

## Turn, Turn, Turn

BY MARTI KELLER, MINISTER, UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST  
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If we hadn't learned it already from reading the Ecclesiastes section of the Hebrew Bible (what Christians call the Old Testament), many of us absorbed this piece of scripture through a musical rendition by Pete Seeger or The Byrds:

*For everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven—a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted, a time to break down and a time to build up, a time to weep and a time to dance, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to seek and a time to lose, a time to tear and a time to sew, a time to keep silence and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.*

And in between all of these “times for” was the chorus—*turn, turn, turn.*

It occurs to me that in this familiar and powerful list of meaningful activities of our lives—year in and year out, over the centuries—there is at least one significant “time-for” that is missing.

A time to atone. To repent, to ask forgiveness. To literally change one's mind.

Atonement was on my mind and in my heart because I was about to embark on an annual time of turning called *teshuvah*. You see, I am a Jewish Unitarian Universalist by birth and by choice. I observe the Jewish High Holy Days—first the Birthday of the World on Rosh Hashanah, then the 10 Days of Awe, and finally Yom Kippur; the Day of Atonement—which is as natural to me as observing and celebrating Christmas and Easter in this liberal and living faith tradition.

Rabbi Michael Lerner, one of the leaders of the Jewish Renewal movement (an effort to increase the meaning and feeling of Jewish religious practice), describes this period of *teshuvah*, of turning, as a time to assess how close we have come to actualizing our potential to be partners with God. It is a time to look at ways we miss the mark, and how we need to realign ourselves so that we return to our highest spiritual mission. It is a time to examine how we have individually gone astray and how we have gone astray as a society.

More than 200 years ago our Universalist forebear Hosea Ballou wrote his *Treatise on Atonement*, which turned the Calvinist idea of the relationship between people and God on its head. It is not an angry God that needs to be appeased or reconciled to human beings, Ballou argued, but human beings who must be reconciled to God—a God who saves all regardless of their errors. Ballou was convinced that once people realized this, they would take pleasure in living a moral life and doing good works.

I sense that the Jewish notions of sin and atonement and Ballou's early Universalist ideas are not strictly parallel. Ballou believed that we need to just accept that human beings are sinful and that God loves them anyway. In Judaism, human beings are believed to be capable always of choosing to do good, to do *mitzvot* (right things, pleasing to God) or not. Once a year during the High Holy Days, when the Book of Life is open for introspection and correction, we can make amends both to the people we have offended and to God. At the end of the period of atonement, the Book of Life is closed again and it is God's turn to judge whether we have fallen short and in which ways.

This comes out of the religious conviction that we are not passive participants in our life on Earth or in our relationship with God. The Hebrew prayer that captures

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The beginning of  
atonement is  
the sense of its  
necessity.  
—Lord Byron

A monthly for religious liberals

### THINKING ABOUT ATONEMENT

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this is *unetaneh tokef*—we change the future by changing ourselves. If we can look at ourselves clearly and take an accounting, we can once again be in right relationship with ourselves, with each other, with the world and all living things. Why do we review the records of our deeds from this past year? Why do we evaluate the quality of our existence? Because we cannot blame our conduct on forces beyond our control.

So we must turn around first, and look backwards.

Seven years ago, just before the High Holy Days and after finishing a Sunday service at my congregation in the North Georgia mountains, I was driving to the out-in-the-country home of a parishioner who was dying of a series of afflictions—breast cancer, kidney failure, heart disease—but who was looking forward to our visit and the bag of McDonald's hamburgers I was bringing for her dog. It was a lovely Indian summer day. I felt good about my sermon, the way things had gone. I was playing something on the radio and singing along. I was reliving some of the better moments of the morning.

And I wasn't exactly sure where I was and if I had missed a turn.

I remember suddenly thinking I was not going the right way. I remember what I thought was a four-way stop sign, and then starting out into the intersection and seeing a car coming on my right, and not being able to brake in time. And then spinning and turning, turning, turning. When I came to a stop, I had spun out and landed to the left of where I had been going. My passenger side was completely smashed in. In the intersection there was a car with a young couple and a baby in a car seat. The driver told me that he had only had one accident before. He kept saying that. And in the back of his car, the baby was wailing.

According to those who witnessed, I had indeed made a full stop, but then I moved out into the intersection when a

car was coming through. My car was totaled, as was theirs. If there had been anyone in my front passenger seat, he or she would have been killed.

I was sore for weeks and would not drive. They filed a claim and said that the baby had some injuries where the seat belt had dug in, and the mother had neck pains. I was cited for failure to yield. They call these "accidents," but they rarely are. I knew, and I know, what happened: I was not paying attention, I was distracted, I was careless. I was spun around, turned around in that intersection and other people were hurt because of this.

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It was my fault. And I felt terrible, a huge sense of remorse for what I had caused, what I had done.

In the process of *teshuvah*, of turning around, the second stage is restitution, making amends. It would have been healthier for me spiritually to have been able to write a letter to the family in the other car or to call them and apologize for my part in the car wreck. But in this litigious world of insurance claims, that is not allowed. I know this from my own earlier experience of being flattened by a car hurtling through an intersection and striking me on a sidewalk when I was just 20. It broke my hip in eight places, causing internal injuries and several other fractures, and still the elderly man who caused this could not and did not ever contact me. He can't, my lawyer told me, and he didn't.

So since I could not, did not, approach those I injured directly, the process of atonement, of turning, was much, much

harder. I prayed about it, and dreamt about it, and wrote about it, and still speak about it, but in some ways I have never reconciled myself to it.

First, we turn back to see what we have done. Second, we turn things right by taking responsibility and saying we are sorry. For me, it was for the sins of distraction and carelessness and being more interested in savoring personal success than driving cautiously, attentively, and safely. I have tried to be a fully alert and conscientious driver, but cannot say I've never lapsed into the kind of distracted behavior that caused the damages. But I try.

For others of us, and for me at other times, our sorrow and attempts at repair may be for the sins of being judgmental or withholding love and support. For the sin of cooperating with the self-destructive behavior of others or ourselves. For the sin of not supporting each other when we attempt to change. For the sin of saying we are spiritual and not political as a way of hiding from painful realities—and not speaking out against injustice and tyranny. For the sin of not recognizing and celebrating the beauty and the grandeur of the universe around us; for the sin of not seeing the spirit of God in others; for the sin of not recognizing and nurturing the spirit of God within ourselves. And for the sin of focusing only on our sins and not on our strengths and beauties.

Turning back, we look to see how we have done, for what we are accountable. Turning—as in changing, changing our minds, making restitution. And then turning toward God. To *turn, turn, turn*.

Rabbi Zalman Scachter-Shalomi tells us that we are theotropic creatures. Just as a sunflower turns towards the sun and we call it heliotropic, we grow naturally toward God. He urges each one of us to find our own name for God. For some, God has a face that we long for in our deepest moments. Is it a friend we need or a comforter? A rock to lean on when we are the most

besieged? A recipient of our joy and gratitude?

For others of us, for me, the rabbi invites us to move away from a noun and find other ways of describing God. We might try on words like godding, a process that the universe is doing, has been doing, and will continue to do forever—moving towards healing, harmony, and wholeness.

That is why every Jewish prayer service ends with praise and a request for blessing, such as:

*On this day, give us strength. On this day, bless us. On this day, help us grow. On this day, be mindful of us. On this day, inscribe us for a good life. On this day, support us with your just strength. On this day bring us closer to your service so that we may be well and so that we may be spiritually alive all of our days as we are on this day. May righteousness, blessing, mercy, life, and peace be ever granted to us.*

For everything there is a season, turn, turn, turn, and a time for every purpose under heaven. ■

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## The Place We Require of Humans

BY JOSH PAWELEK,  
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“Who will journey to the place we require of humans?” asks the poet, Sonia Sanchez. This question from her poem “Aaaayeee Babo (Praise God)” has become scripture to me in recent months. I have read it and re-read it, reflecting on its implications for my life, longing to answer “I will. I will journey to the place we require of humans.”

In the midst of this longing I also recognize in myself a struggle, a not knowing, a not being sure anymore what, exactly, the journey looks like, what the place is and what is required. But I do know in some instinctual, intuitive, spiritual, beyond words way of knowing that I need this question in my life. So I commend it to you: “Who will journey to the place we require of humans?”

Though I confess to not knowing, I am sure of one thing: we human beings, collectively, globally, are not in the right place now. Sonia Sanchez says it with her characteristic grace and edge: “This earth is hard symmetry / This earth of feverish war / This earth inflamed with hate / This patch of tongues corroding the earth’s air.”

Reflecting on “Aaaayeee Babo (Praise God)” led me back to an essay by the Rev. Rebecca Parker, president of the Unitarian Universalist Starr King School for the Ministry in Berkeley, California, entitled “After the Apocalypse.” In this essay, which she wrote in the 1990s, she critiques the popular religious notion of a coming apocalypse—a divinely wrought moment of great violence and destruction after

which a new heaven and a new earth will emerge out of the ruins of the old. She says humanity needs to let go of this myth in all its forms.

She suspects—and I agree—that this kind of spiritual *looking forward* (even in its liberal form) prevents us from engaging in an honest, spiritual looking *backward*, an honest, collective accounting of where we’ve been. This kind of spiritual *looking forward*—and these are my words more than hers—prevents us from beginning a deeply-felt, collective process of atonement for and healing of the deep wounds of the past—an atonement and healing that must take place if humanity is to have a future worthy of our *looking forward*.

Countering specifically those who look forward to a final, violent apocalypse, Parker says, essentially, *Come on! Haven’t we had enough already?* She says, “We are living in a post-slavery, post-Holocaust, post-Vietnam, Post-Hiroshima world.” Were she to write this essay today, I assume she would add “Post-9/11” and “War on Terror” world. For so many people on this planet, hasn’t the apocalypse already come? She says, “We are living in the aftermath of collective violence that has been severe, massive and traumatic. The scars from slavery, genocide, and meaningless war mark our bodies.”

For so many communities on this planet, hasn’t the apocalypse already come? Parker says, “We are living in the midst of rain forest burning, the rapid death of species, the growing pollution of the air and water, and new mutations of racism and violence.” For so many of the earth’s creatures, hasn’t the apocalypse already come? She says, “We must relinquish our innocence and see the world as it is.... We must notice the breakdown, sorrow, and legacies of injustice that characterize our current world order. From this place of honesty, we must discover how we can live among the ruins.”

**“Keep open the door of thy heart”**  
by Rev. Howard Thurman

There is a profound ground of unity that is more pertinent and authentic than all the unilateral dimensions of our lives. This, a man discovers when he is able to keep open the door to his heart. This is one’s ultimate responsibility, and it is not dependent on whether the heart of another is kept open for him.

Here is a mystery: if sweeping through the door of my heart there moves continually a genuine love for you, it bypasses all your hate and all your indifference and gets through to you at your center. You are powerless to do anything about it. It is utterly impossible to keep another from loving you. The word that love is stronger than hate and goes beyond death is the great disclosure to one who has found that when he keeps open the door to the heart, it matters not how many doors are closed against him. ■

*From this place of honesty.* Perhaps that is the place we require of humans. Perhaps that is where we must journey.

Our theological theme for this month is atonement. Often we speak about atonement in very personal terms, as an individual process in which I first recognize that I’ve missed my mark, that I’ve let others down and, most significantly, that I’ve hurt someone. Second, I seek out the one I’ve hurt and pronounce some version of the words, “I’m sorry. Will you forgive me?”

We remember the blessings a spiritual practice of atonement yields in our lives, the invitation it extends to us to repair broken relationships, to restore trust, to return to our best selves, to forgive and be forgiven, to know and be known, to love and be loved. We remind ourselves that atonement is an essential practice in managing the conflicts that seem to arise in human communities.

But now I’m wondering what it would mean for human beings to atone for this earth of feverish war, for this earth inflamed with hate. I’m wondering what it would mean for human beings to really, *finally*, atone for slavery and genocide and meaningless war. I’m wondering how that might happen, what that might look like, how one might organize it. I’m wondering how it might change us. I’m coming to believe such atonement is the place we require of humans.

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I feel very strongly that we can be the kind of people who lament and critique racism, sexism, homophobia, heterosexism and environmental injustice—and work to end them. Such work is a form of atonement.

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I want to disclose my fear to you. That is, I want to tell you about a feeling of fear I’ve been experiencing. I think it will help you grasp why I would make the claim that the place we require of humans is a place of atonement. Recently I read *The Great Disruption: Why the Climate Crisis Will Bring on the End of Shopping and the Birth of a New World* by the former head of Greenpeace International, Paul Gilding. Gilding is convinced that we (meaning we inhabitants of earth) have “physically entered a period of great change, a synchronized, related crash of the economy and the ecosystem, with food shortages, climate catastrophes, massive economic change, and global geopolitical instability.”

Most of us have heard such dire scenarios foretold before. Some of us take them seriously. Some of us can’t imagine they could possibly come to pass. I’m often in the latter camp, but Gilding has gotten under my skin. I know there are many who will hear or read this and say, “There’s no cause for fear. This is overstated. It’s overly dramatic, left-wing environmentalist manipulation. It’s anti-corporation, anti-jobs,” etc. On the far political and religious

right there will be those who say, “There is no climate crisis, no related economic crisis; it’s all a hoax; don’t listen to Gilding; burn that book.”

I read the book. I find him more convincing than anyone else I’ve read on the subject. Gilding is not drawing from biased sources which, admittedly, some environmentalists do. He cites decades of studies from a wide range of sources that warn about the coming of this great disruption. He cites the Pentagon’s 2010 Quadrennial Defense

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Review that discusses how climate change will act as “an accelerant of instability or conflict, placing a burden to respond on civilian institutions and militaries around the world.”

We inhabitants of earth are facing immense loss, suffering and struggle in the coming decades, and there is nothing we can do to prevent it. The damage is already done. This is the source of my feeling of fear. For the record, Gilding is quite hopeful about humanity’s capacity to adapt to the great disruption. In fact, he’s so positive that his tone throughout the book is, well, sunny, which often feels at odds with the future he foresees.

What seems very clear to me is that the reason we’re in this predicament is because we have allowed “This earth of feverish war / This earth inflamed with hate / This patch of tongues corroding the earth’s air.” We’ve allowed it. No single person, no single group of people, no single race, culture or nation is to blame. Many have tried to warn us, but in the end, we inhabitants of earth have allowed it. It has all happened on our watch. It strikes me that some form of atonement is necessary.

What would that look like? I’m not



imagining a global high holy day like *Yom Kippur*. I'm not hoping for some global ritual that will atone for all the atrocities of modern human history. I'm not sure that's possible. But I am looking for what is within our sphere of influence—our power—here in this congregation. I am fearful of what may be coming, but I also feel very strongly we can be the kind of people who speak honestly about our history and about how it has led us to where we are now. Speaking with such honesty is a form of atonement.

I feel very strongly that we can be the kind of people who feel and express deep remorse for the violence human beings have visited upon each other and upon the earth, which has led us to where we are now. Feeling and expressing such remorse is a form of atonement.

I feel very strongly that we can be the kind of people who lament and critique racism, sexism, homophobia, heterosexism and environmental injustice—and work to end them. Such work is a form of atonement.

We can be the kind of people who lament and critique and work for an end to economic injustice, an end to this vast divide between the wealthy and the poor across the globe. Such work is a form of atonement.

We cannot atone for all the violence and oppression of the modern age; we don't have that kind of power. But we do have power. We can be the kind of people who use our lives to proclaim, "It is time for a new way of being on this earth." Such proclaiming is a form of atonement.

We can be the kind of people who do everything in our power to build beloved community, among ourselves, and in the wider world. Such building is a form of atonement.

We can be the kind of people who, in the words of Howard Thurman, keep open the doors of our hearts, recognizing that love "is the very essence of the vitality of being," recognizing the "great disclosure" that "love is stronger than hate and goes beyond death." Such recognition and such open-heartedness are a form of atonement. Bringing such love to bear in the world is a form of atonement.

We can be the kind of people who do everything in our power to heal this earth of feverish war, this earth inflamed with hate. Such healing is a form of atonement.

We have it within ourselves to be this kind of people. If we want to do what is within our power to help humanity and the earth meet the challenges that lay ahead, to adapt to the radical changes that lie on the horizon, then we must journey to the place required of humans. We must journey to that honest, remorseful, lamenting, critiquing, proclaiming, beloved community-building, open-hearted, healing, loving place.

I'm still not entirely sure about what the journey looks like, but I want to go there. I want us to go there. May we go. May we be and may we become that kind of people. ■

## Jerusalem

BY NAOMI SHIHAB NYE

*"Let's be the same wound if we must bleed.  
Let's fight side by side, even if the enemy  
is ourselves: I am yours, you are mine."  
—Tommy Olofsson, Sweden*

I'm not interested in  
Who suffered the most.  
I'm interested in  
People getting over it.

Once when my father was a boy  
A stone hit him on the head.  
Hair would never grow there.  
Our fingers found the tender spot  
and its riddle: the boy who has fallen  
stands up. A bucket of pears  
in his mother's doorway welcomes him home.  
The pears are not crying.  
Later his friend who threw the stone  
says he was aiming at a bird.  
And my father starts growing wings.

Each carries a tender spot:  
something our lives forgot to give us.  
A man builds a house and says,  
"I am native now."  
A woman speaks to a tree in place  
of her son. And olives come.  
A child's poem says,  
"I don't like wars,  
they end up with monuments."  
He's painting a bird with wings  
wide enough to cover two roofs at once.

Why are we so monumentally slow?  
Soldiers stalk a pharmacy:  
big guns, little pills.  
If you tilt your head just slightly  
it's ridiculous.

There's a place in my brain  
where hate won't grow.  
I touch its riddle: wind, and seeds.  
Something pokes us as we sleep.

It's late but everything comes next.

*by Naomi Shihab Nye, from 19 Varieties of Gazelle,  
published by Greenwillow, HarperCollins in 2002.  
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## From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY  
SENIOR MINISTER,  
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What, I ask myself, does it take to live in at-one-ment? I can imagine the road I need to travel from where I am now to a place of living in at-one-ment with myself, with my friends and family, with my neighbors, with the world... And then the spots where I need to turn toward some different course of action or practice tell me what atonement looks like in my life right now.

As I've reflected on it, the road to at-one-ment isn't a complicated or obscure path. It's just that lots of other stuff gets in our way! Here are three obstacles that I have encountered, and three tips for getting back onto the road.

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**The road to at-one-ment isn't a complicated or obscure path. It's just that lots of other stuff gets in our way!**

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One major roadblock is **keeping secrets**. Secrets often lead to dangerous driving and complex detours, some of which become elaborate superhighway systems all their own—but none of those roads lead to at-one-ment. Secrets are often accompanied by lies to cover up the secret. Even if we're not outright lying, we fret about who might know, and build complex mechanisms in order to not know what we ourselves know or fear about the secret.

I know a woman who feared that her husband was secretly gay. She and her husband never talked about this—never. One day the woman's mother said, "I really *need* to talk to you about something." The woman responded, "If it's about that thing I think it is, I will *never* talk to you about that."

This woman was so preoccupied with her secret that every road sign she passed said, "BEWARE, SECRET!" rather than pointing to the natural wonders along the way, or even telling her where to find food and fuel. (All of this was long ago, and the fact that the woman told me this story indicates healing that has long since happened.)

If you feel as if you're surrounded on all sides by a big secret, the way back on the road is to tell someone. It may start with telling yourself, if it is truly not safe to tell anyone else. It may be God. It may be going to a website like [sixbillionsecrets.com](http://sixbillionsecrets.com). Ideally, you will trust another human being to stand by you, no matter what you tell them. Get back on the road—tell someone!

A second major obstacle that keeps us off the path to at-one-ment is **shame**. Whereas secrets cause us to be constantly scanning the environment for signs of danger, shame takes us off the road and right down into the deepest abyss, that place where we know that we are bad, sick or wrong. Shame doesn't say "maybe" to our fundamental wrongness; it declares it with vehemence that can be mistaken for clarity. Recovering from shame is not an easy or a quick process. I recommend Brené Brown's TedTalk on the topic, or her book, *I Thought It Was Just Me (but it isn't)*.

Shame is a big part not only of our relationships with ourselves, but also with those around us. It's hard to look anyone else in the eye when we can't look in the mirror. I am convinced that it is a major piece of how oppression works in most cultures. "White guilt" is probably a healthy response for white people to have both about unearned privilege and about the history of violence we inherit along with the family silver. It might lead to being more conscious and deliberate about how we use that privilege, which in turn would keep us on the road to at-one-ment. Shame, on the other hand, tells us that who we are is so bad that

we don't dare let ourselves know about it. It is an impediment to change and to consciousness.

For me, the first step towards freedom from shame is to wonder, "Is this shame I am feeling?" Ask yourself, when the world feels tarry and hopeless, when you feel as if no one will ever forgive you for the stupid thing you did (or you won't forgive yourself), when the more people tell you you're wonderful, the more you feel like a fraud. Asking yourself that question—"Is this shame I am feeling?"—is the first step towards defining shame as a feeling, not a reality, the first step out of the abyss and back onto the road to at-one-ment.

A third obstacle on that path is **addiction**. No route can lead to at-one-ment with addiction in the car, because addiction will never ride in the passenger's seat. (That's how you know it's addiction.) It is that 12-year-old who shoves over the responsible adult and insists on driving. Addiction is so seductive that it becomes the whole road, car, and sense of self—while we tell ourselves it's just a little suitcase in the trunk. Overcoming addiction is a one-step-at-a-time, day by day, focus. It involves telling secrets, overcoming shame, and a heap of other stuff.

When secrets, shame or addiction are taking up all the air inside the car, it can be hard to even remember where you were hoping to travel. But the road to at-one-ment is always there, even if we can't always see it. Spiritual community helps us with this—to be among companions who shout out when they see potholes or avalanches ahead, who help us find practices that restore us to center,



with a chance to remember who we are. May we be on that road together!



## REsources for Living

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

Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, may be the source of one of the most...um...surprising religious traditions I know of. Surprising, as in a nice way of saying downright strange. Although only a few Orthodox Jews do it any more, it is traditional on Yom Kippur to do *kapporot*. And what is *kapporot*, you might well ask? Well, basically it's swinging a live chicken around over your head. Which I imagine is pretty exciting, for the person as well as for the chicken.

Like most curious religious practices, there is an explanation for this funky chicken. The book of Leviticus talks about the High Priest making himself ritually pure, and then making a sacrifice of a bull



as a blood offering for his sins and the sins of his family. Then he would take two goats, and basically draw straws

to see which goat would be killed and brought to the Temple as payment for the sins of Israel. The priest would ritually place the sins of the community on the head of the other goat (the scapegoat) and send it off into the wilderness. Or shove it off a cliff, depending on which version you read.

OK, that still sounds pretty funky. Most of us don't believe that we can pay for our sins by making animal sacrifices. Really, since the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem nearly 2000 years ago, the Jews don't either. And you'd have a hard time finding anyone around these days who thought that you could make up for the sins of a community by dumping them on an innocent goat



and sending it away. Except...scapegoats are still very much around. Now we use

the term metaphorically, to talk about people who get blamed for problems that really belong to the larger community. Maybe we blame people on welfare for dragging down the economy by not doing the work, or rich people for dragging down the economy by not paying their share of taxes. Maybe we blame undocumented immigrants for taking jobs that should go to citizens or gay people for destroying the sacred institution of marriage or people who drive big vehicles for causing climate change. We humans seem to be generally happy to find someone else to carry the blame for the problems of our society.

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...the process of atonement is not complete without some form of giving...

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And maybe none of those groups is completely innocent of the things they're blamed for. But the reality is that none of us is totally innocent. All of us have taken more than we needed or given less than we could have managed. All of us could have worked harder or been kinder or cared more for those who needed our compassion.

And that's why, even if we have no intention of swinging chickens or banishing goats, it makes all the sense in the world to have a time of atonement, a time to recognize that we each hold some responsibility for the ways our communities, small and large, fall short of their potential.

Of course, the whole idea of having to pay or sacrifice for your failings is pretty foreign to us religious liberals. We generally prefer to talk about atonement as *at-one-ment*, as restoring connection, or coming to peace, or offering forgiveness. But maybe there's something to be said for this old-fashioned notion of sacrifice. At least for those of us who have

enough and more than enough, maybe it's not a bad thing to stop for a moment and think about how we take more than we need. Maybe we drain the earth's resources by the reckless use of power and water, and by the creation of waste. Maybe we gain unfairly through privileges of race or class. Maybe we take advantage of the kindness of our friends or family members, without an equal effort to give back to the people closest to us.

In her sermon in this issue, Marti Keller talks about the Days of Turning before Yom Kippur, when Jews are expected to make things right in all their relationships as they look toward the Day of Atonement. That is one piece of the process of atonement that belongs to the holiday, along with prayers for forgiveness that are part of the holiday itself. But there's one more part of the requirements for the Days of Turning that lead into Yom Kippur that we tend to forget about.

In Hebrew it's called *tzedakah*. In English we might call it charity, or giving, but *tzedakah* is actually something a little closer to the old notion of making a sacrifice. Charity implies that we give out of kindness or generosity. *Tzedakah* implies that we give because we owe it to the world, because we understand that nothing, ultimately, belongs to us. Our lives, and everything we enjoy, are gifts. We give back, not just because it's a nice thing to do, but rather because we cannot be truly religious people without making our fair contribution back to the larger whole.

That chicken which is swung around for *kapporot* is then given to the poor. The more modern version is to put some money in a handkerchief and swing it around over your head instead, before giving it to some good cause. I expect you could do the same thing with a checkbook. But one way or another, the process of atonement is not complete without some form of giving, of sacrifice, of tangibly remembering our obligation to the world in which we are privileged to live. ■



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## Pillar of Salt (Excerpt)

by **Alla Renée Bozarth**

. . . Speak out the paralyzing secret  
and begin to come back to yourself.  
Cry it out to compassionate ears  
and be held in the hearts of your witnesses.

The truth shall make you free  
but first it will shatter you.  
What was broken can be mended,  
what was lost, restored.  
Find yourself, then,  
pure and whole, a child of God.  
Look back long enough to let go.

*From Accidental Wisdom  
by Alla Renée Bozarth, iUniverse 2003.■*





