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 Arlington Street Church  
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### **Ally-Ally-In-Free!**

“Through the long summer and [now] into the autumn ... night after night, ... the neighborhood children play hide and seek: [s]treaming out into the gray twilight as soon as the dishes are cleared from [their dinner tables; [g]athering in the street, ... quickly [dividing] into hidiers and [seekers]; and [fanning] out behind the garages and backyards that encircle the steps that represent home base.

“In the dark,” writes the Boston Globe's Linda Weltner, “... I would often see the small figures sneaking past our wall, their bodies tense and ready for the long sprint to [home].

“[Much later, as they returned from the game,] ... radiant with the glory of [the] late [hour] and a star-studded sky, [I'd] call out, 'How'd you do?' [The reply was victorious:] 'I got home safe.'”<sup>1</sup>

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Ally-Ally-In-Free! Welcome home, seekers!

We're here; we're seekers. I'd venture that we're also hidiers. Just sometimes.

Have you been hiding? From what?

In the game of Hide and Seek, we hide from *It*. What is *It*? It is what we fear – big things, like suffering and dying; and smaller things that feel big, like the pain of not being seen or valued or loved. We hide from our failures, especially the failure to be the best we can be. We hide, safe with our lies and secrets and silence, our fear and anger and jealousy and pride and our lack of forgiveness.

We hide from love, from the way love takes us and shakes us out of our comfort zone, settling for less than love demands of us, settling for less than love offers us. We

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<sup>1</sup> Please see [frjakestoptheworld.blogspot.com/2004/04/alleluia-christ-is-risen.html](http://frjakestoptheworld.blogspot.com/2004/04/alleluia-christ-is-risen.html)

end up in our hiding place in the oblivion of denial, choosing loneliness over vulnerability, all alone. And the deeper and darker the hiding place, the better.

Not.

The hiding place is not safe. Time to face *It* ... together. Time to come home free.

This is from spiritual activist Marianne Williamson:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, ... talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you *not* to be?’” Marianne Williamson continues, “You are a child of G\*d. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of G\*d that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”<sup>2</sup>

We are a community of seekers. We are a tribe of spiritual warriors, with our open hearts against the world. On Sunday mornings, we sprint for home – this sanctuary, our place of refuge and renewal. Here, we renew our courage and devotion, remembering, as Alice Walker says, that courage can be another name for love. Here, we drink deep from the well of our spiritual home base. Then the service ends, and the service begins. We go forth into the world, and let it shine!

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We find ourselves today in the midst of the Jewish High Holy Days, and the New Year. As always, I want to share a brief reflection about *teshuvah*, the Jewish concept of repentance and atonement.

Judaism instructs the faithful to strive to enter the new year with a clean slate. In these sanctified days, they seek out anyone and everyone whom they might have hurt, even in some small way; ask for forgiveness; and seek to make amends. This is *teshuvah*, a brave and extraordinarily healing spiritual practice. According to the Talmud, which is the rabbinic commentary – I love this – repentance was among the first things G\*d

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<sup>2</sup> Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love*, pp. 190-191

created, even before creating the physical universe.<sup>3</sup> In other words, both making mistakes and a way to correct those mistakes was in the grand plan.

This year marks the two hundredth anniversary of Reform Judaism. In July, my friend and colleague, Rabbi Howard Berman, traveled with a delegation of rabbis to Germany, where they conducted a service at the Hamburg Temple. The Hamburg Temple, which once housed the congregation regarded as the “Mother of World Wide Reform Judaism” is the original 1931 building of the first Reform Congregation of 1818, and the only synagogue in Germany that survived World War II. Because it was then new and modern, rather than smashing or burning it to the ground, the Nazis took it over as the German National Radio Station, which it remains, today. So this summer's bicentennial service, in what had once been the magnificent sanctuary of the Hamburg Temple, was actually the first Jewish worship service in that holy place since Kristallnacht, the night of November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1938, when all the other synagogues of Germany – all two hundred and sixty seven of them<sup>4</sup> – were destroyed.<sup>5</sup>

Obviously, there is no atoning for the sins of Nazi Germany. But I am deeply moved that Howard Berman and his colleagues, representing those who were murdered and all that was lost in the genocide, stepped forward in this profound gesture of re-sanctifying the sanctuary, a gesture of making whole that which had been shattered. Even when there's no righting the wrong, we are well served by taking to higher ground, symbolically releasing the past, so that we may go free.

According to *The Gates of Repentance*, a tome of Jewish ethics, a person can be forgiven if they perform *teshuvah*, which includes regretting, acknowledging, understanding, and forsaking the wrong; acting with humility; praying for atonement; righting the wrong, however possible; and teaching others to do likewise. And the scale of *teshuvah* ranges from vast – between nations – to intimate. In their long, loving relationship, our own Gene Navias and Stanley Moss, Gene's former partner of blessed memory, made this a daily practice. Each evening, over dinner, they would check in with each other to be certain that there had been no misunderstanding that could be cleared up with an apology, or some change in behavior.

*Teshuvah* literally means *return*. There's a falling away from our best selves, and a

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3 *Nedarim 39b*

4 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kristallnacht](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kristallnacht)

5 From an e-mail from Rabbi Howard Berman, 7/22/10

return to our best selves: *teshuvah*... which brings us back to Hide and Seek.

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The clarion call of the shofar wakes us up, calling us out of hiding, recalling us to our best selves, calls us home. If you are here today, you have made it home safe. In this beloved community of memory and hope, we renew our covenant to love and serve, to do justice and make peace.

I'm reminded of some lines from a beautiful poem by my colleague, Rev. Lynn Unger. As you listen, think of the fighting and the tyrants as being those parts of ourselves not yet ready to come out of hiding, not yet ready for joy. Think of the temple as your body. Here you go:

Come down from the hills; declare the fighting done.  
Be bold; declare victory even when the temple is wrecked,  
and the tyrants have not retreated,  
only coiled back like a snake, prepared to strike again.

Come down....

Unlearn the years of hiding;  
light fires that can be seen for miles,  
that dance and spark and warm your frozen marrow...

It would take a miracle, you say, to carve such a solid life  
out of this shell of fear.  
I say, "You are the stuff of which such miracles are made."<sup>6</sup>

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Three years ago, not yet fifty years old, singer-songwriter Mary Chapin Carpenter suffered a pulmonary embolism. She cancelled her tour and spent a lot of time hiding from *It*.

She emerged with a beautiful new album, entitled *The Age of Miracles*. In an interview about the title track, she says, "That song is really very much of a straight narrative of what I had been through. The first verse is all about the feeling of terror and retreat and literally hiding away and forgetting how to feel connected to the world, and dreams, [because of] ... all those things that the illness had imposed on me.

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6 Rev. Lynn Unger, *Chaumuka*

“And then the second verse is looking out into the world and seeing all these things, our inability to control the extraordinary power of nature, everything from Katrina to the 40th Anniversary of the Apollo moon mission and asking these questions: If we do live in an age of miracles ... is one on the way?... And if one is on the way, what [is it]?....

“And the last verse ... [is about] that extraordinary week ... when the monks were marching in Burma ... in support of their country[people] against this totalitarian regime, in the rain, in their bare feet.... [T]he world was holding its breath.... [T]he courage, the bravery, the absolute certainty that [the monks] had about what they were doing, ... was enough to shake me out of my stupor. It was enough to make me feel ... there’s so much to be awed by in this world, so much to be inspired by, so much to take comfort from, so much to value. And I wanted to not be hiding and I didn’t want to retreat anymore and I wanted to be able to see that my problems were nothing compared to what I was seeing out in the world and it was absolutely necessary to get up and feel connected again.”<sup>7</sup>

Here's that verse – my favorite lines from the album:

We can fly through space with the greatest of ease  
 We can land in the dust of the moon  
 We can transform our lives with the tap of the keys  
 Still we can't shake this feeling of doom

But I woke to find monks pouring into the streets  
 Marching thousands strong into the rain  
 Now if courage comes dressed in red robes and bare feet  
 I will never be fearful again

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My spiritual companions, courage! And take heart. Here we are, come out from hiding, a gathering of seekers, home safe. Here we are, at the threshold of a new year, and may we give our best selves to it and to one another, returning when we fall short, forgiving and forgiven. Love, service, justice, peace: Ally-ally-in-free! Welcome home.

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<sup>7</sup> Kevin O'Hare, “Mary Chapin Carpenter Talks about the Age of Miracles,” *The Republican*, 6/23/10 [masslive.com/entertainment/index.ssf/2010/06/mary\\_chapin\\_carpenter\\_talks\\_ab.html](http://masslive.com/entertainment/index.ssf/2010/06/mary_chapin_carpenter_talks_ab.html)