

Repairing  
Rev. Carol Allman-Morton  
October 15, 2016  
UUMSB

Our Jewish cousins just celebrated Rosh Hashanah, new year and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, a day of fasting, making amends and repairing relationships. The Torah portion, the text read on Yom Kippur, is from Leviticus, telling the story of keeping the fast and of sacrifice. There is also a *haftorah*, or reading from the prophets, and in most congregations that is a passage from Isaiah chapters 57 and 58. Writer and Reform Rabbi Arthur Waskow says that he always reads this part of Isaiah on Yom Kippur. Within the Hebrew Bible itself, this passage is a commentary on the practice of fasting, pushing people to look beyond liturgy and tradition to seek new understandings. Rabbi Waskow imagines Isaiah preaching this prophecy on Yom Kipper and writes, “The whole rhythm of Isaiah’s speech is to move from ecstatic "religiosity" to concrete acts of loving-kindness, and then through this connection with the humble and humiliated to reestablish connection with the Infinite.”<sup>1</sup> In the passage the people have been fasting and don't understand why things are not better. They ask God why and God says that she is not looking for their fasting. God says:

Is not *this* the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

*Then* your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. *Then* you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and [s]he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, *then* your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.<sup>2</sup>

This is *tikkun olam*, repairing the world through our actions together. Building a beloved community on earth, and in a Unitarian Universalist understanding, through working to build a justice centered community and world, we honor the spirit in each of us, and in the universe. For those who believe in a force of good or God in all things, it is this beloved community we strive toward.

Looking back in our own theology and history, we can find the work of Hosea Ballou, a Universalist minister and theologian who wrote *A Treatise on Atonement* in 1805. Ballou lived in

---

1 [HTTP://theshalomcenter.org/content/isaiah-breaks-official-liturgy-yom-kippur](http://theshalomcenter.org/content/isaiah-breaks-official-liturgy-yom-kippur)

2 Isaiah 58:6 – 12, NRSV

the second generation of Universalist ministers. He started as a circuit riding preacher in rural Vermont, eventually settling as a minister first in Portsmouth, New Hampshire and then in Boston for 35 years. Ballou was an Ultra-Universalist, which meant that he believed that all people were saved, no matter what, and he came to this conclusion through applying reason to the Bible and tradition. The historian Ernest Cassara explains,

As finite creatures, [Ballou] argued, human beings are incapable of offending an infinite God. ...It is not God who must be reconciled to human beings, but human beings who must be reconciled to God. Ballou was convinced that once people realized this, they would take pleasure in living a moral life and doing good works.<sup>3</sup>

At the end of *A Treatise on Atonement*, Ballou concludes:

I look with strong expectation for that period when all sin and every degree of unreconciliation will be destroyed by the divine power of that love which is stronger than death, which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown; in which alone I put my trust, and in which my hope is anchored for all [hu]mankind; earnestly praying, that the desire o the righteous may not be cut off...<sup>4</sup>

Ballou wrote in a Calvinist culture saying to those who believed in predestination and salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ, that like Isaiah, the way that we get closer to the divine, the way to reconciliation, is through our choices, actions, and aid to humanity. It is through our work for justice, compassion, and connection with others that we get closer to that power in the universe that connects us all.

Rev. Dr. William Barber uses the repairing passage from Isaiah as a focus for his organization “Repairers of the Breach.” They are the organizers of the coalition who brought a Moral Declaration to 30 state houses last month - a non-partisan call to action - that includes tenants like equality in education, healthcare for all, criminal justice reform, economic liberation for all people, and equal protection under the law. Many of our congregations, and our Unitarian Universalist Association are working as part of this coalition. Rev. Barber's book, *The Third Reconstruction*, is our UUA common read for the year and our UUMSB Social Justice Book Group will be discussing it in coming months. The Moral Declaration movement is working to motivate people to express their religious and moral ideas in the political sphere. They are working to change the equation in the popular imagination that religious means conservative, and voting our morals means conservative theology. They are working to reclaim religious language and identity and fundamentally what it means to be moral, in the public square. Within the coalition, there are a wide variety of theologies, from Evangelical Christian to Unitarian Universalist and Jewish, to atheist, *and* the partners all agree on the call to justice and care for those who are marginalized. They have called for Moral Declaration worship weekends this weekend and November 4-6.

In about three weeks, we will be voting as a country to choose our next president, and there will be many other decisions and choices to make through Senate and House of Representative elections and ballot measures. We are bombarded by news, speculation, polling, and advertisements about the candidates. Because of the personalities and identities of some

---

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Cassara, “Hosea Ballou” <http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/hoseaballou.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.danielharper.org/treatise.htm>

individuals running, much of the coverage is challenging to watch. Especially in the last year, there has been a sense that racist, sexist, and xenophobic speech is a political position rather than hate speech, or something to be challenged. And to be clear, I don't just mean Donald Trump. There are politicians all over the country who are saying things on air that before they may have only said when they thought the microphones weren't on. The vitriol has brought more racist and sexist talk and behavior out of the shadows. People of color in the United States continue to struggle to receive equal protection under the law, and with violence done to them by the institutions that are supposed to protect them. People of color in the Berkshires continue to struggle with issues of justice, respect and safety in our community. This year has been particularly hard on many of our children in school because so many people feel emboldened to speak the unspeakable. Many of our community members who work for justice and to protect those who are marginalized, are *exhausted*. We have much reconciliation to do to build a community that respects the inherent worth and dignity of each person, where there is peace, liberty and justice for all, where there is justice, equity and compassion in human relations.

Some suggest that big changes are the best way forward, some say that we get to the big changes through the small ones. Both are true. We need small changes: education, compassion, justice acting in community, and we need need big changes like criminal justice reform, dismantling patriarchy and racism, and global movements for peace. We need repair and reconciliation. I have often quoted from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's speech, "Don't Sleep Through the Revolution" given at the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly in 1966. He said:

It may be true that morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. It may be true that the law cannot change the heart, but it can restrain the heartless. The law cannot make a man love me, but it can restrain him from lynching me, and I think that's pretty important also. And so while the law may not change the hearts of men, it does change the habits of men. So it is necessary for the church to support strong, meaningful civil rights legislation.<sup>5</sup>

Voting doesn't always feel like doing much for repairing the world, but it *is* a fundamental part of building laws that restrain the heartless and regulate behavior. This year, of all years, when many state and local governments have restricted access to voting for marginalized people with physical or economic barriers to getting to the polls, if you are eligible, please vote. Search your heart, use your reason, look to your center, and vote.

No one person, or government, or politician, or prophet will repair and reconcile the world. That work is in our collective hands. As Unitarian Universalists, we have the opportunity at a national level to be part of movement to build coalitions of people who have very different theologies, but who seek justice and want to work together. *That* my friends is reconciliation. That is the power of finding ways to work together while holding different identities and beliefs. That is how we move forward together.

So may it be. Amen.

---

5 1966 Ware Lecture: Don't Sleep Through the Revolution, by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Delivered by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly, Hollywood, Florida, May 18, 1966