

## 9/12/10 Sermon

"Reconciliation Begins On Rosh Hashanah"

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Jews around the world celebrate Rosh Hashanah as the birthday of the world, the very moment of creation. This is a time for joyous celebration of the work of their God. Many faiths look upon this and similar events with wonder and awe – anticipating the New Year with hope for a better, more loving and more peaceful World.

***"In the twilight of the vanishing year,  
We lift up our heart in Thanksgiving.  
Our souls are stirred by the memory of joy  
As the New Year begins."***

***– Jonathan Reich***

Jews offer this traditional Holiday greeting, "L'shana Tova", May you have a good and sweet New Year. I invite you to now turn to your neighbor and Say it with me. "L'shana Tova." In offering this greeting, we recognize the worth and dignity of all people as part of our shared web of existence.

For Unitarian Universalists, Rosh Hashanah is a time that we can renew our commitment to honor and live our principles and values; in the same manner the Jews of old did theirs. With new beginnings, there is an opportunity to reexamine and reflect on the year just past. Now is the time to assess our successes and achievements, and to account for our sins and atone for all of our failings: promises not kept, people hurt, sins committed inadvertently and maliciously and, if you are a believer, the sin of disobeying God. In recounting our failings, we are called to both repentance and reconciliation.

The Jews are very clear about this direct need for atonement. For sins against God, or by whatever name you call holy – you can be granted forgiveness by God. However, for sins against any other persons, only s/he can grant release and forgiveness. Reconciliation calls for sinners to be held responsible for their actions and to offer justice to the victims; whether they are individuals, communities, or nations. Atonement must be direct and personal – face to face where possible.

We must be willing to change our egregious behavior for all time and not just in the moment. We are called to a deeply spiritual change of behavior on a soul level if we are to prepare our hearts for the High Holy Days, for "only through this kind of self-searching reaching, digging, knowing and

changing, can we prevent ourselves from revisiting the ugliness and sins of the past.”

To do the work of reconciliation and to achieve the restoration of relationships, we must offset our wrongdoings with “Mitzvoth” (good deeds), to match them in kind. A heavy burden.

In truth, there is more restoration work to be done than in a 100, 10,000, a million lifetimes – overwhelming – too much suffering, brokenness and need. This work is so intimate, personal, yet too global; and we have only limited power, resources, vision, skills and time. Garret Keizer asks in “Help: The Original Human Dilemma,” “What ought we to do to help then?”

Reconciliation begins within to repair our own wounded heart; to learn to love ourselves for what we can do rather than cannot. We must begin to have faith in our own intuitive sense of what is right and wrong, moral and sinful. We must trust our compassion and ability to witness the world in all its pain and joy. Sometimes helping the most is by doing the least. It is knowing “when”; in Keizer’s words, “when to speak, when to be silent, when to laugh, when to hug, when to be pliant, and when to stand firm.” Gaining such self-awareness is as good a place to start as any.

Then, we must learn to work as individuals and with others, adversary and friend alike to effect the change we want to see, to build the world we are dreaming about. We are called to repair the world, to reconcile people with each other and to do the holy work of peacemaking and justice. This work calls for more than an apology for past bad, destructive behavior. If we don’t remember the history of our past sins, we are doomed to repeat them. We only have to look as far as our own families and this congregation to see where work needs to be done. Dr. King reminded us that “Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America.” It was true when Dr. King spoke those words 50 years ago and it is true today. We are a largely white denomination and if we really want to change that we must reach out to Latinos/Latinas, people of color, and other marginalized communities such as the L/G/B/T/? and Native Americans. Do we truly want to reflect the diversity of America or just give it lip service?

Look around our congregation at all the glorious multi-cultural families. This mix represents the real world that we must build upon and celebrate if we are to truly be a house of welcome. Our anti-oppression work on race and other issues will speak to the truth of our values.

Are we willing to take the hard steps of racial, ethnic reconciliation? Are we willing to face the hidden intertwined issue of classism? There is no

guarantee in this life that the work of reconciliation will be successful but, as Mark Morrison Reed speculated, "you have to wonder what might happen if only more congregations would take authentic steps towards reconciliation."

Over the decades, Unitarian Universalists have demonstrated both cowardice and courage in confronting our own demons. In the 1960s, we broke faith and promises with members of the black caucus over funding of our anti-racism work. Yet today we are the first denomination to have had both a Black President and now a Latino one. But we must go beyond that if we are to make meaningful, systemic changes. As Bill Sinkford pointed out, "We haven't yet found a way to move forward to redress the impact of racism, or even a way to productively talk about race in our society or in our lives. We have been stuck too long."

"When we confront the issue of race we have seen whites moving into political correctness and denial; citing progress over the last 40 years as proof of our good intentions. Our Black members still rightly simmer with resentment over the glaring disparity of opportunity in our society, fearful that once again black lives will be deemed unimportant."

Honesty is a rare commodity in these discussions and without that real reconciliation will not happen. We fear an emotional explosion that we are not prepared to deal with. Yet, in spite of this divide we as a religious community have an important role to play in healing the social, moral and political divide in our heart and in the country. As Sinkford observed, "If we can be both honest and open-hearted, there is a chance that we can move beyond the impasse that blocks our path into a place where true reconciliation may be possible."

As Dr. King did, we must, in John Creswell's words, "we must find principles we are willing to live and die for. Our seven principles should prick our conscience every day – they do mine. We need more conviction in our faith." We create the beloved community only when we fully engage in the practice of affirming and promoting the inherent worth and dignity of all people. We need to do less talking and more doing. The work of justice and reconciliation is ongoing and will not be achieved perhaps in our lifetime but we must start.

We have a moral obligation to the disposed of our society. Our obligation is to perform Mitzvoth, good deeds – to speak our truth to power and restore those wounded by our lack of action. It is not too late to commit ourselves to the transformative work of creating inclusive multicultural community of the spirit.

While Unitarian Universalists don't believe in hell, if we did, "hell would be the place where we stand and admit that we could love the world more, love one another better, care more deeply, help more helpfully, but choose not to." (*Unknown*)

I want to try harder to do this work – to become a better, more dedicated agent of compassion, hope and grace.

I want to offer more spirit ...  
More ideas ...  
More life ...  
Greater reconciliation and healing.  
And I want you to do your part with me.