

Interfaith Families Project

October 2004 www.iffp.net P.O. Box 5413, Takoma Park, MD 20913 iffp@verizon.net 301-270-6337

FROM THE BOARD

Warren Harding gave "normalcy" a bad name in the 1920's. IFFP has given it a great name this September. Of course, our "normalcy" has nothing to do with the absence of excitement, change, or growth. Indeed, it is full of precisely those things. Anchored by the continuity of Rev. Heather's leadership and the return of almost all of our member families from last year, we already have begun enjoying the energy brought to our ship by new crew members. Rabbi Harold brings the Jewish tradition to our Gatherings in a way that only a distinguished and experienced rabbi could. Rev. Barbara brings energy, creativity, and insight to our religious school, with her vast experience in religious education and exceptional tolerance for the challenges posed by our location. Perhaps the most important new sources of energy and spirit in IFFP are the many new member families who have joined this year and last. We welcome all new member families and look forward to getting together with you at the New Member Breakfast on October 17th.

With the management of IFFP in such capable staff hands, and the continuing involvement of the Executive Committee, the Board has seized the opportunity to devote half of each monthly meeting to issues dealing with the medium-term future of IFFP and the challenges of our growing community. Our continuing oversight role will occupy the other half of our meeting time. At the October board meeting, we will focus on the future use of electronic communications, including the Web, the list serv, and e-mail. We will be examining the opportunities and possibilities, on the one hand, and the privacy and security concerns, on the other. All of these must be considered as we think about future efforts to nourish and sustain this community by the careful use of electronic media. Subsequent discussions will consider the future of the Gatherings, the religious school curriculum, and the facilities in which we gather. None of these discussions is scheduled yet, and we welcome your suggestions for topics deserving of Board attention – topics which allowing us to think about what we would like IFFP to be in two, three, four, maybe five years.

One other topic for discussion will be the need to encourage broader participation in the opportunities offered both for volunteering and leadership. We presently are without a Community Services Coordinator (and I would very much like to hear from you if you might be interested). When we were looking for candidates for the Board of IFFP this past spring, we found fewer people willing to serve than we would have liked. While we have immediate needs, we are particularly concerned about making sure we are organized properly for the future, to encourage full participation in the life of this community, whose spirit and purpose begins and ends with the needs of its members. As we grow and develop, we want to make very certain that active participation in the leadership and organization of the community becomes and remains an important part of the culture of IFFP, as it has always been in the past.

OCTOBER - NOVEMBER 2004

Oct. 17 (Sun.)	National Children's Sabbath* <ul style="list-style-type: none">• New Member Breakfast, 9:00 a.m.• Bagels, 10 a.m.• Gathering, 10:15 a.m.<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Rev. Heather will give the reflection: "Wrestling."- Scripture: Genesis 32:22-32• Sunday School / Adult Group/Yoga, 10:45 a.m.• Class Picnics for Grades 5 & 6, noon	Oct. 22 (Fri.)	Young Couples Potluck location and time to be determined More info on page 3 and in bulletins
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Oct. 23 (Sat.)	IFFP Fall Women's Gathering 9:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. More info on page 3 and in bulletins	Oct. 24 (Sun.)	IFFP Community Service Day More info on page 3 and in bulletins
Oct. 31 (Sun.)	Reformation Sunday* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bagels, 10 a.m. • Gathering, 10:15 a.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rev. Heather will give the reflection: "Here I Stand." - Scripture: John 9 (Jesus heals the man born blind) • Sunday School/Adult Group/Yoga, 10:45 a.m. • Sunday School Class Picnic Rain Date 	Nov. 7 (Sun.)	Meditations on Peace* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Contemplative Service, 9:30 a.m. • Bagels, 10 a.m. • Gathering, 10:15 a.m. • Sunday School/ School/Adult Group/Yoga, 10:45 a.m.

* Notes on Gatherings:

- The October 17th and October 31st Contemplative Services listed on the IFFP calendar have been canceled.
- For information on the National Children's Sabbath, go to the Children's Defense Fund website: <http://www.childrensdefense.org/religiousaction/childrenssabbaths/default.asp>
- Look in the Calendar Notes section below for information on the October 31st and November 7th Gatherings.

CALENDAR NOTES

October 31st, Reformation Sunday

On October 31st, 1517, a young monk named Martin Luther expressed his dissatisfaction with a number of practices of the Catholic Church of his day by nailing a list of 95 grievances to the door of the cathedral in Wittenberg, Germany. Luther's bold act, and his resulting excommunication, were key events that led to the Protestant Reformation. Accordingly, many Protestants celebrate the Sunday nearest October 31st as Reformation Sunday.

Years ago, this Sunday was an occasion not only to remember the history of the Reformation and its great leaders, but also to celebrate Protestant solidarity. A worship service with triumphal hymns and a blistering sermon against Catholic "papists" would be followed by a parade of Protestants through the center of town. Today, many Protestant and Catholic churches use Reformation Sunday as an opportunity to reflect on the causes of division, and to recommit themselves to the work of reconciliation.

Since IFFP is meeting on October 31st this year, I want to introduce our community to this day of commemoration in part to fill in a piece of our history that continues to shape us. But I'm also interested in the tension that exists in the story of this day between "taking a stand" and seeking reconciliation and compromise.

November 7th, Meditations on Peace

The wise members of our Worship Committee have suggested that on November 7th, the Sunday after the Presidential Election, our Gathering should focus on Peace. In the days prior, our lives almost certainly will be filled with words as we talk about the election, either in joy or in grief. We intend to suspend that conversation on the 7th, and instead to make some space for quiet in our lives. There will be no Reflection this week. Instead, our Gathering will include an extended time of meditation and prayer, in silence and quiet song.

- [Heather Kirk-Davidoff](#), Spiritual Director

On November 7th, before our Gathering, IFFP will have its first Contemplative Service. Read the article in the "Get Involved" section on page 4 for a description of this [service](#), which will start at 9:30.

New IFFP Members' Breakfast – Sunday, October 17th at 9:00 a.m.

IFFP invites its new members to a breakfast in their honor at 9:00 Sunday morning, October 17th, before the Gathering. This will be an opportunity to chat informally with others new to our community, as well as some families with a longer history at IFFP, members of the IFFP Board, and Heather Kirk-Davidoff, our Spiritual Director. Each new family will be joined for breakfast by a "mentor family" who will make themselves available throughout the year to answer questions about IFFP. Look for an invitation and more information in your mail. If you have questions, please call or e-mail the office, (301) 270-6337 or iffp@verizon.net.

Do you like good food and good company, but you're not a new member? You can come to the breakfast if you are a [mentor](#) -- read the article starting at the bottom of the page to learn how!

Young Couples' Dinner – Friday, October 22nd

The fourth annual Young Couples' Potluck is scheduled for Friday, October 22nd. This can be either a potluck at a member's home, or a dinner together at a restaurant. Any couple without children who would like to host, organize, and/or attend, please RSVP to the office at (301) 270-6337 or iffp@verizon.net.

First Annual Fall Women's Retreat – Saturday, October 23rd

The Fall Women's Retreat is scheduled for Saturday, October 23rd, from 9:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The theme for the retreat focuses on autumn -- a time of harvest, when we gather in what we have made and what we have been given. The retreat will be facilitated by the same wonderful woman who facilitated the spring retreat. Lunch will be potluck. Following the retreat, there will be an optional dinner at a nearby restaurant. The fee will be \$25 per person (send your check to IFFP in advance, noting that it is for the retreat). For questions, or to RSVP, contact the office at (301) 270-6337 or iffp@verizon.net.

Community Service – Sunday, October 24th

We had a great turn out last year for the Sligo Creek Park Clean-Up. This year's project is another family friendly, all ages, clean-up, this time for a center that serves people with developmental disabilities. This site needs raking, trash pickup, weeding, and other lawn duties. They would be very grateful to have any of us bring plants or flowers to plant (more instructions about this in the bulletins). Please contact me at the office, (301) 270-6337 or iffp@verizon.net, for information on the exact location. We will meet the Center's supervisor at the Center at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday, October 24th, and he will gladly give everyone directions and instructions. Please bring work gloves and any weeding tools that you prefer to use. They'll supply rakes, trash bags, etc. All ages are welcome, but anyone under 12 must be with an adult. Teens, come and bring your community service forms!

If you are planning to participate in this event, please e-mail me, iffp@verizon.net, with the number of adults and children who will be going.

- [Susan Ryder](#), Program Coordinator

GET INVOLVED

IFFP Needs Mentors for New Families

We are very pleased that we have had a steady stream of new members joining IFFP this fall. That means that we are in need of Mentor Families to help welcome our new members into the IFFP community. This involves joining your assigned new family at a [New Members' Breakfast](#) at 9:00 a.m. on Sunday, October 17th, and being available to answer their questions throughout the year. Making an effort to greet them at our Gatherings is another helpful way to make new members feel welcomed. We happen to have quite a few new families with kids in the 6th Grade and COA Prep classes, so we particularly would like mentor families who also have kids in those groups. If you would be willing to provide this little bit of hospitality to one of our new families, please contact Susan in the IFFP office at iffp@verizon.net.

Help Shape Contemplative Services

Last year, we experimented with an "Adult Only" Gathering which we held during an extended Sunday School. While the day presented a number of logistical problems, we did discover that many IFFP adults appreciated a quieter atmosphere for their reflections. Our "Whole Family" Gatherings will continue at IFFP, but we are also interested in exploring ways do to some of the things we can't do when there are so many young folks with us!

One option we are going to explore this Fall is an early-morning "Contemplative Service." Here's what we're going to try: We'll meet in one of the rooms from 9:30 am to 10:00 am. Childcare will be provided during this time, and the service will be aimed at adults. We'll have some time of silence, read some scripture, and perhaps share some reflections together.

We'll have a meeting of anyone interested in shaping this service at 9:30 am on Sunday, October 31st. Then, our first Contemplative Service will be on Sunday, November 7th, at 9:30 am. Everyone is most welcome. For more information, or to share your ideas about what this service might be, speak to Rev. Heather (revhkd@comcast.net).

Would You Like to Give a Reflection This Year?

If you'd like to work with Rev. Heather to compose a reflection for our Gathering based on a scripture passage and your own ideas and experiences, please let her know! Over the years, IFFP has been blessed by some wonderful member reflections, and we'd like to continue that tradition.

- [Heather Kirk-Davidoff](#), Spiritual Director

Join the List Serv

If you have not yet joined the list serv, please do so now, to receive our weekly bulletins and monthly newsletters. You can sign on to the list serv by sending a blank e-mail to iffp-subscribe@topica.com. Send it from the same e-mail that you use for IFFP newsletters (if you haven't given Susan your e-mail address already, do so now). You will receive a confirmation e-mail with instructions to follow to complete your registration. There is no charge to join or use the list serv.

If you have difficulties using the list serv, contact the office at (301) 270-6337 or iffp@verizon.net.

NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to All Our New Members!!!!

We have had an unprecedented number of families join our IFFP family during the past three months! They include several couples and at least six families with children. Please look for name badges with stickers (usually stars) on them, and make a special effort to meet and greet the people wearing them -- the new members:

- [Susan Ryder](#), Program Coordinator

Recent newsletters have introduced us to Rev. Barbara and Rabbi Harold. During the year, we will continue to include profiles of new members, Sunday School teachers, and others important to our group.

ADULT GROUP

IFFP Adult Group 2004-05 Schedule and Topics

This year, we are going to have some Adult Group sessions as a whole group, and some as multiple groups. We are planning Fall, Winter, and Spring series where our Adult Group will divide into smaller groups, and we'll focus on a topic for a series of weeks.

FALL SESSION

October 17, October 31, November 7, and November 21

This Fall, we'll have two series, each lasting four weeks. One will be led by a long-time IFFP member on "Interfaith Families 101." This series will provide a forum for talking with other interfaith families about issues and experiences that all we share, including, Weddings, In-Laws, Family Choices, and Grief and Death.

The other will be led by IFFP Spiritual Director Rev. Heather Kirk-Davidoff. This series will focus on a social/political reading of the Gospel of Mark, guided by Ched Myers' classic book, *Binding the Strong Man*. This course will serve as a basic introduction to the story of Jesus as well as a springboard for a provocative discussion on how to read the Bible.

On Sunday, November 21st, we will have a third option for adults, a discussion of the short non-fiction book *Mudhouse Sabbath* by Lauren Winner. One of our IFFP members will facilitate the discussion.

Our yoga class will continue to meet each week as well.

WINTER AND SPRING SESSIONS
January 9, January 23, and January 30
March 6, March 13, and April 10

The topics of these sessions will be determined by community interest and leadership. On the attached page, please indicate your first, second and third choices among the topics listed as well as ideas for other topics you'd like to explore or lead.

- [Heather Kirk-Davidoff](#), Spiritual Director

SUNDAY SCHOOL

The Best Thing You Can Give to Yourself & Your Children

In my opinion, the best thing that you can give to your children is yourself as a centered soul. In our complex world, that goal is difficult. When my own children were growing up, I tried to manage this by giving myself a “10 and 10”—ten minutes in solitude (or at least in silence) twice each day, usually at sunrise and sunset. (I like to think of Christianity as a “sunrise” faith, since the women discovered the Resurrection at dawn, and of Judaism as a “sunset” faith, since their new day begins then.)

Sometimes I would simply pull a chair to the window, and find some calm as I enjoyed the changing colors in the sky. Sometimes I would close my eyes and meditate. Sometimes I would journal. Often I would read a Psalm or a poem. If I missed doing it for a day, I felt it. If I missed two days, my family saw me becoming irritable. If it went three days, my church wondered where my calm had gone.

So, I urge you in this New Year to try! Here is one of my favorites for this time of year-- “Wild Geese” by Mary Oliver (who once did a reading in my Cleveland home—before she got famous!):

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting--
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

© Mary Oliver

As we enter the Jewish New Year, might you, too, begin this practice, perhaps first by training your children to understand “Not now...it's my 10 time”? Blessings!

- [Barbara SilverSmith](#), Director of Religious Education

TEEN GROUP

We had a very productive gathering of Teen Group parents on Sunday, September 19th, to discuss the group's work this year. Several parents were interested in exploring taking a weekend trip to do a service project of some sort, and we agreed to research possibilities and meet again. We are also hoping to hold an "IFFP Reunion" Holiday Party in December for all IFFP teens, whether they are currently IFFP members or not. In the meantime, we hope to gather again for dinner this month—stay tuned for details.

- [Heather Kirk-Davidoff](#), Spiritual Director

BOOKS WE ARE READING

IFFP Book Club

The book club had a great meeting on Wednesday, September 29th, at a member's home. Although a small group, we had a really thoughtful discussion about the novel *Davita's Harp* by Chaim Potok. The book tells the tale of a young girl growing up in an interfaith household in 1930's Brooklyn. Her parents are, however, devout Communists. Potok represents strong and sympathetic characters, both religious and non-religious, Christian and Jewish. Davita, the main character, is an extremely bright young girl who is longing for the security and consistency of a community. Her parents, who are active in the Party, change addresses frequently and put their devotion to the cause above almost all else. While it is clear both her parents love her very much, the Communist Party offers nothing for Davita as a child, and thus she turns to her neighborhood shul to provide her the consistency and community she craves. As she participates more in religion, she struggles with the question of whether she is Jewish or Christian and by what standards.

The book club discussed in particular several stories within a story. One main influence on Davita's life is the famous author Jacob Daw, who tells a number of highly symbolic stories. In one, he tells the tale of a bird that flies the world seeking the source of music. The bird believes that the music is a distraction to the people of the world and silencing it might help the world stop fighting and start helping each other. The book club debated the possible meaning of the story, as music is such a strong and positive connection in so many cultures. We compared it to the Communist vision of religion as "the opiate of the people." As the story within a story evolves, its fictional author Jacob Daw becomes disillusioned with Communism, and he tells Davita that the bird has found rest in the door harp on her door – one of the few items that Davita's family has brought with them despite many upheavals.

The book club participants also discussed the various traditions that they either created or valued in their own lives, and whether they considered those traditions religious or cultural. We noted how important tradition was for Davita, although it seemed clear she could easily have turned to Christianity if her personal circumstances were different (if she had been living in a less Jewish neighborhood, for example). We also discussed how Potok represented characters who were devout and single-minded in following religious doctrine, and those who questioned authority. Those who questioned were often less happy in their day-to-day lives, but Potok clearly favors the characters who do not fully conform. Even as Davita (and eventually her mother) find comfort in Judaism, they refuse to fully conform to the role assigned to women within Orthodox Judaism.

Join the book club next month when one of our members will host our discussion of *The Gifts of the Jews, How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* by Thomas Cahill. This book is a light-handed, popular account of ancient Jewish culture, the culture of the Bible. If you would like to join us on October 20th, please contact [Susan Ryder](#) in the office (301-270-6337 or iffp@verizon.net) for details and to let us know how many people to expect.

IFFP Members' Book Recommendations

If you like historical fiction, you might try *The Birth of Venus*, by Sarah Dunant. Amazon.com describes it as "a tour de force, the first historical novel from one of Britain's most innovative writers of literary suspense. It brings alive the history of Florence at its most dramatic period, telling a compulsively absorbing story of love, art, religion, and power through the passionate voice of Alessandra, a heroine with the same vibrancy of spirit as her beloved city."

Another member enjoyed *The Kite Runner*, by Khaled Hosseini. It is a very readable book about good friends -- one is the son of a wealthy Afghan businessman and the other is the son of an old servant. As Amazon.com says, the author "manages to provide an educational and eye-opening account of a country's political turmoil--in this case, Afghanistan--while also developing characters whose heartbreaking struggles and emotional triumphs resonate with readers long after the last page has been turned over."

Want something reflective to prepare you for the Fall Women's Retreat? Try *A Year by the Sea: Thoughts of An Unfinished Woman*, a nonfiction book by Joan Anderson. After years of focusing on the needs of her husband and family, the author chooses to spend a year by herself at the beach. She supports herself by her royalty checks, as well as by working in a local fish market, and digging for and selling clams. During the year, she makes new friends, enjoys observing the ocean, learns about herself, and develops new dreams for her life. (Don't worry, men -- at the end of the year, she and her husband reunite!)

Thanks to those who shared recommendations this month. If you have a book or books to recommend, send the office the title and author, and -- if time allows -- a summary. The books can be new or old, fiction or non-fiction, novels, science fiction, suspense, mystery -- whatever you have enjoyed recently.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY TRADITIONS

We are Fashioning Traditions

MY COLLECTION OF HATS IS DIVINE
"BUT WHERE CAN I WEAR THEM?" I WHINE.
DOES A CHAPEAU TRADITION
FIT IFFP'S MISSION?
IF YOU WEAR YOURS, I'LL WEAR MINE!

- An IFFP Member (who can wear a new hat each week for 10 weeks)

Tashlich*

Some time during the Jewish High Holidays, we take a long walk in a local park and throw pieces of bread in the lake. As we throw, we talk about things we want to do better in the coming year and things we are sorry for in the past year -- and anything else that comes up. It is a really nice time to reflect and talk. Although it is very nice to do in a group, as many synagogues do, we really like doing it just with each other, so we can reflect about more personal issues.

- An IFFP Member

* For members who are not familiar with tashlich, Susan Ryder notes that, according to *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Judaism*, tashlich is done on Rosh Hashanah. It's customary for Jews to go to a flowing body of water and symbolically throw away their sins. Tashlich means "you will cast," based on the word of the prophet Micah: "and you will cast all your sins into the depth of the sea." It's the first step in repentance, to acknowledge that we were wrong and want to rid ourselves of our imperfections.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Mosaic Concert

On Saturday, October 9, 2004, [Mosaic Harmony](#) will perform in a benefit concert of song and inspiration at 7:30 p.m., at 276 Carroll Street, N.W. (diagonally across from the Takoma Metro Station).

Mosaic Harmony is 90-member multi-faith, interracial community choir that draws on the rich heritage of African-American Gospel music to express their belief in and enthusiasm for the oneness of the human community. Choir members represent several races, 17 faith traditions and a variety of professions. They come together around their ministry of music as a powerful force for unity in the midst of diversity. During their ten years together, they have performed in a variety of places, from D.C. area soup kitchens to the Kennedy Performing Arts Center, and on tour in Germany and Eastern Europe.

Pay what you will. All proceeds go to [Silver Spring Interfaith Housing Coalition](#). SSIHC is a non-profit coalition of local congregations that provides affordable housing, friendship and support for our neighbors who are homeless.

Action in Montgomery

Last year, Mark Fraley, the Lead Organizer for [Action in Montgomery](#) (AIM) came to speak at an Adult Group. AIM is a non-partisan social justice organization composed of Christian and Jewish congregations from across Montgomery County. Their mission is “to build a base of power so that citizens can influence the institutions that affect their lives, i.e., public schools, housing, youth, day care, transportation.”

On Wednesday, October 13th, from 7:00 until 9:00 pm, AIM is holding its 5th annual convention at the [Sligo Seventh-Day Adventist Church](#) (7700 Carroll Ave. in Takoma Park). It will be an exciting evening, as AIM expects over 1,000 members from a huge range of congregations. They will pray together, reflect on scripture together, and announce this year’s Action Agenda. Montgomery County Executive Doug Duncan will be in attendance, as will members of the Montgomery County Council and other political, corporate and religious officials from Montgomery County.

For more information on AIM, check out their web site: www.aim-iaf.org. If you’d like to go to the meeting with Rev. Heather, drop her a note (revhkd@comcast.net).

Adult Education Opportunities

There are three great programs coming up at the National Cathedral this Fall. For more information on any of these, check out www.nationalcathedral.org.

1. Saturday, October 23rd
Karen Armstrong: Sensible Mysticism: Studying the Great Religions
A religious historian in demand as an expert on Islam draws inspiration from the sensible mysticism of the Buddha
2. Wednesday, November 17th
Marcus Borg: A Thinking Person’s Take On Christianity with a Mystical Twist
This deconstructionist Jesus scholar’s spiritual paradigm shifted after “eyes open” mystical experiences
3. Saturday, November 20th
Julia Cameron: A Spiritual Toolkit for Your Creative Life
Experiment with tools for an “induced spiritual awakening” that will unblock your authentic voice.

The Jewish Study Center has a great series of classes starting in October and November, including a series on Basic Judaism, and What’s What in Jewish DC, Jewish Law and the Embryo, and more. Of particular interest to IFFP’ers might be “An Interfaith Reading of J.M. Coetzee,” a study of the South African author, which begins in November. These classes meet in several locations in DC, and all are fairly inexpensive. Check out www.jewishstudycenter.org for a schedule.

Thanks to Rev. Heather Kirk-Davidoff, Spiritual Director, for sharing information about these events with us.

REFLECTION

Yom Kippur is over, but I’m still thinking about it. The experience of developing and helping to lead our Yom Kippur gatherings this year stirred up a number of old questions for me. What does it mean to observe Yom Kippur as a Christian? Am I watching, or participating? And if I’m participating, am I participating as a Christian? What would that even mean?

It is almost an IFFP-truism to say that Christians have an easier time celebrating Jewish holidays than Jews have celebrating Christian holidays. The reason for this is that, theologically speaking, almost all of what is affirmed in the course of Jewish liturgy is easily affirmed by Christians.

But what about this prayer, the Unetanah Tokef, which lies at the heart of the Yom Kippur service: “On Rosh Hashanah it is written, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed: how many shall leave the world and how many shall be born, who shall live and who

shall die, who shall rest and who shall wander, who shall be humbled and who exalted. But repentance, prayer and works of charity can remove the severity of the decree.”

Over the past several years, the IFFP Yom Kippur service has been evolving, gradually incorporating more elements from the traditional liturgy. This is the first year we included this prayer, and as I typed it into the program for our service, I realized something. This prayer seems to describe atonement, the reconciliation of God and humankind, as something that humans do, humans initiate, humans have in their ability to control. I realized I had discovered one point where I as a Christian have a theological difference with traditional, liturgical Judaism.

With this on my mind, I opened my Bible to the Book of Jonah. Rabbi Harold and I had met earlier in the week and gone over the whole Yom Kippur service IFFP had used last year, and he had suggested a couple of additions. One of his suggestions was that we include a reading from Jonah, the Haftarah portion that is read during the Yom Kippur service each year. So I skimmed through the book, looking for some passages to excerpt for the purposes of our service. I settled on reading just the second chapter, Jonah’s prayer from the belly of the whale.

When Jonah is in the belly of the whale, he is at his lowest point. He hasn’t yet confessed the error of his ways, turned around and gone to Nineveh. He’s only gone in the opposite direction, away from God. But while he is inside the whale, he prays saying, “I called to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me.”

As I read it, this passage is about Grace. This passage is about how Jonah realizes that God is still there, that he is still able to be in relationship with God, even when he has done nothing but run away. That’s the moment when he begins to turn around. And for me, that’s what atonement is all about—God reaching out to us with love, calling us back to relationship with God before we really even know what that relationship looks like. We don’t initiate it; God does.

I’ve thought a lot about our use of this passage during our Yom Kippur service. It was certainly my Christian theology that caused me to choose it. Was I wrong to do so? It is, after all, in Jonah, and as such, it’s also read in most synagogues during Yom Kippur. So what really is the theology of atonement in a traditional Yom Kippur service? Did my Christian perspective simply lead me to notice a tension that exists within the Jewish liturgy already?

On the other hand, by noticing (and highlighting) the part of the service that connects with my Christian theology, am I blocking out some wisdom that I might gain from the part of the service which is alien to me? What do I have to learn from the UnetanaH Tokaf?

I don’t really have an answer to these questions—I’m still mulling on them. But I’d welcome your thoughts as well, and I’m glad for a community with whom I can think through these things.

- [Heather Kirk-Davidoff](#), Spiritual Director

POSSIBLE TOPICS FOR IFFP ADULT GROUP SERIES

Winter and Spring, 2005

- ___ Introduction to Christianity
- ___ Introduction to Judaism
- ___ Personality and Spirituality (How who you are influences what you believe.)
- ___ Jewish & Christian understandings of Vocation and Call
- ___ Jewish & Christian understanding of Evil
- ___ Jewish & Christian perspectives on War and Violence
- ___ Contemporary Jewish religious movements
(Jewish renewal, the Havurah movement, neo-orthodoxy, etc.)
- ___ Decision making and discernment—Jewish & Christian resources for individuals and communities.
- ___ Ways to Pray
- ___ Issues in Bioethics—Jewish & Christian perspectives

Other ideas for topics or themes:

Would you have interest in leading or facilitating a session or series? What topic?

Your Name: