

Jewish Mysticism, High Holy Days and You

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Inscription of Hope

I believe in the sun, even when it is not shining
And I believe in love, even when there's no one there
And I believe in God or That creative Spirit, even when it's silent.
I believe through any trial, there is always a way
But sometimes in this suffering and hopeless despair
My heart cries for shelter, to know someone's there
But a voice rises within me, saying 'hold on my child'
I'll give you strength I'll give you hope, just stay a little while.

May there someday be sunshine
May there someday be happiness
May there someday be love
May there someday be peace

After that we can go home. That says it all. Someday... Someday is what we hold on to. But we must recognize that someday is today. "Be here now". Someday is today. That is the point in Judaism. Life is a circle. An end is a beginning. The High Holy Days is about the end of the Jewish year and the beginning of another. And before they get busy and forgetful—before life takes over—they are directed to pause and reflect and atone for their sins (or where they've fallen short of their best [that's a simplification of course])... Jews must make atonement. That is Yom Kippur---"The Day of Atonement."

To atone means we make amends; to make reparation; make redress (wiki). But for what? For everything. For those things conscious and unconscious. And for Jews how is this done? It is done through ritual. Fasting, prayer, song, asking someone's forgiveness; forgiving yourself. This is an intentional practice that orthodox and not-so-orthodox Jews practice each year.

Now... this is something that we should do every day. If today is the end and beginning, then everyday is Yom Kippur. Everyday “we forgive ourselves and each, and we begin again in love.” BUT the ancient Hebrews were smart, they knew getting people to do this daily is a big ask for most folks, so having an annual ritual is a sure way to get people to memorialize an important practice.

The ancients understood that what we say and the covenants we make are holy bonds. Our “word is our bond”, as it is said. “There is life and death in the tongue.”

The ancients understood this... The name Yahweh, as it emerged in the Jewish lexicon, was “too sacred to be uttered” with words, so they used Lord in many writings instead. Later, their deity was given sacred vowels (an A and an E) Y.H.W.H became Yahweh. Transliterated as Jehovah in our language. However, in Jewish mysticism also known by some as Kaba-lah or Hasidism, the sacred name is not spoken but SUNG to harness the powers of the cosmos... It sounds like this: Yod He Vau He (it’s beautiful). In Jewish mysticism, you chant the holy name to move the primordial powers to act in your life. They believe vibratory sound IS the sound of the universe—the sound of God’s creative, redemptive power.

What does it mean? **Yod** Creative Fire/ **He** Masculine power / **Vau** (is like a conjunction. It hooks the two H E’s). And the last **He** is the Feminine power. The translation? “Creative Father/Mother God”. God in this context is masculine and feminine. Yahweh in the Old Testament is binary. The God of Jesus was yin and yang. God is bi-sexual!

In fact, if you listen closely to the chant you here the word “eve” as in Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis--who are another representation of the divine energy manifest on earth that is male and female.

I like mystic teachings because they seem to all converge at the same points—that we are all one.

SLIDE UP (symbol coexist). In every major religion (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) there are mystical teachings that contradict the fundamental ideas from orthodoxy. Mysticism synthesizes ancient wisdom. As an example, Judaism has mystical Hasidism and Kabba-lah; Christianity has the Gnostic writings; and Islam has Sufism (and the swirling dervishes among others).

Humanism talks about “the religion of humanity”—all of us are one big family. All religions seem to converge on this point—that we are one.

I also like mystic philosophies because they remind me of our seventh UU principle: That “we are connected in an interdependent web of existence.” For mystics, every living thing is connected. This is like pantheists and earth-centered traditions too. And this relates to our theme this month of BELONGING. We are yin/yang; yang/yin. Black and White, rich and poor and all the spaces in between-- but we are one. When we can’t forgive others, it means we cannot forgive ourselves. The other reflects the self. The self reflects the other. What I speak to others I speak to myself. (You gotta sit with that for a second.)

I want to posit that if the sounds I make have great power, then I must take very seriously what I/we speak into existence with my/our words. This is certainly why I’m very concerned for our nation right now. The words being spoken by many powerful people are not affirming. They are poisonous words that do great harm. They reverberate and cause a lot of pain. They don’t get

it... Words manifest into matter. Please don't fall into this seductive trap of blaming and name-calling. It's poisonous.

But, I digress. The point I want to make is that SOUNDS matter. The sounds we make matter; the words we say have power and substance. That's why I just love that song by Daniel Nahmod when he sings: "Let every breath I breathe be sacred; let every word I speak be true; let every song I sing be holy; and only bring me close to You!" That's Yod He Vau He! That's oneness and we don't get there without atonement—without reparations—without making amends.

Speaking loving, healing, and affirming words aligns your inner power with all the good, vibratory stuff that exists. Saying that "I was wrong...Please forgive me. I am sorry...How can I make this right? Can we begin again in love?" is important work. AND it can be transformative; sometimes for all parties involved. You can feel the weight release from your body when you can sincerely make amends. It's great when the offended party forgives too but remember it's for YOU and not for them.

Me? I have said a lot of things I should not have. We all have. And sometimes I've said those things because I wanted to be hurtful. Sometimes I said them to speak my truth. Sometimes I was just talking and not thinking. Sometimes I know the impact I have—other times I'm oblivious. Sometimes when someone says that something I said hurt them, I get defensive—we all do. We think: (WELL THAT'S YOUR PROBLEM). But we sit with it... And it feels bad; and it won't let us go... We can't release the tension. You know why? Because you/I/we care. And if you are in a relationship with someone and you LOVE THEM you want them to be happy and at peace. We are all connected a gigantic web, so we feel the cognitive dissonance in our

mind and body when we are not in right-relationship with someone we care for. You could let time pass and hope it goes away or you can begin YOUR healing process by making amends.

Rev. Kathleen will have a class in the library after service on this very topic. Please join her.

Atonement. I want to come back to this... We can also say that atonement is “At-one” with...

We cannot fix what ails the world if we do not become one with ourselves first. As you will hear me say our central task in life is to balance the polarities that exist within us so that we can love with our whole heart. Anger and not being able to forgive, well, that creates imbalance.

In UU circles we talk about “being woke” all the time. That we are enlightened people.

Perhaps... But Rabbi Don Ani Shalom Singer in your order of service reminds us:

Enlightenment is Atonement. Atonement is Enlightenment.

- Rabbi Don Ani Shalom Singer

Why? Because we will not find our full-selves in life if we cannot let go of EGO.

Cause, that’s what it’s going to take to change this world. Forgiveness with accountability. We may not forget but we can forgive (FOR OUR SAKE AND SANITY). If we hold all that has been done against us or our family or our culture or our community---if we cannot let it go, we will be stuck in this cycle of purgatorial abuse—internally and externally.

I’m talking about commitment to change; commitment to being the best version of you. That’s what atonement is to me. But there’s more. Because in our culture some are given the benefit of the doubt while others are not.

SIDLE UP: This story this week just stopped me. Botham Jean murdered in his unlocked apartment by a Dallas cop who came home from work and walked into the wrong apartment and shot him thinking he was an intruder. This made national news. There are many debating this picture. Botham's brother wanted to give his murderer a hug. I watched this. It seemed sincere. It was touching. There was healing there. There is also the issue of America always wanting to redeem the white person and some say this brother played right into this. They have a point.



The optics of a black man hugging a white woman caused some to show where they are on the forgiveness scale. You can tell where you are by how you react to situations that are not your own. Of course, there are larger stories here around race and gender and black men being targeted in America by Criminal Justice system, but this, very complicated situation, I think, is asking us to simply see forgiveness (in raw form) and think about our ability to make amends, reparations or forgive. I have to say that Black folk have been the most forgiving people on the planet. This picture took me back to Charleston SC when the woman congregant of the historically black church there said to the shooter, "I forgive you." Remember that... I said WOW back when I saw that on CNN.

Related to that, there was an article in the Washington Post back in 2015 about this terrible event in Charleston. The writer, Stacey Patton, who is a Person of Color, titled the article: **Black America Should Stop Forgiving White Racists**. She wrote in response to the mass shooting saying this: **“The almost reflexive demand of forgiveness, especially for those dealing with death by racism, is about protecting whiteness, and America as a whole...This is yet another burden for black America.”** She’s right.

You see, marginalized groups are too often expected to forgive after a tragic event. We need to see more reparations by Whites. That’s the truth. The carnage and traumatic stress on generations cannot be under-estimated. The issues we face as a marginalized community are too many to name. I am thankful that there is a culture of forgiveness in my community that emerged out of our struggle in this country for human rights and to basically survive. We saw this with the Civil Rights Movement. We saw this, too, in India with Gandhi. P.O.C. having to forgive the tyrannical forces that don’t want to see their full humanity is an exhausting journey. But Thank GOD for this forgiving consciousness. Without this kind of Agape Love that emerges again and again in this country, I’m not sure where this nation would be!

People of Color do have a deep and abiding faith that carries us through some of the worst situations. As Patton wrote: Black pain is normally not felt until it is within the context of white pain. That’s true. It’s a mess in this country. History says people of the African Diaspora should not be so forgiving. It does. But in truth, history has been cruel to most of the living and dead—haves and have-nots alike. White Supremacy, Indian Supremacy, Egyptian Supremacy, Chinese Supremacy—humanity has been haunted by psychotic domineering leaders for a very

long time! Men, women, children---all of us—all races—all cultures—we are all victims whether we are oppressed or oppressor.

When you take a macrocosmic view and see that WE ARE ALL ONE you see this paradox. You see that there's sadness on all sides. You see the self-hate on all sides. You see "one tyranny giving way to another form of tyranny" as Dr. King said. It's all a big sinful and painful mess. But good emerges. God emerges. Love emerges. The sun cuts through the clouds and shines through. I believe that picture on your screen is an example of the good that can emerge when we let down our defenses and allow our humanity to present. Tragically, another black life was tragically, but this picture may, over time, reconcile millions! It doesn't bring Brotham back but maybe we move a little closer to Beloved Community. There is good and bad in every situation that occurs.

That's why I say that we have to be committed to doing the little things every day until the small becomes great and the great becomes small. It's all connected. We are one.

Those under the intoxicating impact of privilege; or power-OVER are actually in MORE inner-pain than those they subjugate-- (even as they dress it up with fancy clothes, food, jobs and recreation). I don't care if you are a queen or king or president or CEO, or Executive, or head of the household...if you need to dominate and control, you are showing your true-colors. You are showing your own self-loathing. I know that you are projecting your own sense of lack. And that's why I forgive. Because it's so sad. It's heartbreaking. I see how fast we can fix this world if we lead with LOVE instead of FEAR and my heart breaks. My continual prayer is that we release the inner pain that makes us do mean and selfish things.

Finally, Rev. Nancy McDonald Ladd said in our reading that “atonement is difficult, risky work.” Why? Because we meet our true selves in the process. AND we cannot get to our happy place without creating trusting, real, authentic and accountable relationships. You meet the bigot. You meet the chauvinist; you meet the controller, you meet the pacifier, you meet the angry person, you meet the blamer you. You meet this person when you decide to grow your soul.

Rev. Nancy says liberals love to hope and look onward and upward; but what is needed now is COMMITMENT—that is her buzz word. Commitment to change. Commitment to facing our fears; commitment to not being stuck in your ways; commitment to examining supremacy culture; commitment to being the best version of yourself. Commitment to showing up; commitment to reconciling or making-right those relationships that matter to you. Commitment to letting go and trusting the process as you heal. That is how we change the world...we change ourselves. We forgive ourselves and each other. And we begin again in love. May it be so. Amen.