



**SMALL GROUP MINISTRY**

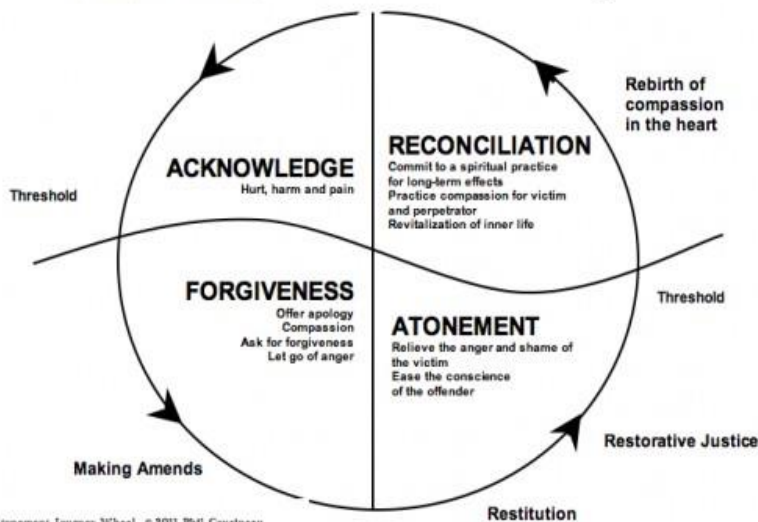
Unitarian Society of  
Germantown

**September 2012 ~ Atonement**

**THE ATONEMENT JOURNEY**

In Search of Deep Reconciliation  
~Inspired by The Hero's Journey~

*beyond  
forgiveness*



**The Spiritual Exercises can be found at the beginning of the Additional Resources.**

**Chalice  
Lighting**  
~ Arun Gandhi,  
grandson of  
Mohandas  
Ghandi

Forgiveness without atonement is worthless just as atonement without forgiving means very little. But equally, atonement has a double meaning—changing one’s self, and changing the issues created by others that create the conflict.

**Check-in**

*Share briefly what’s been on your mind lately or your highs and lows since we last met.*

**Reading**

~ *Beyond  
Forgiveness,*  
p106

Arun Gandhi [shares] how his grandfather had a life-long fascination with what we call today “self-improvement,” but complemented it with an interest in raising the consciousness in society about the ways in which “each of us contributes to conflict.” As many of our great spiritual leaders throughout history have taught, the only way to break destructive habits is through a life of self-awareness. In this sense the often maligned description of “self-improvement” doesn’t suggest that the old Puritan ethic of constant progress of the ego, but in improving our awareness of where the self belongs in the world, and its relationship to the community. For that sense of self to improve, a different kind of honesty and a different practice is required, one based on compassionate living, which is rooted in understanding that everyone is human, everyone makes mistakes, everyone longs for forgiveness and atonement.

**Sitting in  
Silence**

**Sharing/Deep  
Listening**

1. Share your experience with the Spiritual Exercise(s.)
2. Does our first UU Principle impact your feelings about the value of atonement? (The Principle and Source are on the cover page of this Order of service.)
3. In keeping with our fourth UU Source, we acknowledge Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur when Jews admit to their sins, ask for forgiveness, and resolve not to repeat the sins. (Continued next page.)

3. (Continued) What is your experience with this spiritual practice?
4. Can you recall an incident where you committed a transgression that made you feel guilty? Can you recall how you handled it?
5. Have you ever forgiven someone you love: a parent, lover, spouse, friend? Has someone you love ever forgiven you?
6. Have you ever followed up an acceptance of an offer for amends or made amends yourself? Have you ever "proved" your remorse with a real act? Has another proven their remorse to you?

**Reflection**

*This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared.*

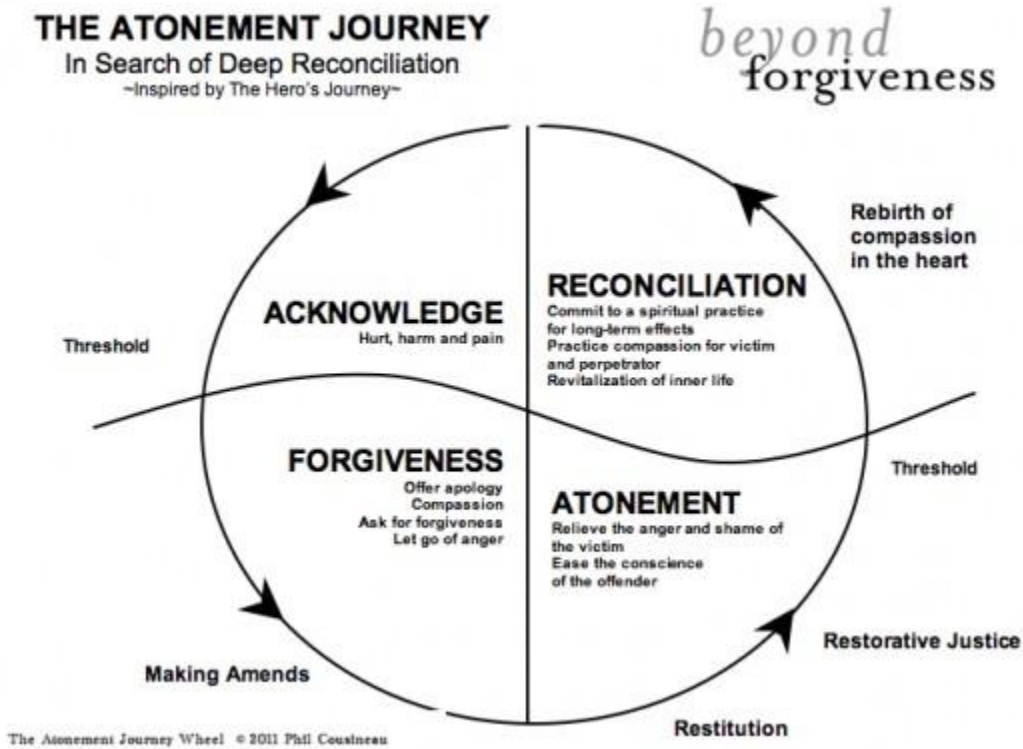
**Singing  
~ 123  
Singing the  
Living  
Tradition,  
Spirit of Life**

Spirit of life, come unto me.  
Sing in my heart, all the stirrings of compassion.  
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea; move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.  
Roots hold me close, wings set me free.  
Spirit of life, come to me, come to me.

**Extinguishing  
the Chalice  
~Affirmations  
from *Beyond  
Forgiveness***

**I am** the change I wish to see in the world.  
**I am** alert to my acts of passive violence that might lead to acts of physical violence. **I affirm** the need to douse the fire of violence in me.  
**I let go** fear because it spawns negative feelings, such as greed, hate, prejudice, and lack of respect for others. **I look** at my talents and gifts "in the Gandhian way," which means that I am only a "trustee" of those talents, and so I must share them with others. **I practice** atonement "the Gandhian way" by first getting rid of hate within myself and then by helping society see the futility of hate and prejudice.

## Spiritual Exercises and Additional Resources



*"Atonement is a journey of healing that moves from the pain between a victim and an oppressor, through forgiveness, the making of amends, the relief of anger and compassion for the victim, to deep reconciliation."*

"Life seems like a circle," said Vincent Van Gogh, and many other artists, writers and spiritual leaders have alluded to the cyclical nature of our existence. One such social commentator was the mythologist and my mentor, Joseph Campbell, who invented the idea—and the image—of the hero's journey as a *counterclockwise* movement, the adventure of self-knowledge going against the grain, against the wind, against conventional thinking and ordinary living.

For Campbell, the journey was a *model of psychological or spiritual transformation*, following the traditional stages of the rite of passage. Campbell's innovative idea has proven to be one of the most influential ideas in modern times for Hollywood filmmakers, psychologists, artists, business leaders, and even athletic coaches.

As illustrated here, *The Atonement Journey* follows the very same three-stage structure, with similar emphasis on illuminating the *transformative* experience of embarking on an adventure of self-knowledge. This wheel follows the journey of reconciliation, from the first **Acknowledgment** of wrongdoing, through stages of **Denial**, **Blamesaying**, **Allies**, **Dark Night of the Soul**, **Amends-making**, **Restitution**, **Restorative Justice**, **Reconciliation**, and finally to the last stage, which is making the long-term commitment to making through various **Practices**, such as mediation, prayer, or social justice work.

### Spiritual Practice 1:

If you're ready for the journey of forgiveness and atonement, begin by answering this simple question: "Where am I on this journey?" Are you at the beginning, acknowledging that someone has harmed you, or you have hurt someone else? Are you moving through the denial stage, or seeking mentors? Are you at the resolving stage where you have decided to make amends, compensation, or restitution, or accept someone else's offer to

make peace with you? Or you at the last part of the journey where you must now incorporate all these changes and practices into your everyday life?

I recommend that you use a pencil or marker and describe or sketch in a notebook more about where you are on the journey, and then follow up with a five-minute writing exercise answering the following questions:

- What does it feel like to see your life as a journey? Does it help to see it *in the round*?
- If you're not there now, where would you like to be on this journey?
- Do you want to forgive but can't? Would you like to make amends but can't?

Would you like to move beyond forgiveness into a lifelong discipline of peace, well-being and reconciliation so that you are finally living an evolved, well-lived, and compassionate life?

### **Nightly Prayer Practice (Spiritual Practice 2)**

One of the constants in well-examined life is the belief that there is no time to wait, no time to put off the deeper questions of the soul. **Mohandas Gandhi** advised his grandson **Arun** to "build a genealogical tree of violence," which included two branches, physical and passive." (Refer to page 110 in *Beyond Forgiveness*.) Every day, he advised, we should analyze all the events of the day and put them into their appropriate places on the tree. The standard was that if any of our actions "Caused someone anguish or emotional injury, or made someone unhappy, than that would be passive violence." Consider creating your own nightly list of acts of passive violence – and then create a parallel list of actions that might make amends for them.

With these simple but provocative and potentially cleansing questions in mind it is now helpful both for a good night's sleep and a clean conscience. Eventually, with practice, forgiveness can become a way of life, and not allow anger and resentment to fester and become a kind of soul rust.

The Spiritual Exercises, Affirmations and Resolutions are from *Beyond Forgiveness: Reflections on Atonement Healing the Past, Making Amends and Restoring Balance in Our Lives and World* by Phil Cousineau and information from it found on [reflectionsonatonement.com](http://reflectionsonatonement.com)

**a·tone·ment**  (ə-*tōn* m<sup>ə</sup>nt)

*n.*

**1.** Amends or reparation made for an injury or wrong; expiation.

**2.**

**a.** Reconciliation or an instance of reconciliation between God and humans.

**b. Atonement** *Christianity* The reconciliation of God and humans brought about by the redemptive life and death of Jesus.

~ from dictionary.com

### **From ehow.com**

When you have hurt another person emotionally, you might question whether you can ever be forgiven. Although in some cases the answer is no, in many cases, you can be forgiven and continue the relationship. However, before you can be forgiven, you will need to atone for what you have done. The other person needs for you to understand the damage that your actions caused before he will be able to forgive you. Here is how to be forgiven.

1 Recognize how harmful your actions were. Until you see the damage that your choices inflicted upon another person's life, you are unlikely to be forgiven. The person you wronged needs you to recognize how devastating your actions were, including all of the damage that resulted from your bad choices.

2 Feel remorse for what you have done. To be forgiven, you must first feel badly about the damage you caused. You must feel deep regret for harming the people who trusted you.

3 Take responsibility for what you have done. Let go of the excuses. Even if you had numerous "good reasons" for making the choices that you did, your actions still harmed the other person. Take responsibility for this. Saying, "I was wrong," can go a long way toward being forgiven.

4 Decide never to make a similar bad choice again. Make a life decision that, if you find yourself in a similar situation in the future, you will make a different choice.

5 Make amends for the wrong you have done. Make restitution for any financial losses that your actions caused. If the person you harmed is struggling emotionally, pay for that person to enter into therapy. Go to counseling with the other person if the person you harmed requests it. Do whatever you can to "right the wrong."

6 Ask for forgiveness. Tell the person you harmed that you are truly sorry for the choices that you made. Then, ask that person what you can do to be forgiven.

7 Forgive yourself. A relationship is not going to work if you are continually beating yourself up. Once you have taken responsibility for your bad choices and have done what you can to provide restitution, your penance needs to end. Choose to let go of beating yourself up for past bad choices and, instead, focus on making better choices in the future.

### **Without sacrifices how do we atone for our sins? by Rabbi Shalom Hazan**

There is a widespread misconception that merely offering a sacrifice attains atonement for sin. As will become evident, this is not the true Jewish Torah-view.

The primary aspect of atonement was, and still is, Teshuvah: regretting and correcting (to the extent possible) the actual wrongdoing.

No matter the punishment or sacrifice, the sin is not atoned until the person first does Teshuvah: regretting his action, resolving never to repeat it, and confessing (i.e. asking forgiveness for) his sin before G-d. Only after these conditions are met, is the sacrifice accepted as an offering on the altar in the Temple, bringing an *additional* level of atonement.

The sin is not atoned until the person regrets his action, resolving never to repeat it and confesses his sin

That is why one who sins is commanded<sup>1</sup> to repent and to confess his sin. Those who are required to bring a sacrifice for their sin, must also confess their sin at that time.<sup>2</sup> The requirement of repentance and confession also applied to anyone who received punishment from a Jewish court of law (such as corporeal or capital punishment), as well as to any interpersonal sin, i.e. one committed by man against man (e.g. damaging a person or his property).

Thus even when there is no Temple - may it be rebuilt speedily in our days - there still is Teshuvah, repentance. Teshuvah atones for all sins no matter how grave they may be. Even one who sinned his entire life and repented at the last moment is forgiven and his sins are not mentioned during the Day of Judgment.<sup>3</sup>

#### Footnotes

[1.](#) Numbers 5:6-7

[2.](#) Leviticus 5:5

[3.](#) Ezekiel 33:12; Maimonides, Laws of Repentance 1:3