

Linda Simmons  
Shabbat Service  
Shirat Ha Yam  
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Thank you so much for having me here at this sacred time in your lives. I am humbled by the invitation to stand before you.

I am not a scholar of Judaism and yet Judaism has long touched my soul. My limited understanding of what this time of high holy days signifies, calls me. Many of us in the UU congregation have decided to join you in fasting on the 13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> in an effort to open ourselves to the healing and reconciliation of these days.

I have read and prayed with the texts defining these holy days until one night, I dreamed I was standing in a pool of water. It was a pond really but the water was intensely clear. When I looked into it, I could see myself perfectly, clearly, and not just the outside of myself, my mirror reflection, but I could see my insides too, my veins and organs and blood flowing. I turned away with horror at first. I don't want to know how all that works, I cried. I could see my heart beating and it looked so terribly fragile, so impossibly tender that the knowledge of the fragility of life could not be pretended or pushed away with business and consumption of the thousand things we keep ourselves busy with in part to avoid our mortality, our temporariness.

In that pool, I could not turn away. There was only seeing. Slowly, I was able to stop running my hand over the water wildly to disturb the reflection. I was able to stand still and just watch the image of life- my life- pulse around me.

This dream built a bridge between your holy days and Unitarian Universalism for me. I enter so briefly into this sacred time and do not wish to pronounce that I understand anything at all. And yet, these holy days call us all, I believe, toward recognition, and recognition calls us all toward two things I think: love and reparation.

For us as UUs, we believe in love as a force as strong as God. We believe love is God. And we hold true that all of us are equally deserving of that love, that our inherent worth and dignity is a channel upon which that love can flow. This does not mean we think we are always good, just that we always have the capacity for goodness, are wired for goodness, so to speak, and have an inherent right to fulfill that goodness within us.

The book of life, what I know about it, is something we believe we are always written in, every year. How we live into that responsibility and privilege is where our work comes in.

Not whether we were good enough to be entered in that holy ledger but rather whether we took our entry into that ledger seriously enough to do what is asked of us as human beings who are loved and worthy of love.

Part of what is asked, part of what has to be asked, is that we reflect on how we have lived into our commitments as Unitarian Universalists to uphold decency, justice, hope, personal integrity, love in our personal and our public relationships and love for ourselves too.

All of this without reflection could become a narcissism. The pool of my dreams could have easily entranced me with the beauty of being one worthy of love as with the fragility and responsibility of being one worthy of love.

As Unitarian Universalists we look into this pool and we recognize the utter tenderness of our humanity and therefore the humanity of all others and this tenderness then demands of us a response.

These High Holy Days ask of all of us to assess how we managed those responses. Imagining ourselves worthy of being written into the book of life carries enormous responsibility and demands the courage to look into the face of this, to look into our own faces and assess who we are and have been, how we have carried the honor of love, how we have carried the privilege of our humanity.

There is another part of the high holy days that moves me. The need to make amends. I think there is too little focus on this in many other religions, including our own. There is talk of what we did wrong or are not doing right, how we have failed each other and ourselves even but talk of how to repair that brokenness or perhaps how to live into the brokenness and do the work it calls us to do, that kind of talk is not common.

Your Holy Days lift up to me the need to pause, to reflect, to empty ourselves too of what we usually fill ourselves with and account for our lives, first. To notice who we are and how we have walked on this beautiful, fragile, blue earth for this past year. And then to feel that. To really feel what that reflection brings to us, the gifts and burdens of it, without blinders. And then, and then, to make amends. To reach beyond ourselves, our interior worlds and to say, I am sorry, to ask for forgiveness from ourselves for the times we tread upon our own dignity, to ask for understanding for those times our own greed or envy or self centeredness kept us from responding to the needs of our brothers and sisters.

That is the medicine. That is the work. That is the beauty. To ask for forgiveness while knowing our goodness, to ask for forgiveness while knowing our worth, to ask forgiveness while knowing that we are always written into the book of love and then to use that courage, to use that balm, to use that graciousness to give us the courage to live into our own goodness. This is a mighty invitation.

Thank you for asking me to be here. This invitation brought me dreams and lifted me to a new place of accountability to myself, my community and world.

Thank you for the gift of your faith on this earth. Thank you.