

A Pattern So Vast

BY KATE TUCKER, ASSOCIATE MINISTER, FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF MINNEAPOLIS



I still use the copy of *The Joy of Cooking* I got for Christmas in 1969. This now-fragile cookbook has memories stained into many of its pages (especially the peanut-butter cookie page). I've always loved how the "Fish" chapter ends. The authors give many dozens of fish recipes, arranged alphabetically by fish—from fried catfish, scalloped cod and marinated herring through casserole octopus, glazed salmon, broiled swordfish, and so on. Then the final fish recipe, on page 362, just says: "Whale. Last, but vast." As I thought toward this month's theme, forgiveness, that phrase kept coming to mind: Last but vast.

Forgiveness is a whale of a topic for exploration. Vast, certainly...and, last, in a way, in that it's a lifetime's work—forgiving and being forgiven. Forgiveness is a big part of getting our house in order when we come to die. The hospice booklets tell us that two out of four of the things we need to say to each other pertain to forgiveness. The final four? Thank you. I love you. Forgive me. I forgive you. (Last, but vast.)

We know that in this world the pattern of revenge and hatred is vast and ancient, fed every day by new bloodshed and breakage. We know about the vast pattern of hurt and warfare. That's why it's so amazing when we hear about those who break

the sequence, who do something surprising.

Forgiving ourselves.
It's a big one, perhaps
even more vast than
forgiving others.

If you'd like to read stories about surprising patterns of forgiveness, I recommend a website called The Forgiveness Project (<http://theforgivenessproject.com>). It's an international nonprofit dedicated to healing the wounds of the past. The Forgiveness Project

collects people's stories: you see a page of tiny head shots of individuals from all over the world and you click on a photo and the full story appears.

There's Bud Welch, whose daughter Julie Marie was killed in the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. In the months after her death, Bud changed from supporting the death penalty for Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols to taking a public stand against it. There's Andrew Rice, whose older brother David was killed on September 11, 2001, when the World Trade Center collapsed. Andrew is a member of Peaceful Tomorrows, a group founded by family members of September 11 victims seeking effective non-violent responses to terrorism. There are stories of people from Northern Ireland, Rwanda, the US, England, South Africa, Israel, Ukraine. People who are part of a vast pattern of forgiveness.

In the archives of the Forgiveness Project there's the story of a woman who was brutally assaulted while she was out running. She picked a man out of the lineup and he went to prison for 18 years—and then, after 18 years, DNA testing showed that she'd picked the wrong man. This woman had spent a couple of decades trying to forgive the man, and now she'd spend her future trying to forgive herself. Self-forgiveness, she says, is more difficult, by far.

Forgiving ourselves. It's a big one, perhaps even more vast than forgiving others.

Occasionally when I'm here at church and I need to remember to do something I call myself at home and leave a message. It's quick and easy. I call my home number, I hear my phone ring, I hear myself answer and I invite me to leave a message.

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Quest

The Church of the Larger Fellowship
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

Without forgiveness
there is no future.

—Desmond Tutu

A monthly for religious liberals

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So I do. I say, "Hey! It's me. It's you. Would you look for the book of wedding readings and bring it for Sharon? Thanks. See you."

The first time I did this—called myself and heard myself answer—I had a strange couple of seconds, where I

**“One who has been
forgiven much,
loves much.”**

wondered: "This person I'm talking to...will she be glad to hear from me? Will she get back to me? Is she kind? Has she forgiven me for some dumb things I've done? Do we have unfinished business?" I had a teeny urge to stay on the line and check out a couple things: "Hey, that weird time back in—what, 1991? —and that thing that happened around the time Dad died, is that all okay now? Are we square? Do we need to talk?"

When you search online for "How to Apologize," you get a drop down list: How to apologize: to a girl, to a friend, to a girlfriend, effectively, for cheating, to a guy, to your mom, to someone, to a woman. Nothing about apologizing to yourself. But it's interesting to imagine how some sound guidance on apologies might apply to forgiving yourself.

Rochelle Melander of the Alban Institute has some good thoughts in her article "Learning to Apologize." She suggests a four-part process. The first step is to listen and learn how we've hurt the other person. It's usually not comfortable. "We want to say, 'No, you're wrong, I'm not that bad!'" Instead, the idea is to be still and listen, and then ask, "Is there more?" And when we've heard the whole story, we check to see that we've heard well. "Is this what you are saying?" we ask, repeating the story until we get it right.

The second step is to say, "I'm sorry." Period. We do not qualify our apology by saying, "I'm sorry if you took of-

fense at what I said." Or "I'm sorry if you felt that way," or "...if you heard me say that."

That's like saying, "I'm sorry you are hyper-sensitive; I'm sorry you are mixed up; I'm sorry you don't hear well." The best apology is just, "I'm sorry."

The third step is to make it right. Both parties talk about what can be done to bring healing. They ask: "What are our needs here?" "What do we do or say differently from now on?" They look each other in the eye and agree on a plan.

The fourth step is to ask for forgiveness. Receiving forgiveness—officially—is essential. It isn't helpful when the offended person brushes off our apology with, "No big deal," or "What's done is done."

Melander says, "It's hard to be content with 'no-big-deal' responses when we suspect that it was a big deal. These responses don't have the healing power of 'I forgive you.' To say 'I forgive you' is to say we are letting go of any claim for punishment or payment. We're ending our hold on the other person. We're setting them free."

"If the wronged person does not offer forgiveness," Melander says, "simply ask, 'Do you forgive me?'"

Four steps: Hear the hurt, say "I'm sorry," make it right, ask forgiveness. And then, I'm thinking, we might be wise to go through the whole thing—all four steps—again with ourselves.

I know and admire a woman whose life journey (she's now in her mid-40s) has included living with the fact that when she was a young adult she was the driver during a car accident that killed her father in the passenger seat next to her. She considered suicide, but instead she chose meditation, and since then her life has been about healing and becoming a healer.

She can see farther than a lot of us. People can bring her anything. She's unflappable; she has the

most hospitable heart.

I haven't known regret like hers. I do remember, though, a particular time when I narrowly escaped a bad crash. It was my fault. In a confused moment I turned left against the light. The oncoming car screamed to a stop and saved us both. I was so rattled I immediately pulled over into the closest parking area, just to get my breath and fall apart a little.

When the other car followed and pulled up beside me I braced myself. The guy who got out of the old Chevy was twenty-something with tattoos, and he was gonna let me have it. I was ready—I'd been stupid. But what this young man did was come over to me with a face full of concern, as he asked politely, "Are you okay?" He asked me, the negligent one, if I was okay, after I'd nearly killed him. I felt something release way down in my chest. It was beyond personal. He not only gave me back my dignity; he redeemed the whole human race.

**“[T]he root of blaming
is a deep discomfort
about ourselves.”**

One thing I understood, right then, was that the hardest thing, ultimately, is to be the perpetrator. And I got a better understanding of something else, too—something Jesus reportedly said to his disciples when they complained about the sudden generosity of a former sinner. Jesus said, essentially: "One who has been forgiven much, loves much."

The disciples didn't quite get it, but I do. When I think about the woman who was driving when her father died in that accident, I have a wish or a hunch or a prayer that her father has visited her somehow—maybe often, maybe in dreams. He's come to her whole, and with the tenderest concern, the tenderest expression, he's asked, "Are you okay?" Because they both know that she's the one who needs the

reassurance. She's the one who needs to be set free.

No matter how careful we humans are, we can never be careful enough to avoid hurting and being hurt. That's the human condition and that's why we need forgiveness.

Not long ago, Buddhist nun Pema Chodron asked Buddhist teacher Dzigar Kongtrül Rinpoche what advice he had for Western Buddhist practitioners. He replied that what we in the West need to understand is guiltlessness. "You have to understand that even though you make a lot of mistakes and you mess up in all kinds of ways, all of that is impermanent and shifting and changing and temporary. But fundamentally, your mind and heart are not guilty. They are innocent."

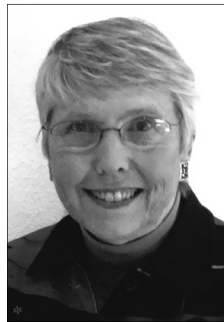
He continued: "Most of our striking out at other people, in this culture, comes from feeling bad about ourselves." He said that when you get upset or hooked by something, in the first four seconds it feels like "bad me." After a few minutes it has shifted, and it feels like "bad them." Our response is to blame, and the root of blaming is a deep discomfort about ourselves.

Kongtrül suggests that when you get hooked by something, pause, breathe, let it be. Don't strike out at yourself or anyone else. Breathe, relax. Let all the feelings pass through you. Let the whole thing "unwind and unravel." Feel how it feels "to hang out in inef-fable space."

The universe forgives, as theologian Matthew Fox reminds us. The earth moves on. Wild daisies bloom again on the battlefield. Our Universalist message of hope says that Love has the final word and Love's work is to heal and forgive. It says that vaster than our wrongs is the vastness of the mystery; vaster than our misdeeds and hurts is the vastness of our kinship. It says the last vast thing is Love. ■

Finding Our Place in the World

BY ANNE FELTON HINES,
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It was the third summer of my seminary training, and I was completing the required "Clinical Pastoral Education" by serving as a student chaplain in a women's prison near Tacoma, Washington. There were a half-dozen of us seminarians there, each from a different faith tradition; I was the only Unitarian Universalist.

One of our tasks was to take a turn at presenting the weekly worship service for the entire prison each Sunday morning, first for the general prison population in the chapel, and then the same service over at the maximum security unit, although in a much more casual format since they had no actual chapel there. What I remember is simply sitting in a circle with four or five women who chose to attend.

So my Sunday came around, and I decided to focus on the theme of God's love and forgiveness. I talked about Martin Luther, the founder of the Protestant Reformation, and his insistence that God's grace was available to all of us, no matter what sins we'd committed, and that all we needed to do was to open ourselves to that grace, to recognize it and be grateful.

I told them about the early Universalists, and their idea that God is too loving and merciful to condemn any of us to hell. I likened God to a parent who might get angry or saddened by the behavior of their child, and might even take disciplinary action, but who would

never turn their back on their child—would always love that child and welcome him or her home.

My message was one of compassion and hope—a message I was sure would be welcomed by these women who had been cast aside and mostly forgotten by the world beyond the

prison walls. So I was stunned when one of the women in maximum security said to me at the end of my homily: "You don't understand. Here in this place—we don't deserve forgiveness! We are sinners; we can't be loved, even by God!"

I wanted these women in the prison, no matter what their crime, to believe the message of universal love. Not that they didn't need to acknowledge the damage they'd caused—in a couple of cases, with tragic consequences. Nor did I think they shouldn't be where they were for a period of time—in a couple of cases, maybe even for the remainder of their lives. Some of these women were dangerous.

"You don't understand. Here in this place—we don't deserve forgiveness! We are sinners; we can't be loved, even by God!"

But I am a Unitarian Universalist. I deeply believed, and still do, that each of them was born worthy, that at their core still is a spark of the Divine—of the Eternal Spirit of Life—of God, and that they are worthy of love. Most of us have not committed the kinds of acts that the women I ministered to that summer had committed. Nevertheless, we all could probably point to things in our past that we regret: people we've hurt, poor decisions we've made, times we've fallen short.

In the Episcopal Church in which I was raised is a Prayer of Confession which



says in part, “I have done those things I ought not to have done, and have left undone those things I ought to have done, and there is no health in me.” From time to time, still today, that prayer haunts me, and I have to work hard to remind myself that there is health in me, in spite of all that I’ve done or left undone!

The writer Anne Lamott tells the story of sitting on the beach one day with her young son, both of them appalled as a man violently hit his dog in the ribs with a large stick. Rather than yell at the man to stop, Lamott froze in fear, until another woman nearby began shouting at the man, and then Lamott’s son took up the cause. The man laughed at them and walked away.

Lamott felt both hatred of the man and deep shame at her inability to respond. And then she recalled the words of her Presbyterian minister: “God is an adoptive parent; she chose us all.”

“The mystery of God’s love as I understand it,” writes Lamott, “is that God loves the man who was being mean to his dog just as much as he loves babies; God loves Susan Smith, who drowned her two sons, as much as he loves Desmond Tutu. So of course he loves old ordinary me, even or especially at my most scared and petty and mean and obsessive. Loves me; chooses me.”

And that is indeed the message taught by our Universalist ancestors: That God is so fully loving, and sees us so completely, that God—the Holy Spirit of Life and Love—continually chooses us all, no matter what mistakes we’ve made, no matter what others may say about us. We are enough.

When we view the universe, or God, as keeping score of all our failings, when we ourselves keep score of our failings, or our inadequacies, when we fail to forgive ourselves of our transgressions and shortcomings we become unable to accept and forgive others as well. And then everybody loses.

This truth slapped me in the face years ago when I was trying to forgive my parents for all the angst I felt they’d caused me. I was pretty sure that just about every problem I had could be traced to something one or both of them had said or done. But every time I got close to seeing them in a more forgiving light, there would be this voice inside me suggesting that if I could forgive them, then I’d have to forgive myself for my failures as a parent, and that was just not possible.

Once we understand that who we are at the core of our being is good enough, then we can allow others to be good enough just as they are.

In that struggle I came to understand that my challenge wasn’t to forgive my parents. The real, almost insurmountable, challenge facing me was to forgive myself. And I couldn’t do that for a very long time. It literally took me years, and a couple of conversations with my children about it, before I could begin to let go of the guilt and shame I’d carried around for not being the kind of mom I thought I should be. But once I was able to let it go and accept that I had done the best I could at the time, I easily accepted my parents as being the best parents they were able to be—and pretty darn good ones at that!

Once we entertain the possibility that we don’t have to be some idealized version of what it means to be “good,” once we understand that who we are at the core of our being is good enough, then we can allow others to be good enough just as they are. We can see the beauty in them, and forgive them their human frailties.

So much in our world tells us that who we are (never mind what we have done) is unacceptable. It may be the

color of our skin or the accent of our words; it may be the size of our body or the number of our years; it may be our gender, or who we love; it may be the abilities of our body, or what we do for a living. Whatever it is, we have all received messages telling us it would be so much better if we could look or be different than how we are. And we have often bought those messages hook, line and sinker.

As I was writing those words, I was suddenly reminded of an old Christian hymn that my ex-husband grew up with, and played for me on the piano when we first became friends in high school. The only words I remembered were those of the title: “Just As I Am.” So I found the piece on the Internet, and it’s actually a lovely hymn that was apparently written by a young woman upon being asked by a stranger if she was a Christian. She told him to mind his own business, but later went back to the man and asked him how to find Jesus. He answered, “Just come as you are.”

One of the verses goes, “Just as I am, tho’ tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt, fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.” The hymn was used as an altar call in my ex-husband’s childhood church, sung as people made their way forward to be accepted into the “family of Christ.”

Now, the full theology behind this hymn is no longer ours. But its message—that we will be loved and accepted just as we are—is our Universalist message.

It does not matter who or what we are; it does not matter what mistakes we’ve made in the past; it does not matter what size we are, or the color of our skin, or who we love, or whether we are able-bodied, or how much money we earn, or whether we even have a job...the world is ours. It is calling to us to dream our dreams, to imagine the possibilities that await us, to discover our place in the cosmos. ■



The stories we tell . . .

of heaven and hell are not about how we die, but about how we live.

Two summers ago, [two of my children,] Woolie and Zach were badly burned when the gasoline my cousin George was using to ignite a pile of backyard brush essentially exploded in their faces. Being burned in a fire is one of the classic images of hell, and it's a pretty powerful one. Being burned hurts a lot.

As I drove my burned loved ones to the hospital, I had the 911 dispatcher on the cell phone. She kept asking me whether anyone was having trouble breathing. What she knew and I didn't was that if George and the kids had

inhaled the scalding air at the moment of ignition, the insides of their lungs would begin to swell and shred, and they could die very quickly.

So she kept saying, "Are they breathing?" And I would hold the cell phone up in the air, so she could hear the hellish sounds of them cursing and crying.

George was cursing and crying because his burns hurt and because he knew that the fire that had injured these children was his mistake, his fault. He was the adult who had decided to use gasoline to start the fire, and his was the hand that struck the match.

"Are they breathing?" the dispatcher said, and I held up the cell phone.

George, beside me in the passenger seat, said, "Oh my God. Oh hell.

I am so sorry. I am so sorry."

Zach was sitting behind him in the backseat. In the middle of his own loud litany of "Oh God" and "Oh hell," Zach leaned forward. He reached out with his burned arm, an arm blistering and shredding before my eyes, and [he] put his burned hand on George's shoulder.

"It's all right, George," he said. "We love you."

If you are living in love, you are in heaven no matter where you are. May heaven hold you. May you always, always, live in love. ■

by **Kate Braestrup**, from *Here if You Need Me*, published by Little, Brown and Co. in 2007. Braestrup is an author and UU community minister who serves as a law-enforcement chaplain in Maine.

Online Classes

Economic Justice and the Bible

The authors of the Bible expressed many strong opinions about economics, from advocating the complete erasure of debts every 50 years to suggesting that the way to get to heaven is to give away everything we own. In this class we'll learn about some of the Biblical attitudes about economic issues, compare them to our own and other modern convictions, and challenge ourselves to think deeply about what would constitute a just economic system.

The teachers for this course are UU parish ministers **Darcey Laine** and **Amy Zucker Morgenstern**. The class begins September 14th and runs for six weeks.

Doorways into Prayer

How, if at all, do UUs pray? Some of us who are new to prayer may need a few ideas to get started, and those of us who have been people of

prayer for some time may feel a little stale and need some new ideas.

In this four-session class, we will form a supportive prayer circle and explore several prayer practices together and on our own. Whether you are an agnostic, a mystic, or "none of the above," this class will offer you a guided, accompanied journey through several doorways into prayer, including movement, centering prayer, labyrinths, rosaries, and other accessible, practices.

Amanda Aikman is a UU parish minister, spiritual director, and joyfulness consultant. This class begins November 14th, and runs for four weeks.

These classes carry a \$40 registration fee. To find out more about how CLF online classes work and to link register for these classes, please go to www.clfuu.org/learn. Contact minister for lifespan learning Lynn Ungar at lugar@uua.org for more information. ■

For Giving

Forgiving and forgetting often go hand in hand, but don't let this month's theme of forgiveness make you forget to support the CLF! Your contributions are what



bring this church—this beacon of liberal religion—to life. We each play a role in ensuring the longevity of our

church, so that the message of liberal religion can continue to grow and flourish in places new and old. Please make a gift now. Your offerings, which are easy to give with the enclosed envelope or on our website, www.clfuu.org, are what enable this progressive ministry. For an enduring legacy, let us know your interest in exploring how to make bequests and other planned gifts to the CLF. ■



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
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I have mentioned my garden in past columns—how much joy and life I find there and how central to my spiritual practice it is from spring through fall. I have never mentioned, however, that my next door neighbor hates my garden at least as much as I love it.

Lest you think I am being a drama queen here, let me tell you why I report this as fact. It is not because I am deeply sensitive to my neighbor's body language, or wonder about the meaning of awkward silences when the subject of gardening comes up in conversation. In fact, I love my garden so much that it never occurred to me that someone else could hate it until the day when she looked me in the face and said baldly, "I hate your garden." This is DEFINITELY not a typical thing for a "Minnesota nice" neighbor to say. I was flabbergasted.

Please understand that, as yard styles go, my neighbor and I are very much "The Odd Couple." Her solution to any weed or disorder is to either apply chemicals or landscape with thousands of small rocks. She loves her lawn. I, on the other hand, don't disturb milkweed in hopes that it will attract monarch butterflies. I am likely to let unidentified plants grow with hopes that they are something fantastic I've forgotten about, rather than labeling them "weeds" and eliminating them immediately. One summer I grew a whole bed of dandelions, insisting to myself that they were a unique kind of poppies. It wasn't till they flowered that I admitted to myself that I was delusional and finally pulled them up.

So, my garden is definitely not in a style that would appeal to everyone. I

do have a fan club, which I greatly appreciate, but unfortunately it does not include my neighbor. She has torn down plants that crossed the chain link fence she erected between our yards and thrown them back into my yard. (I had presumed that no one would enjoy looking at a vast expanse of chain link fence and planted attractive vines along it. It turns out she and I have vastly different opinions on this matter.)

Over the years, I have tried to figure out what she hates most and remove it. She hated my sunflowers, she said, because they made her feel unsafe in her house—someone could hide behind them and sneak up on her. I loved my sunflowers, but I didn't want her to feel unsafe in her own house, so I took

Did Jesus say to love the neighbor you think you deserve, or love the neighbor you have?

them down right in the height of their prime and never planted them in that spot again. When she's not home, I've snuck into her yard to see the garden from her point of view, and I've worked harder to clean up the areas she looks at.

You may have noticed that at some level I enjoy complaining about her, that I've snuck in just enough details here to appear balanced in my description of our differences while working to tilt your sympathy towards me. (I don't really know if she "threw" vines into my yard; I only know I found them there.) Anyway, one day, as I was carrying on about all this, kind of like I am now, a wise friend said, "Aren't you a minister? Did Jesus say to love the neighbor you think you deserve, or love the neighbor you have?"

Oh. That. It made things even worse that I was wearing my bright yellow "Standing On the Side of Love" shirt that day.

The truth is, even if I've been adjusting my behavior and pulling up plants to please my neighbor, I have not even tried to love her. Only coming into my reflections on forgiveness for this month's Quest did I realize that, whether I joke or whine about it or not, I am having a hard time forgiving her for hating something that I love so much. Somehow, just naming that as a fact brings some relief to the situation, the first baby step towards healing.

"Really?" I ask myself. "You really can't forgive someone for having different aesthetics about their yard than yours?" And I lighten up a bit, find some humor in it. "Really?" I ask myself. "This is what's unforgiveable? This is what crosses the line of the Universalist commitment to love? Not torture or genocide, but too much Chem-lawn and too many rocks?" And I have to roll my eyes at myself.

I'll be honest. I'm not yet ready to try for conversation that leads towards constructive collaboration towards yards we both like. I'm not ready to forgive her yet, or even to forgive myself for not forgiving her.

I share this because I suspect you have a neighbor or co-worker or relative who is, in your life, what this neighbor is to me. I offer the suggestion that, for all of us, a commitment to forgiveness made in our own heart, in our own home, and on our own city block is as profoundly important for our commitment to world peace as it is for feuding nations. I love being in this community together so we can help each other remember who we are, the values we live by, our aspirations. By Yom Kippur, I vow to speak to my neighbor about the really ugly fence between us, the one we've each erected around our hearts. I'll keep you posted how that goes! ■



September 2011

REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP



I've been thinking about the Days of Turning, the ten days between Rosh Hashana (September 28th this year) and Yom Kippur. Rosh Hashana is the Jewish New Year, and like any New Year celebration it marks the opening of new possibilities, of the chance that we and the world around us will be better than last year. But here's the kicker. People who celebrate the new year on January 1st have a whole year to keep—or forget about—the resolutions that they so optimistically made when the year began.

The changes you pledge to make for Rosh Hashana, however, don't have so much time to get stale and ignored. You see, ten days later (those ten Days of Turning) comes Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. And tradition says that on Yom Kippur God writes down in the big Book of Life who deserves a good year, and then closes the book. *Bam.* Not opening for another year. So you only have ten days to make good on your resolutions if they're going to count in your favor.

Okay, the Book of Life does sound just a little bit like Santa Claus's list of who's been naughty and nice. But here's the thing. God, it seems, is not necessarily interested in the kinds of resolutions that people most often make in January. You don't get into the Book of Life by promising to go to the gym or eat more vegetables or lay off the Krispy Kremes. Frankly, God couldn't care less (although in the Jewish tradition God appears to be interested in a bunch of other rules about what you eat, but that's a whole different story).

No, the way you get written in the Book of Life is to make things right with the people around you. During the Days of Turning the faithful are expected to think carefully about who they have quarreled with,

insulted, ignored or generally not treated right, and then to go and apologize and work things out. The

Days of Turning are about asking for forgiveness.

They are also about offering forgiveness. Making things right is a two-way street. If someone comes to you sincerely and apologizes for having wronged you and asks for forgiveness, your job is to forgive them—within that period of ten days, not just sometime eventually down the line. And I'm thinking that God, holding that big book, pen in hand, probably knows whether you really mean it when you say "I forgive you."

What if the Days of Turning are a way of choosing to take a turn on your life path so that you see things from a different angle?

Wow. That seems like asking an awful lot. I mean, just because a holiday rolls around and you've eaten your apples dipped in honey for a sweet new year doesn't mean that you've gotten your heart and mind ready to forgive someone who did something awful to you. Think about this. It's pretty easy to just forget about a resolution if you have a whole year to get around to it, and it's even easier to assume that you'll just leave a damaged friendship alone until you're over the hurt or you feel like the other person has been punished enough. But when is that time going to come? Wouldn't during these ten days be as good a time as any?

I've always assumed that the Days of Turning are called that because it's a time to turn away from the negative things you've done, or to turn toward the people in your life with whom you need to fix things. But maybe it helps to think about the Days of Turning in a different way. Say you are walking

down a path through the woods, admiring the trees and bushes around you. Suddenly, the path takes a sharp turn. All of a sudden, your point of view changes. You see things from a new angle. It turns out that what you thought was a really big tree is actu-



ally two trees growing close together, and the fallen log now shows itself as a tangled mass of exposed roots. The things you have already seen are changed by looking at them in a new way.

What if the Days of Turning are a way of choosing to take a turn on your life path so that you see things from a different angle? What if you shifted your point of view to try to see what was going on in your friend's heart and mind when they hurt you? What if you learned to forgive yourself by seeing that mistake you made (the one that just makes your skin crawl) from the perspective of your dog, who loves you absolutely, no matter what? What if you looked at a tough situation from the perspective of ten years down the road, and asked yourself what you want the relationship to be like in 2021?

Maybe the Days of Turning are days of deliberately choosing to see things in a new way, looking with an eye toward finding happiness and justice and peace rather than self-righteous anger. The view might be pretty great from there—maybe even good enough to peer into the Book of Life and see your name written there for an excellent year to come. ■



Church of the Larger Fellowship
Unitarian Universalist

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The CLF is re-imagining a brand new website? Watch for our October launch!

Quest Editorial Team: Meg Riley; Lorraine Dennis; Celeste DeRoche; Janet Lane; Beth Murray; Cindy Salloway; Jaco ten Hove; Arliss Ungar; Lynn Ungar, editor

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Indian Boy Love Song #1

Everyone I have lost
in the closing of a door
the click of the lock

is not forgotten, they
do not die but remain
within the soft edges
of the earth, the ash

of house fires and cancer
in sin and forgiveness
huddled under old blankets

dreaming their way into
my hands, my heart
closing tight like fists.



by *Sherman Alexie*

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