

WA reading : Carol Rosvold

Life itself is the great mystery and death a part of it. In truth we know not the one nor the other. We live and die in the mystery of being from moment to moment till at the end we merge with the universe and marry the All in One, the One in All.

We pray for ourselves this day. May we be more kind, tolerant and charitable toward one another and all with whom we share this globe of love and laughter and tears. Knowing our mortal frame, that we have no given day with certainty, may we be more ready to lend a helping hand, make someone's life a little easier and happier by what we do or say, bequeath a kinder and fairer earth than we received, and at the last bless the giver and receiver of life for all we have and are in this world and in the world to come.

Richard M. Fewkes

Sept 27, 2009

Yom Kippur - Day of Atonement

& Well of Souls

Rev. Chip Wright

Today is Yom Kippur the Day of Atonement. Last week we took a look at the first part of this Jewish New Year festival Rosh Ha Shonah which brought us into the year 5770 and the days of awe. Days which are appropriately named as they are about taking time to work through the disquieting and uncomfortable issues of our lives that have risen over the years. Whither they gnaw at us from the outside or from the inside, they will continue to do so until we take the time and effort to start to heal them. The days of awe are about an internal effort and having it supported by everyone in the community by all engaging in the same endeavor. A time taken to expand pardons that we need to in order to forgive ourselves as well as others, to remember the wrongs and admit to our mistakes so that we can with clarity and honesty offer forgiveness to all including ourselves.

This labor is given a week, because as we well know this is not the kind of thing we can do in a moment an hour or even a day, and in fact it is not likely we can ever do it completely. Still the effort put

out in any attempt at this kind of personal work will make it that much easier to achieve more effective results the next time you try.

As I said last week the key in all of this is the possibility of transformation, small or large, it's not important, just that in this act we find some place of freshness to start the next moment less bound by meaningless history and unproductive emotions.

So last week we cast our bread crumbs into the waters; a simple act but a symbolic one of the efforts that the Days of awe asked of us; a cleansing and first step towards forgiving, letting go of unneeded baggage, of the unhealed angers, and the all the petty slights we fell victim of. To this end of being freer and more available to the new time ahead. This is written into the Jewish tradition as process towards obtaining what is called atonement.

Now I am not going to ask you who spent time in reflection this last week or even who cast their bread crumbs into the waters. You all know who you are and just what you were willing to do. Nor do I expect that you will buy into receiving atonement from some outside place. But then again that is not my place to presume that or not.

But we are coming to the end of this very old and well tried ritual and festival of the high holy days. And we have ventured into it these two Sundays for a good reason. That is that hopefully at least some of you entered it in the spirit of transformation offered in these ideas and rituals and took at least a little journey this week on the theme of self reflection and forgiveness.

As the sunset approaches on this day we will stand on the edge of the closure of this special time. A time that has been for thousands of years set aside by a people, The Jewish people we call family, to prepare to step forward into the future with trust and a renewed sense of purpose. Today is the day in this tradition we do the final letting go, to do the final forgiving and step past the negative history so we don't carry ourselves into another year without dimming the light of trust and care. This is a religious effort with one purpose, to open the doors as wide as we can to the potential that waits ahead of us; to be a part of a better tomorrow and particularly for we Unitarian Universalists to be a relevant voice along the path of our collective religious evolution.

We can all use this kind of internal house cleaning and the support it offers to an ongoing life. But it is up to us to do the work to pick up the broom and sweep out the closets and the living room. In the

end it is all about hope, trust and a willingness to go ahead into something bigger than our singular life. It is the foundational grounds upon which community sits.

Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur are traditions that call to us through our history to remember the inherent piece of our humanness. A piece grown in community tied together by the interdependent web of all human existence.

These High Holy Days are about making the New Year the best it can be and that means letting go of all the conflict and negativity we possibly can.

It is important to be thinking about this. We here at the UUCM stand on the edge of a new time; a time that if we choose we can use to recognize our potential power and the remarkable opportunities yet unearthed in this community. If we can move forward with a unified Unitarian Universalist voice, sharing and proclaiming our values in love and support and care of each other there is no place we cannot travel and no ears that will be able to close themselves to our collective voice. And being heard is the first step on the road to change to transformation.

So in keeping with our Jewish heritage, albeit a bit Universalist on the edges, I would ask you all to take a few minutes now to think about the negativity, pessimism, restrictive judgments, that you have sat with this last week. And if you haven't I am sure you can come up with some on the spot. Things that have stuck and then grow in your craw about someone or something you blame on another or maybe even on yourself in reflection.

I ask you to take a bold act now, towards what the Jewish folks call atonement and recognize the feeling it holds in its essence, look deeply inside yourselves and find the roots of your discontent and where they wind their way out of you and entwine with the other. And then with a conscious internal voice offer yourself forgiveness first, and then the other whose being your roots of discontent have sucked from. Let it go, let it fade away like so much of the past should.

Over my lifetime as a Unitarian Universalist and now as a UU minister I have found that ritual has been one of the most meaningful things we can do in community. Because of this experience of this powerful tool I developed this ritual which I call the well of souls. I first did it here at the Sonoma Fellowship in

1987 and have used it on numerous occasions since. And today we are going to do it here.

What I want you to do is to write down on the paper you have in the Order of Service a symbol of, or the words that describe the negativity and the unneeded baggage of the past year and even further back if the need calls. Then bring it forward to the Well of Souls, place it inside and say out loud in the presence of all, “ This I give to the past, I will carry it no longer.”

Milton will play as you write and bring your offering up to the
WELL OF SOULS;

OFFERING IN FLAME:

Closing words:

Let me close this morning with a Poem by Mary Oliver
The Summer Day

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean--

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down--

who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.

Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down

into the grass, how to kneel in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,

which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

with your one wild and precious life?

Om peace Amen.

Extinguishing the chalice