

*At-One-Ment*  
**A sermon for the Days of Awe**  
**September 28, 2014**

What's in your pockets? No, I'm not trying to channel Alec Baldwin and messing up the punchline. I really am asking what's in your pockets? Pants, skirt, shirt, jacket – what do you find?....

What else? How about deep in the corners or caught in the seams? Are there crumbs, lint, grit? Did you think about them before I drew your attention to them? How do you feel about your pockets now that you know just what's in them?

During the Days of Awe, usually on the first or second day, Jews go to a flowing water – the ocean, a river, or a lake – and if there's no natural body of water available, a fountain will do - for the ceremony of *Taschlich*. The word means "You shall cast" and they do. They empty their pockets of all the crumbs, lint, and grit – those little bits we often don't even notice, but which nonetheless weigh us down and stick to the items we do value. Symbolically, they are casting out the other things in their lives which weigh them down and get in their way – their sins. They ask God for forgiveness, but first they have to ask one another for forgiveness, for this is a ritual done in community, never alone. And then, as the water carries the crumbs away, so are they freed to flow forgiven into a new year.

Now we don't often talk about sin in Unitarian Universalist churches anymore. We used to. It used to be standard in our orders of service to say a prayer of confession every Sunday. But that went out of practice 60 or more years ago. If you've come from another tradition to this one, you may have grown up with the practice of confessing your sins in the mass or in the service. The confessions in our services were a little different. We didn't begin from the premise that we are "miserable sinners and there is no health in us" or that we needed a priest to mediate forgiveness. Our prayers of confession offered a time each week to bring to mind the ways in which the congregation had not lived up to their values. As one of the prayers from our old red hymnal puts it:

"Before the wonders of life we acknowledge our failures to see and to revere; before the sanctities of life we are ashamed of our disrespects and indignities; before the gifts of life we own that we have made choice of lesser goods, and here today seek the gifts of the spirit; before the heroisms of life we would be enlarged to new devotion."

Another of the prayers, using the same imagery as Tashlich, closes, "Take us now to serve thee in newness of spirit, and sweep away every dust of care, every trace of fear, every taint of an uncharitable mind."

Like the Jewish people gathering together to empty their pockets, Unitarians and Universalists spoke these prayers together on Sunday morning. For the crumbs, and lint, and grit which weigh us down aren't just from the things we ourselves have put in our pockets, and they don't just affect our own lives. Unlike our January new year's resolutions which usually focus on our individual health in body, mind, or spirit, these prayers of confession acknowledge our broken connections. The unkind word, but also the kind word not spoken; the work badly done, but also the work not picked up; the actions we approved and carried out but also the actions we didn't approve but which were carried out for us by the institutions in which we live – our families, churches, schools, towns, and nations. All these, those we have done and those we have left undone, rip the fabric of our lives. In order to begin to repair the fabric, we must first acknowledge the tear.

So where are the tears in your life and in your communities? How have you in this past year helped to place those tears there? How have you in this past year avoided or neglected to mend them? Is there someone whose pardon you need to ask? Is there someone whose pardon you need to accept? Literally, sin means to miss the mark. How have you missed the mark in this past year?

These days of Awe end with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. "To atone" is to make amends for a wrong so that wholeness may be restored to the individual, the community, and creation. The word "Atonement" literally means "at-one-ment" – restoring a condition of unity, or being at-one. Unlike traditional Christian theology, where one person accomplishes that for all believers for all time, Judaism emphasizes human agency – we break wholeness with ourselves, others, and the universe, and we must restore it. We can of course do this at any time of year, but Jews do it ritually together once a year, reforming the community and starting anew. How might we incorporate this ritual into our life together? For whatever our theology, our tradition, our history; we all miss the mark. We all need to turn again to our center.

So together now, let us metaphorically perform Tashlich. Perhaps next year we could do this on the beach. We will read together the prayer "On Turning" by Rabbi Jack Riemer which is at the back of our hymnal. Then I invite you to sit in silence for two minutes and reflect on where you want to turn. Rather than making a list, focus on one practice or attitude you'd like to change, one which doesn't just affect your own life, but ripples out into the world. What is this practice you are doing or not doing, this

attitude you are grasping or not holding onto enough? How does it make you feel? Can you do otherwise? You do not have to change by yourself – imagine the spirit within giving you courage and strength; imagine asking others to support you. Sum all of this up for yourself in one word or concept and metaphorically cast it upon the waters and watch it flow away.

Let us now say together #634 “On Turning:”

Now is the time for turning.  
The leaves are beginning to turn  
from green to red and orange.

The birds are beginning to turn and  
are heading once more toward the South.  
The animals are beginning to  
turn to storing their food for the winter.

For leaves, birds, and animals  
turning comes instinctively.  
But for us turning does not come so easily.

It takes and an act of will for us to make  
a turn. It means breaking with old habits.  
It means admitting that we have  
been wrong; and this is never easy.

It means losing face; it means starting  
all over again; and this is always painful.  
It means saying: I am sorry.

It means recognizing that we have  
the ability to change. These things  
are hard to do.

But unless we turn, we will be trapped  
forever in yesterday’s ways.

God, help us to turn - from callousness  
to sensitivity, from hostility to love, from pettiness  
to purpose, from envy to contentment, from

carelessness to discipline, from fear to faith.

Turn us around, O God, and bring us  
back toward You. Revive our lives,  
as at the beginning.

And turn us toward each other, God,  
for in isolation there is no life.

[Silence]

Hear these words of comfort and encouragement by Rabbi Rami Shapiro: “An  
Unending Love”

We are loved by an unending love.

We are embraced by arms that find us  
even when we are hidden from ourselves.  
We are touched by fingers that soothe us  
even when we are too proud for soothing.  
We are counseled by voices that guide us  
even when we are too embittered to hear.  
We are loved by an unending love.

We are supported by hands that uplift us  
even in the midst of a fall.  
We are urged on by eyes that meet us  
even when we are too weak for meeting.  
We are loved by an unending love.

Embraced, touched, soothed, and counseled,  
Ours are the arms, the fingers, the voices;  
Ours are the hands, the eyes, the smiles;  
We are loved by an unending love.