

Unitarian Society of Hartford  
**Days of Awe: On Faith and Forgiveness**  
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A Time for All Ages:

Hi boys and girls. I've brought something to show you - a quilt.  
It was made a LONG time ago by my grandmother.  
Then my grandmother died, and this quilt was put away,  
and never used at all, which is why it looks new!  
It was given to my father when he got married,  
and then he gave it to me when I got married.  
And I'll give it to my son when he gets married!

A quilt is a good lesson about our life -  
On this side is all the stuff we do—school, and ballet, and ball games,  
and TV and video games.... It's the side that shows when you put it on the  
bed...

BUT the quilt would not be any good at all if it didn't have this backing,  
this big orange piece that holds it all together, and makes it fat and warm.  
This top piece would not keep us very warm if we wrapped up in it,  
Though it might LOOK good.

Our religion, our FAITH is like this bottom part.  
It's invisible, and on the bottom...so we don't notice it that much.  
**But our faith, - the things we learn about and experience here....  
is what holds us together, what keeps us warm.**

One thing our faith teaches us is that we are forgiven—  
whatever we do wrong.  
We cannot do anything so wrong that we are not forgiven.  
All we have to do is notice,  
just notice when we break something or hurt someone.  
And feel sorry, and say I'm sorry.  
Because when we feel sorry, we are less likely to do it again.

We don't need to spend much time thinking about all that —  
it's the orange piece on the bottom...  
BUT we do need to come here from time to time and be reminded  
that whatever we do, we are forgiven, accepted just as we are.  
And we do need to feel sorry for the bad things....  
so we won't be likely to do them again.

Thank you!

Sermon:

### **Days of Awe: On Faith and Forgiveness**

We have been talking these weeks about the ways that we  
as religious people make quilts,  
the way we stitch the sacred plane and the ordinary plane  
into one by way of religious practices.

We did some Ember Days practices from Christian tradition —  
Stitching silence, simplicity, solitude.  
Then I invited you to the Muslim practice of Ramadan,  
fasting - something to make space for something else.

Today we look at the **Jewish** religious practice of turning —  
of remorse and restitution, of forgiveness and reconciliation,  
as another way of stitching the sacred and ordinary together.

The choir just sang—"I believe, with complete faith,  
in the coming of the Messiah. And even though he may tarry,  
I will wait for him each and every day.

Even though he may tarry..."

So many ways the Messiah tarries in all our lives—  
Ways things are flawed, and need turning toward the light.

The high holy days are about turning toward the light,  
Toward good orderly direction.  
A definition of sin is missing the mark,  
and Yom Kippur offers us a chance to re-turn toward the mark again.

Now, we UUs are into “inherent worth and dignity.”  
Our theology shies away from sin,  
the need to re-turn toward some mark,  
to repent, to forgive and be forgiven--  
As if we were beyond those things.

David Hubner wrote a piece in a recent UU World  
entitled “Original Perfection.”  
He opined that the Puritan’s doctrine of original sin  
And total depravity was in fact  
no more harsh than our own UU modern day  
“original perfection and needing to know it all.

Dave wishes UUs would deal more honesty with failure  
as part of the human condition, that we would take time here to talk about  
how we miss the mark, as persons and as a people, time to inject humility  
into our theology.

Sometimes I measure my very worth by whether  
my projects, plans, and relationships succeed,  
so I am ashamed when they don’t,  
and upset when you don’t help me make my projects succeed,  
so I’ll have worth.

What might it take to turn that just a bit,  
turn to measuring our worth, not by whether we’re successful  
at what we do, but by whether we are faithful  
to the things we are called to do.

And when we are not even faithful, much less successful,  
what might it take, to turn that a bit,  
to admit error or ignorance, to forgive them, and ourselves,  
And begin again?  
How simple might it be to turn....just a bit?

Yes.... but look at us. Our kids have the highest SAT scores.  
We are the best educated, and earn the most money  
among the religious.  
We don’t have a lot of practice in being ordinary,  
being humbled by ordinariness.

But those statistics are deceptive.  
Our kids sometimes disappoint us, our finances falter,  
our partners sometime fail us, and we fail them.  
Our congregation sometimes fails to support our cause,  
to fulfill its own vision in the world.  
And in those times our UU theology falls short.

There's merit in a faith that incorporates confession,  
and rituals of remorse, and a bit of *mia culpa*.  
Because it's only when we can recognize we have fallen  
that we can get up and go again.

We need a religion that acknowledges we mess up,  
that those we love mess up,  
and then gives us tools to clean up the mess,  
to make up, to let up, to fix up, to bind up the broken.

That's what Yom Kippur is about.

Acknowledging a bit of brokenness, of falling short,  
in ourselves and in others, and then beginning again in love.  
What hurts you today? Who let you down? Threw you down?  
Who did you hurt? Who did you let down?

Philosopher Ken Wilbur says that religion is normally  
**translative**. Our rhythms and ways of thinking and acting together  
in our religion, help us translate life into something meaningful,  
hold the chaos at bay.  
Our faith is **translative**, conveys a culture's way of being and understanding  
itself.

But for some few of us, in moments, Wilbur says that  
religion is **transformative**. When religion lets us be thrown  
into the chaos, lets us look fear and failure in the eye,  
lets us acknowledge the agony of being betrayed and of  
being the betrayer, the agony beneath the anger,  
THEN our faith becomes transformative,  
can change us, from glory unto glory, into the image of god.

And that's why the high holy days of atonement

are also called the days of awe.

It is awesome, how atonement can lead to at-one-ment.

These are Days of Awe because as we grow a faith that empowers us to recognize our kind of sinfulness,  
a faith that empowers us to repent and repair,  
a faith that empowers us to forgive ourselves,  
A faith that empowers us to forgive them—as we grow that faith  
We come to peace. We become at one, and are transformed in moments.

In this time of seasons turning, let us turn.

You were given a leaf when you came into the Sanctuary.

Take it now in your hands and look at it.

Think of something you want to forgive more fully,  
some betrayal, violation of your person,  
some wound received and not healed.

Now think of something you want to be forgiven for,  
some injury you inflicted on another person, or on yourself,  
something you'd like to turn round right.

Take that leaf home and put it someplace you'll see it.

Each time you see it, today and tomorrow,

say I forgive you X. Then say I forgive myself for Y and Z.

Yom Kippur is today and Monday.

On Tuesday morning, go outside,

toss the leaf from the car window or the porch, and say,

“I release you X, Y, and Z. **I turn over a new leaf.**”

May these words and meditations of our hearts be acceptable in the sight of  
that which strengthens and redeems us.

Amen.

Benediction and Extinguish Chalice:

May this day make us strong, like a tree of life with good fruit.

May we now forgive, atone, that we may live.

May we forgive that we may live.

And may you have this blessing of Yom Kippur:

May your names be written in the book of life.

