To reinvigorate our bodies

Response: We join with the earth and with each other.

Leader: To recreate the human community

To promote justice and peace

To remember our children

Response: We join with the earth and with each other.

All: We join together as many and diverse expressions of one loving mystery: for the healing of the earth and the renewal of all life.

**A Prayer for Difficult Conversations** by Rev. Meg Riley

May our shared values be our compass,

Helping us to remember why we are on this spinning planet,

Helping us to navigate here in this dense thicket.

I know we are both struggling, so may we have compassion for one another.

May our shared memories be our sustenance,  
Nurturing us along as we are weary and wary on this rocky road, Providing strength to go on.

I know we are kindred, so may we overcome this obstacle to kinship.

May our shared commitments point to our destination, Imagining a place big enough to hold us all,

Desiring to live where love casts out fear.

I know we both want to be there, so may we touch it now.

May every word I speak be filtered through my heart. May every word I hear be filtered through my heart.

May my inner judge sit this one out.

May I breathe into loving kindness, for myself and for you.

And may I accept that we will both do this imperfectly.

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## Choral Music and Hymns

See link for spreadsheet of hymns and music.

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1XLe37z2ANgVVG7BMKy0RQGcJlkkPYV\\_uQBdfiHhMGs/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1XLe37z2ANgVVG7BMKy0RQGcJlkkPYV_uQBdfiHhMGs/edit?usp=sharing)

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## Sample Sermons

### The Healing Power of Forgiveness

By Rita Schiano

Sermon given on December 14, 2014 at The Brookfield Unitarian Universalist Church

#### ***Sermon Summary***

In this powerful sermon about forgiving her father, Rita Schiano asks the question: “Is this the kind of person I want to be?” That question was her awakening: “Did I want to continue to be bound to my past, and captive to my future? Or was I ready and willing to do the soul-searching work that would ultimately free me? And once I embraced those questions, the channel was incontrovertible: forgiveness. I had to forgive my father for putting me at risk; I had to forgive my father for not demonstrating to me how a lover properly and respectfully treats his beloved; I had to forgive my father for broken promises that caused me to feel hurt and angry and unworthy of his time and attention. Embracing forgiveness is easier said than done, for we cannot enact successful change in our lives unless we breakdown the process of forgiveness into small segments. To begin, I had to learn what forgiveness is, and what forgiveness is not, and what it meant to be unforgiving.”

## Sermon

When I was young, I was fond of saying, “If someone hurts me, I can forgive, but I’ll never forget.” And I’d speak those words with a certain air of hubris, and an implied forewarning: “Don’t mess with me. Revenge is a dish best served cold.”

When I was young, I had no idea what forgiveness was truly about. Truth be told, I didn’t have any real clue about true forgiveness until I was in my early 50s, when I began writing the story about my father. Until that time, I didn’t understand that my issues around trust, and intimacy, and honesty had little to do with the actions of the people in my life, and everything to do with my thoughts, beliefs and judgments about them, about myself, and about me in relation to them.

Yes, when I’d say, “I can forgive, but I’ll never forget,” what I meant was “Don’t mess with me.” When I’d say, “I can forgive, but I’ll never forget,” what I meant was “I can never again trust you.”

When I’d say, “I can forgive, but I’ll never forget,” what I meant was “I can’t trust myself that I will not let you hurt me again.”

When my father’s life was taken, I fell into a deep and dark emotional state; an existential depression. I was 21 years old. Everything I believed about myself, about my life seemed meaningless and hopeless.

And while I did eventually find that “invincible summer within me” that Albert Camus spoke of, the metaphysical metamorphosis would later prove not to be enough. Hurt, anger, confusion, distrust were just a sampling of the negative emotional energies that kept me bound to my past and captive to my future. The circumstances may have been different, the situations were different, the players weren’t the same, but I kept experiencing the same lamentable outcomes.

In my work as a teacher and resilience strategist, I often hark back to the teachings of Aristotle. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes that there are two times in our life when our character is shaped. The first is when we are children. At that time, our habits and attitudes are shaped by our parents and our early teachers, who taught us the best they knew how based on what they had learned. And while these early messages and habit formations were central to our character development, sometimes these lessons were negative.

As a child I was, like most children are, a keen observer. I witnessed first-hand the hurt, the betrayal, the humiliation my father inflicted upon my mother. And I witnessed first-hand the suspicion, the mistrust, and the self-loathing my mother absorbed into the deepest fibers of her being. And as a child I was, like most children are, a poor interpreter of what I observed. Children do not have a well-developed emotional language that adequately identifies their reactions and responses. Iyanla VanZant in her course on forgiveness explains that as children, we’re taught to identify an emotion or feeling as right, wrong, good, bad, nice or not nice in response to the behavior most often associated with it.

For example, it’s not right, good or nice to express anger. We are told not to be afraid. Sadness is often addressed with sweet treats (Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups and pastries, as was in my case) or some other distraction that makes the adults feel

comfortable, yet fails to address what the child thinks and feels. This use of misdirection is what keeps us emotionally stuck.

When as children we are humiliated or are witness to humiliation by a parent or caregiver or bully, we carry that emotional energy in the body. We persevere on it, allowing the emotion, the hurt, to linger and fester, becoming a benchmark for the way we deal with others, with failure, with criticism.

And these repeated reactions and negative responses strengthen the neural circuitry in our brain, and shape our attitudes, our settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something, which is typically, then, reflected in Brookfield Unitarian Universalist Church our behavior. Different set of circumstances, different situation, different players, same old crappy outcome. We get stuck repeating the same patterns — dating losers, marrying alcoholics, or cheaters, or the emotionally unavailable — because it is familiar. It's dealing with the devil we know, rather than the devil we don't know.

However, our adult conception of the world comes from within and is self-directed. And so, as Aristotle writes, when we reach adulthood we are obligated to look back at those early lessons, those habits we developed, and determine if they serve us, or if they are habits that do not serve us. And then we must ask ourselves, "Is this the kind of person I want to be?"

That question was my awakening: Did I want to continue to be bound to my past, and captive to my future? Or was I ready and willing to do the soul-searching work that would ultimately free me? And once I embraced those questions, the channel was incontrovertible: forgiveness.

I had to forgive my father for putting me at risk; I had to forgive my father for not demonstrating to me how a lover properly and respectfully treats his beloved; I had to forgive my father for broken promises that caused me to feel hurt and angry and unworthy of his time and attention.

I had to forgive my mother for subjecting me, her child, to her hurt and humiliation. I had to forgive my mother for not being strong enough to say to my father, "Enough. I won't allow you to treat me like this anymore. I am worthy of respect. I am worthy of devotion, I am worthy of love." Those are the messages a child needs to learn.

Embracing forgiveness is easier said than done, for we cannot enact successful change in our lives unless we breakdown the process of forgiveness into small segments. To begin, I had to learn what forgiveness is, and what forgiveness is not, and what it meant to be unforgiving.

Forgiveness is not weakness; it is not acquiescing to someone else's bad behavior. Forgiveness is not condoning their actions; it is not saying 'That's okay.' Forgiveness is not excusing what happened; nor is it a pass for bad behavior.

And forgiveness does not mean that we are obligated to continue a relationship with someone who has caused us hurt or harm. Many times these are the people we find the hardest to forgive, for we feel we are then obligated to "let bygones be bygones" and allow that person full access to our lives. We do not.

Regardless of the reason, rational or irrational, when we choose to be unforgiving we choose to remain stuck. Being unforgiving gives the other full power over our future choices, decisions, and actions.

We've all heard one script or another...

"I'm not going to my niece's wedding because my sister, who caused so much disruption in my family, will be there. I feel badly I won't get to see my niece get married, but if she's going, then I'm not going."

"I'm not going to my uncle's house for Christmas because he owes me an apology. So I'm just going to stay home. Everyone there will miss me. That'll show him."

In each of those scenarios, and all the other similar situations at play in the lives of the unforgiving, we think we are hurting the offender. But who are we hurting, really? We're hurting the niece, we're hurting the uncle, we're hurting the aunt, the cousins, all the family and friends with whom we won't share those life events and holidays. And most importantly, we are hurting ourselves by denying ourselves those precious moments in time with those we love.

What keeps us stuck in the pain both emotionally and at a cellular level — what we FEEL in our bodies — is the choice of unforgiveness. This emotional energy becomes a driving force that sustains our thoughts, beliefs, and judgments, and strengthens in a negative way, what I call our HABITUDES© — patterns of thoughts or behaviors affecting our attitudes towards life.

While our attitudes influence our behavior, it's our habits — those recurrent, often unconscious patterns of behavior — that direct our actions and ultimately shape our character.

"I can forgive, but I cannot forget, is only another way of saying, I will not forgive," said Henry Ward Beecher. "Forgiveness" he went on to say, "ought to be like a cancelled note — torn in two, and burned up, so that it never can be shown against one."

When we do not forgive and release that negative emotional energy that is attached to an experience, we remain emotionally stuck in the experience.

Once the situation is over, once the interaction between you and the other person is over, it's done. It no longer exists. Forgiveness does not change the past, but it opens the door of our hearts, allowing us to build upon the future. "Anger" Cherie Carter-Scott said, "makes you smaller, while forgiveness forces you to grow beyond what you were." Another important and critical step in the process . . . is self-forgiveness. Self-forgiveness is having the courage to face the reality of the impact of our thoughts, beliefs, and judgments on others and on ourselves. Self-forgiveness arises when our hearts yearn to relieve the suffering, the hurt we caused another or ourselves. And just like excusing others, it doesn't excuse or justify our bad behavior.

Even if someone is no longer alive or an active part of our lives, we must acknowledge the truth of their hurt, intentionally take responsibility for our actions, and offer them (or ourselves) a proper apology.

Randy Pausch in his book, *The Last Lecture*, writes: "A bad apology is worse than no apology." When we hurt each other — intentionally or unintentionally — it is "like an infection" in our relationship. Offering no apology would be like letting the infection

continue. And a bad apology is worse because “it is like rubbing salt in the wound.” Giving a Real Apology, he writes, is like using an antibiotic ointment. Pausch provides these examples of bad apologies:

I’m sorry you feel hurt by what I have done. This statement, he explains, indicates that you really aren’t interested in putting medicine on the wound; it has no personal acknowledgement that one’s words (or actions) were hurtful. It says, in other words, “You’re too sensitive. Get over it.”

I apologize for what I did, but you also need to apologize too for what you’ve done. In saying this you are, in actuality, wanting an apology, not truly asking for one.

A proper apology, he writes, has three steps:

1. What I did was wrong.
2. I feel badly that I hurt you.
3. How do I make you feel better?

To forgive is to find peace. And finding peace begins with us.

Forgiveness is not something that just happens; it is a choice we make, a shift in perception. When we can open our minds to a higher way of thinking, when our hearts are open for giving and receiving love, that’s when we receive the grace of forgiveness. Perhaps some of you may be thinking, but what about the evils of rape, violence, and global horrors that are perpetrated upon the innocent? Are healing, justice, and forgiveness possible after such tragedy? Let’s go back to October 9, 2012. On that day a man boarded a bus and shot 15-year-old Ma-la-la You-saf-zi in the head. What prompted this horrific act? The young girl had defied the Taliban in Pakistan and demanded that girls be allowed to receive an education.

In circumstances like this, forgiveness seems like an unlikely choice. Yet, in her speech at the Youth Takeover of the UN last year, she said: “I do not even hate the Talib who shot me. Even if there is a gun in my hand and he stands in front of me, I would not shoot him. This is the compassion that I have learnt from Muhammad-the prophet of mercy, Jesus Christ and Lord Buddha. This is the legacy of change that I have inherited from Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, and Muhammad Ali Jinnah. This is the philosophy of non-violence that I have learnt from Gandhi Jee, Bacha Khan and Mother Teresa. And this is the forgiveness that I have learnt from my mother and father. This is what my soul is telling me, be peaceful and love everyone.”

Be peaceful and love everyone, she said.

“The first and often the only person to be healed by forgiveness is the person who does the forgiveness,” writes ethicist and theologian Lewis Smedes. He goes on to say, “When we genuinely forgive, we set a prisoner free and then discover that the prisoner we set free was us.”

Forgiveness advances our capacity to be responsible and accountable for our thoughts, our beliefs, our judgments, and our actions. To again paraphrase Iyanla, “Forgiveness is a sacred practice, a spiritual discipline that allows our heart, our emotional being to remain open to a deeper understanding of ourselves and of others.”



In the forgiveness work I have done, which began when writing the story about my father, to the practice of forgiveness I continue to do, what I have learned, what I know, is that forgiveness has brought me inner peace, has given me a broader perspective on life, and has made me a person capable of giving and receiving genuine love.

Forgiveness is a gift that we give to ourselves.

To embrace true forgiveness, we have to take the time and make the effort to identify the feelings that we are holding to the thoughts, beliefs, and judgments about the harm, the hurt, the actions that live and grow and fester and keep us stuck in unforgiveness, that close our minds to new possibilities; that cloud our capacity to think clearly and soundly. Forgive not the behaviors, but the thinking, the beliefs, and the judgments that are unkind, unloving, and unnecessary, and which hinder your personal growth and healing. The decision to forgive begins in your mind, threads through your heart, and rests in your soul.

“Forgiveness,” writes Mark Twain, “is the fragrance the violet shed on the heel that has crushed it.” Inhale deeply.

So be it.

## Choosing Hope (given after the Philando Castile shooting)

### **Cycle of Life Prayer**

By Rev. Elaine Aron Tenbrink.

Delivered at First Universalist Church in Minneapolis on July 10, 2016.

As we prepare to share silence together, I invite you to bring your awareness to your physical self, closing your eyes or softening your gaze, placing your feet on the ground if that's available. Dropping your shoulders. Taking a deep breath in. Bring your awareness to life's tides moving in and out. Noticing that breath moving in and out of your lungs. Noticing your heart beating.

After a week of holding it together, let your spirit rest in this sacred space.  
This space strong enough to hold all that you've brought here this morning.  
Let us join in the silence that makes us one. (silence)

“It's ok, Mama, it's ok. I'm right here with you.” The words of a four year old girl in the midst of trauma, reaching out to her terrorized mother after witnessing a murder in cold blood.

It is not ok. It is not ok.

Sacred spirit of love,  
Animating force of life always inviting us toward greater love and deeper compassion.  
Source point of our human family, of the holy mystery of which we are a part  
Our hearts are aching  
We are on edge,  
Fearful,  
Angry,  
Disoriented and filled with questions that should have better answers

With hearts in a kind of pain that is sickening with familiarity.  
Familiar because the norm in our country looks like systemic racism, white supremacy,  
easy access to guns, extremist violence, and, with each passing week, more black lives  
ending in violence and becoming hashtags  
and it is NOT ok.

We mourn the death of Alton Sterling, killed by police in Baton Rouge, Louisiana on  
Tuesday.

We mourn the death of Philando Castile, killed by police in Falcon Heights, Minnesota  
on Wednesday.

We mourn the deaths of Brent Thompson, Patrick Zamarripa, Michael Krol, Lorne  
Ahrens, and Michael Smith, police officers in Dallas, Texas, killed by gunfire on  
Thursday.

We mourn the death of two year old Le’Vonte King Jason Jones, killed in a drive-by  
shooting in Minneapolis on Friday.

We lift up this morning the grief, fear and rage in black communities, particularly here in  
our own Twin Cities, in the face of continuing recorded police killings for where there are  
few indictments and even fewer convictions.

We join with our neighbors:

With Diamond Reynolds, who lost her boyfriend,

With Valerie Castile, who lost her son,

With Philando’s siblings, who lost their brother and a father figure.

We lift up the grief, fear, and rage of the police officers and their families in Dallas and in  
the larger police community.

We lift up those whose lives have been permanently scarred by gun violence,  
whose grief cannot yet be assuaged by political reform or societal shifts.

And the child said, “It’s ok, Mama, it’s ok. I’m right here with you.”

In the midst of a horror scene that will shape the rest of her life,  
a child speaks words that have likely been said to her before,  
Words of love that she has heard,  
words of comfort inscribed on her heart by caring people in her life  
“I’m right here with you.”

Words that remind us how humans care for humans.

We come together. We are here for each other.

Words that we are called to say to each other, over and over and over,

I am right here with you.

May we be courageous enough to be here for each other

To hug, cry, and rage

To step into discomfort and work through pain

To listen, to trust, and show up with humility

And when we are with our people, to speak to them the hard truth in love.

We remember that here in our church community, there are those who are struggling and those who are celebrating, as the cycle of life turns for us all.

This morning we hold all those whose hearts are aching with the events of the week, and are also carrying their own personal suffering

Battling addiction,

Moving through the heaviness of grief,

Wondering how to make ends meet.

Praying to be just able to get through.

Our hearts are with [cycle of life prayer naming joys and concerns within the congregation]

And I invite you now, to bring into this space the names of those you carry or the worries you hold- and to speak them aloud - that the love of this community might embrace us all.

(pause)

May all who suffer know comfort. May love surround us and hold us. Amen.

**Reading: Rules for My Future Son Should I Have One** By LaToya Jordan

<https://latoyajordan.com/2014/09/01/rules-for-my-future-son-should-i-have-one/>

1. Play dead when you see a police officer. They do not like to eat dead prey. Fall down on the ground faster than light. Fall down on the ground in slow motion. Always be prepared to catch a bullet with your teeth.
2. Do not put your hands up. Do not put your hands down. Do not move your hands. Do not hold a wallet in your hands. Do not have brown hands.
3. Do not write rap lyrics; they are a suicide note. Do not have a rap sheet; this is a death warrant.
4. Know that if alcohol, drugs, and/or guns appear in your photos, I have created an app that will cause your phone to self-destruct one minute after the photos are taken. These photos will not be used against you in a court of law. These photos will not be used against you in the court of public opinion.
5. Do not wear a hoodie is a body bag is an urn is probable cause. Do not hang your pants below your waist; this is police code for your ass is a moving target.
- 5a. Wear clean underwear just in case you get into a car accident. If you are involved in an accident, need help, and no one is around, do not go to the nearest home for help. Do not call 911. Please check the small black bag in your glove compartment. In it I have gathered twigs, tinder, and a box of matches. Please send a smoke signal.
6. I can't breathe. I don't have a gun. You shot me. I do not want to know your last words because you are not allowed to say last words before I say mine. But I will say I love you every time you leave me. I will whisper I love you in your ear all the nights you sleep in my home so that if I am not the one to cradle you in your final moments, if instead you are cradled by hot asphalt as your body roasts in the sun, you will have left this Earth still hearing echoes of me I love you.
7. If all else fails and you can't remember the previous rules: lay down on the ground and slide your body against concrete until you shed brown skin. When you were in my belly I stitched an emergency second skin, fair and light, without the weight of blackness. Try on your freedom, baby boy.

## Sermon

Over the last few days, I've found myself spending a lot of time in front of screens, taking it all in, trying to understand, trying to get the latest, trying to find words where I have none. I've watched videos of horrible violence, I've read news and analysis of the week's tragedies, I've seen hundreds - -thousands -- of posts on social media. And I've usually done this while sitting alone, sometimes too late into the night. Alone with a screen and the pain of the world -- this is where many of us have found ourselves this week -- alone with a screen or maybe with a loved one -- watching horror unfold and witnessing people's horrified online responses

Personally, my life -- my professional life serving this congregation -- afforded me the freedom to go over to the Governor's mansion to protest, to the vigil at JJ Hill Montessori School, to gather and march together with people who are raging, praying, and speaking their truths. In fact, that's my job.

But many of us went to work, cared for loved ones, carried out our life's responsibilities, fitting in conversations where we could manage, holding this awfulness. And I know that, in the predominantly white spaces I was in this week, it was business as usual with neat and tidy small talk, while the world was clearly falling apart. The sun was shining, the lakes were sparkling, while over in Falcon Heights [where Philando Castile was killed by a police officer], they were literally washing the blood off the streets.

And in the midst of that, I knew that I could bring my heart here this morning, to come together with you in this community where we name what's real, where we know how to be present to each other, present to the rage, grief, confusion, outrage, heartbreak. Facing the unknown. I knew I could come here with it all, because this is a place where we commit and re-commit ourselves to staying awake,

Where, as a people of faith, we know in our bones that we are one human family  
That there is no such thing as other people's children.

In the home of Minnesota Nice, this community is a place where we can be real, where we can be each other's people. So let's be real. It's been a gut-wrenching summer.

The massacre in Orlando

Terror attacks in Iraq

The horrible killing in Bangladesh.

Isolationism and xenophobia permeating politics at home and worldwide.

These are just a few of the pieces that got picked up by our news outlets

And then last Wednesday night, as we now know all too well, Philando Castile was pulled over in Falcon Heights for a broken tail light, with his girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds and her four-year-old daughter in the car. Legally licensed to carry a firearm, Philando Castile was seated with his seatbelt on, reaching for his identification when the officer shot him dead.

The wrongness here is so egregious, so incomprehensible.

Incomprehensible -- yet not an isolated incident, not a particularly awful one-time mistake. This is part of a pattern of black and brown lives coming to an end through police shootings. This happens over and over in this country where black people are three times more likely to be killed by police than white people.

And then 5 officers were killed in Dallas. Another act of mass murder and terror through gun violence. Five lives lost -- five more families without their loved one coming home that night. Was this war? Fear coursed through me, and yet I knew this couldn't compare to the fear being felt in Dallas, the fear being felt everywhere by black communities and activists expecting to become targets of blame and violence.

The emotional impact of the entire situation was so powerful, I myself thinking "This has got to change things. Something this horrible will be the catalyzing event that changes it all."

And yet, in the next moment, recognizing with despair that this, too, is a thought I've had before.

Surely after Michael Brown  
Surely after Tamir Rice  
Surely after Jamar Clark

...it will just be too much, too clear, and we will really begin to address and dismantle an inhumane, broken, racist system of policing and criminal justice.

But this is nothing new. This is all taking place in a country founded on the notion that some lives have more value than other -- an old, old narrative, a miseducation we all still receive on some level. What's new is the way we're taking it all in: Facebook posts and streaming video.

Could there be anything more anathema to what we stand for as people of faith than this? And yet, this system is so old, so entrenched, and those with the greater power and privilege -- the white folks -- not only benefit from it but are socialized to utterly blind to anything but it's most abject manifestations? How do we dig up roots this deep?

This may be the part where the despair kicks in for you. The cynicism. The overwhelm. The too-much-ness.

And if you've got enough relative privilege to have the luxury of doing so, you just might numb out through your method of choice -- overwork, Netflix, food, you name it -- and tune it out. And we know that stuffing down and tuning out pain and, frankly, evil, this corrodes the soul -- it's its own violence.

And we know that we are all inextricably bound to one another. One human family. No other people's children.

We know that, as a community, we are committed to affirming and protecting the light in each human heart,  
Listening to where love is calling us next  
And acting boldly outside our walls.

So where do we go from here? We are gathered as a whole body of people this morning with a shared set of religious commitments, but of different identities, histories, and lived experiences. In some ways, where we go from here depends on where we are coming from.

Where do white folks go from here? Beloved white friends, this is a time for us to be doing more listening and less talking. Listening to and believing the lived experiences of black people. Seeking out African American voices in the discussion, in the media, in our neighborhood. And bearing witness with open hearts. More than ever, this is a time for us to do our own work, bringing our own questions and tears to each other.

So that we can honor our black siblings by not asking them to take on fixing us, explaining to us, being brave for us when they need to tend to their own aching hearts and reverberations of ancient traumas.

Also, my white folks, we cannot let ourselves lose sight of the fact that public tolerance of police killings is a white problem -- it is our collective problem to work on together. This is not because as individuals we are bad people, and if you're feeling that guilt just say hello to it and ask it to take a seat to the side. Our continued tolerance of police killings is completely bound up how whiteness functions within this brokenness of racism that we've all inherited-- it wants to render black bodies invisible. White people, we are uniquely positioned to bring about this shift. And I know it is so hard and awkward but we are called to have those damn hard conversations, use our influence to contact lawmakers, to use our white bodies as tools of de-escalation in demonstrations - - and we do not have to do that alone. I know it is hard, but it is not nearly as hard as never hearing your son call your name again because he committed the crime of driving while black.

We will be there with you, the people of this congregation will join you, we will continue to offer classes, circles, opportunities to grow into this direction here at church. We do not have to do this alone.

People of color, I can only begin to imagine how you are feeling right now, and I don't think you need my advice right now. You have heard advice for too long from white people about how to feel and how to respond when violence is perpetrated upon you and your community. So I don't have any words of advice today - just words of love - to say that I see you and this church community sees you - to say that we love you and we will be right here with you.

We will all continue to be right here, together, remembering the fundamental love that surrounds us, calls us to our best selves, and will not let us go, even in times of trauma and fear and devastation, there is a greater love calling us to imagine and build together the world where we can all be free.

And trusting this is what hope looks like.

Hope isn't a naive assertion that everything is going to ok Rebecca Solnit describes brilliantly in her book "Hope in the Dark" when she writes, "...Hope is not like a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky....hope is an ax your break down doors with in an emergency; Hope just means another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed.... To hope is to give yourself to the future, and that commitment to the future makes the present inhabitable."

Here we are at a precipice, not knowing what comes next. We never do. We are in the middle of the story, shaping it -- a process that is rarely remembered accurately, but is often supplanted by a hero story or easy narrative.

Transformation is something that begins in the margins, in the shadows, and moves toward the center. Its path is complex, hard to predict, and often involves lots and lots of people-power. And when we take the long view, we remember that ideas that were once considered extreme or impossible eventually become what we've always believed, how it's always been. And it will happen again.

And I am seeing hope in the margins of this tragedy, I am seeing hope in this movement for black lives and its impact.

I saw hope at the governor's mansion, in the donations of fresh fruit, water, and warm meals for the protestors.

I saw hope when a former coworker, and our babysitter, showed up at the rally and sought me out because they saw on social media that I would be there. And I felt hope when I knew that you would be there -- and I know that so many of you were, either in body or in spirit.

I saw hope in having a playdate with white friends in Southwest Minneapolis and having a real, substantive conversation about race and police brutality with my peers.

I saw hope in the indefatigable organizers, including our own Lena Gardner, showing up again and again holding kindness, rage, imagination, deep courage and ten thousand details all at the same time, organizing friends and strangers with a kind of trust that can only be called faith.

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And the child said, "It's ok, Mama, it's ok. I'm right here with you."

In the midst of a horror scene that will shape the rest of her life,  
a child speaks words that have likely been said to her before,  
Words of love that she has heard,  
words of comfort inscribed on her heart by caring people in her life  
"I'm right here with you."

Let us take these words spoken in terror  
and use them to upend the system racism that created the terror,  
I am with you.  
Let us inscribe this on our hearts, let them be our prayer and our guide  
I am with you  
May these words undergird every action we take --  
every kindness, every hard conversation,  
every time our deepest commitments ask us to step into fear, into the unknown  
Into something we've never done or someone we haven't quite been before  
Let this be our spiritual practice: to find ways to be right here for each other,  
With humility, compassion, and courage  
I am with you.  
I am anchored in love.

May we choose to give ourselves to the future so that that commitment might make the present inhabitable.

May we even dare to find joy in it, which would be the ultimate rebellion.

I am with you.  
You are my people.  
We are all each other's people.  
Love will prevail.

May it be so, and Amen.

## **Tikkun Olam: Healing the World**

by Rev. Elizabeth L. Greene

Delivered on September 19, 2004 at Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

### **Sermon Summary**

Tikkun Olam in Hebrew means to heal or repair the world. Healing the world is part of why Jews practice Teshuvah during the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The world hangs in the balance between good and evil. It is up to us to heal ourselves and the world. The gap between the unimaginably wealthy and even the middle class—never mind the genuinely poor—is no gap, but rather a chasm of Grand Canyon proportions. Humans continue to degrade the earth as though we have a couple of worlds to spare. Horrors are committed in the name of religion, perverting the profound good that comes of practicing a humble, open-hearted faith. The list goes on. During these ten days, we are constantly recalled to the profound responsibility we have to save the world by choosing the good.

### **Reading:**

Baruch at Adonai elohenu melech ha-olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav vitzivanu l'hadlik ner shel yomtov...Baruch atah Adonai eluhenu melech ha-olam sheh- hechianu v'ki-imanu v'higianu lazman hazeh.

Blessed be You Lord Our God, Ruler of all space-time, who made us holy by your commandments and commanded us to light a candle for the holy day. Blessed be You, Lord Our God, Ruler of all space-time, who has given us life, has lifted us up, and has brought us to this season.

### **Reading: "O Hear, Israel"**

Judaism begins with the declaration: "Sh'ma Yisrael...Hear O Israel..." But what does it truly mean to hear? The person who hears the words of friends, spouse or children, And does not catch the note of urgency: "Notice me, help me, care about me." Hears—but does not really hear.

The person who stifles the sound of his conscience And tells himself he has done enough already, Hears—but does not really hear.

The person who listens to the rabbi's sermon but thinks that someone else is being addressed, Hears—but does not really hear.

As the new year begins, Adonai, Strengthen our ability to hear. May we hear the call for help of the lonely soul, And the sound of the breaking heart. May we hear the words of our friends, And also their unspoken pleas and dreams.



And may we hear you, Adonai, for only if we hear You, do we have the right to pray that You will hear us.

## **Sermon**

Imagine this annual scene, taking place in the month of Tishrei, the seventh in the Jewish calendar (approximately September and October in the Julian Calendar): Adonai, Ruler of the Universe, in all its unimaginable glory, preparing for a yearly task of ultimate significance. Adonai takes out three books, two of modest size, one gigantic. Using whatever it is that Rulers of the Universe use to write with, Adonai writes in the Book of Life the names of the few who are thoroughly righteous; inscribes in the Book of Death the names of the few who are thoroughly wicked; and gets Divine writer's cramp from putting the rest of us in the third book.

It is Rosh Hashanah evening, the beginning of High Holy Days in the Jewish tradition. (Last Wednesday evening, this year.) At the Rosh Hashanah service, the shofar will be blown—the ram's horn, untuned and strange sounding—its eerie tone signifying Adonai's call to the people, and the people's call to Adonai. At this service, we, the countless millions in the very large third book, resolve to get into the Book of Life. We resolve to spend the next ten days—the Days of Awe, Days of Return and Repentance—restoring our lives to more wholeness. Specifically, we resolve to examine how we have led our lives since the last High Holy Days, and to fix what is broken. A book intended for Jewish children puts it simply and most understandably: “[The Ten Days of Penitence] is a time for us to think about what is good and what is bad, and how we have behaved all year.” (77)

If we do it right, when Adonai checks on us on Yom Kippur, ten days later, we will be in the Book of Life and on the right side of the Gates of Heaven when they clang closed for another year.

Prayerfully, sincerely, deeply, we resolve to practice teshuvah. Teshuvah is often translated as “repentance,” and it does imply that. But it is more accurate to translate it as “turnaround,” changing directions. Some translators prefer—and I like best of all—“return to our Source.” When we turn around from our wicked ways, we move back toward the fundamental goodness that we can feel somewhere deep in us. Assuming we made it through the gates last year—that we successfully practiced teshuvah during that ten Days of Awe—we can also assume that we have backslidden during the ensuing year and need the process once more. It is human nature.

For those of us who are not Jewish, we do not honor this particular time of year in this way. But we are missing a very important human practice if we do not observe teshuvah sometime during the year—preferably, all year—in the best way we can. St. Paul noted that he was forever doing the things he should not do, and not doing the ones he should. Each of us knows ways, large and small, in which we have been like St. Paul. Personally, I know that I fall short, all the time, in spite of my best efforts. I know that my ongoing efforts to be the best person I can be constantly take a back seat to my busy schedule and my less-than-best nature.

Before I started the actual writing of this sermon, I reflected on what I needed to do during these particular Days of Awe. I thought about my sister, the only sibling I have left, when I once had three of them. I have been meaning to get in touch with her. I have wanted to congratulate her on completing a triathlon, something she is understandably

very proud of. I have wanted to ask about a couple of issues that I fear may be coming between us having a close, sisterly relationship. And I haven't done it. (She completed the triathlon in mid-July.) So, in order not to feel a total hypocrite, I wrote her a long email before I began writing the sermon. One act that turns me just a little in the direction of being the kind of person I want to be.

Before we go deeper into our own hearts' teshuvah, I want to enlarge the subject for a moment and talk about the title of this sermon and its relationship to our individual reflection and action during the Days of Return and Repentance.

Tikkum olam is a Hebrew phrase meaning "to heal the world." "To repair the world." Lord knows that it needs repairing. Wars happen constantly: for territory, for power, for riches, for the simple reason that the "other" looks or acts different. The gap between the unimaginably wealthy and even the middle class—never mind the genuinely poor—is no gap, but rather a chasm of Grand Canyon proportions. Humans continue to degrade the earth as though we have a couple of worlds to spare. Horrors are committed in the name of religion, perverting the profound good that comes of practicing a humble, open-hearted faith. The list goes on.

Healing the world is part of why the Jews practice teshuvah during the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This past Friday, at Sabbath service, Rabbi Dan Fink began the service by reminding us of what is at stake in our taking spiritual self-examination seriously. He noted that the month of tishrei corresponds to the astrological sign of Libra, symbolized by the scales. He said, "The world hangs in balance constantly, between good and evil. During these ten days, we are constantly recalled to the profound responsibility we have to save the world by choosing the good.

Every time each one of us chooses a good deed, we affect the balance just a little." The interdependence of inner "work" and outer conduct is not only a Jewish concept. Recently, I read a book called *Living Peace: A Spirituality of Contemplation and Action*, by Father John Dear, a Jesuit activist priest. Father Dear is a radical pacifist, a tireless worker in the "outer" cause of peace—but he warns us that we cannot work against violence in our world unless we search our own souls fearlessly and "... root out violence within us, to forgive those who have hurt us, let go of bitterness and resentment." He then goes on to say, "true inner peace pushes us into the thick of the world's problems." (This fascinating man will be in Boise very soon—check your order of service for activities, dates, phone numbers.)

Father Dear does not use the word teshuvah, because he practices the Christian faith (although I'll bet, being a Jesuit, he knows Hebrew). But what he is talking about is just what the rabbis and other Jews are talking about when they speak of what we should be doing during the time between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

The practice of teshuvah—during these days, or ongoing—is a complex of the inner and the outer. Traditionally, there are four ways during the Days of Awe to escape our doom, three of which are still current: "righteousness expressed through gifts of charity; prayerful supplication;...and change of conduct." (Waskow, 4) The fourth one, no longer legit, holds that you can get yourself into the Book of Life by changing your name. (I was busily planning to call myself Mary until I read further and noted that the rabbis have dropped that particular path.)

We see how the inner and the outer are interwoven in the three paths. Gifts of charity are—which we take also to mean work for justice—at least on the surface, outer acts. So is change of conduct. But neither of these can be done in the spirit of “turnaround” unless they are supported by a solid, solid foundation of humble, honest self-examination. I, personally, know that I have fallen short of the mark every day. (How about you?)

I have fudged the truth; I have spoken ill of others for the sake of my own exasperation or anger with them; I have neglected to carry out obligations to the larger community; I have allowed my physical world to get into a mess that then reflects spiritual chaos; I have overridden my spiritually-uplifting practices with busyness and self-importance; I have let sloth keep me from reaching out to those I love; I have refused to forgive others and myself, when doing so would bless the community. I have “fallen off” my diet! And part of me doesn’t care about all of it. The part of me that does care, and cares greatly—that knows I am affecting the scales of the world—cannot move to change my external conduct unless I practice prayerful supplication.

“Prayerful supplication” can take many, many forms, depending on each of our theological foundation, philosophical orientation, personality, and upbringing. For one of us, it might involve waking in the morning, asking for guidance, then mentally stopping as many times during the day as possible, to “listen,” to still the monkey mind, to attend to the Source. For another, it might be a matter of going to a twelve-step program regularly, of practicing those miracle-working steps of surrender and self-examination and service. For someone else, it might require a daily reading of noble poets and playwrights, men and women who speak of humanity’s goodness: “what a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! ...in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world!” (Hamlet, I, v, 316ff.) Still others may require meditative focus of some sort, like sitting or yoga or walking or tai chi. For all of us, it probably involves a daily, hourly, minute-by-minute mindfulness that is very hard to practice. It also, almost surely, involves other people, the beloved community of our congregation, our dream groups, our supportive gatherings, our twelve-step meetings, the loving and challenging friends with whom we break bread. Make no mistake, the part of us that takes a certain glee in meanness of spirit and narrow focus on self is a force to be reckoned with. And unless each of us does reckon with it, we will fall short of our own highest longings; we will fall short of our responsibility of tikkun olam, of saving the world.

It can be done, of course, for humans have for millennia been finding, affirming and acting upon our noblest selves. As a reading from the Jewish tradition says, “We forgive ourselves and begin again in love.”

Once we have done the reckoning, we must decide for ourselves how to carry it into the rest of the world. Our spiritual and psychological stock-taking leads us into the change of conduct spoken of by the rabbis. We make peace with ourselves. We make peace with those we need to forgive and whose forgiveness we need. We look fearlessly at this so-imperfect and beautiful world of ours and see where our acts of charity and justice can make a difference.

On Yom Kippur, the final day of the High Holy Days, observant Jews fast. At sundown, they feast and rejoice, happy to have once again fulfilled the old, old cycle of repentance, atonement, forgiveness and action.

Please join me in Responsive Reading #637.

For remaining silent when a single voice would have made a difference

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For each time that our fears have made us rigid and inaccessible

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For each time that our greed has blinded us to the needs of others

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For the selfishness which sets us apart and alone

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For falling short of the admonitions of the spirit

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For losing sight of our unity

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For those and for so many acts both evident and subtle which have fueled the illusion of separateness

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

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