

July 1, 2024

## Dear UUFLG Community,

We are delighted to announce that we have a new minister! Shams Cohen joins us on August 1 and will lead her first service on August 18. It has been an extensive search process, and the board appreciates all the input and guidance from the membership along the way. Shams emerged as a stellar example of our UU values and beliefs, and we look forward to Shams joining our fellowship to help us grow and thrive as a community.

UUFLG Board of Trustees

## A Message from Shams Cohen, MDiv

Greetings to you, good people of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Los Gatos.

I cannot begin to tell you how delighted I am in becoming your next minister!

Many of you began connecting with me during and after the April 28<sup>th</sup> service, "Embodied Earth Day Inspirations". Some of you I met prior to that online as stalwart members of the search committee, and some of you I have yet to meet.

As we progress in relationship together, something that excites me is the chance to get to know each of you and to create a tapestry of our lives together. One thing I have heard repeatedly from members of UUFLG is a need and desire for pastoral care. I truly hope to meet each and every one of you; to come to know your needs and yearnings, to collect & witness to your wisdom, and to embrace your own life questions with curiosity and vigor. I hope to bring empathy, comfort, and resource-networking where those things may be useful. I hope to bring inspiration and challenge to those seeking growth and transformation, and I sure hope and plan to have as much fun as possible with you along the way! (Introverts, do not fear, I only wish to get to know you if and as you are willing <grin>.)

I am a huge fan of UU Fellowships and have always been inspired by the Fellowship Movement. With more time & space, I will be happy to share more about why and what that means to me. I am wondering what it means to (and how it has possibly enlivened) YOU? The Fellowship Movement arose to inspire and honor the ability of Lay Leaders to create meaningful spaces of connection and worth, as well as to grow "the movement" at a time when demand was higher than the availability of professional leaders and UU owned spaces. I must say that I am so impressed with the devotion and generosity of the many volunteers that make your small and mighty Fellowship, well... small & Mighty!

While the relationships within and between us are where I find passion for Ministry, I imagine that you may also wish to know some of the nuts & bolts of my professional biography.

Please forgive a bit about me in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person (from some of my application materials) as follows:

*Born and raised Unitarian Universalist, Shams Cohen is an inspiring multifaith leader, a grounded pastoral presence, and a devotedly omnivorous mystic. A published poet and recorded chant practitioner with a mid-life undergrad in Organizational Communication and Business Management, Shams is adept at nurturing the opportunities for growth that lay dormant within conflict and change. Shams has a background of intense community involvement, effective professional, social, and spiritual leadership, and keen attention to detail, both emotional and logistical. Experienced in DEI focused religious leadership as a director, chaplain, bereavement counselor, minister, officiant, teacher, worship leader, and justice advocate in UU, Sufi, Jewish, NeoPagan, Sacred/ Ecstatic Dance, and multifaith/ interfaith/ no faith contexts. Well regarded amongst employees, colleagues, clients, congregants, friends, and mentors for sensitive facilitation of rites & transitions, welcoming, open and forthright manner; willingness to engage difficult topics & truths; inspiring teaching & visionary problem-solving, reliable initiative, follow-through on commitments; and skillful*

*use of humor to diffuse tensions & enhance joy. (Enthusiast of leadership concepts espoused by Brene Brown, Parker Palmer, Jim Collins, Margaret Wheatley, and Mark Silver). Enjoying uses of the creative in surviving life's most emotionally devastating times.*

I have come to deeply value honesty, transparency, vulnerability, and the ongoing journey to an embodied attitude of non-defensive openness. My spiritual maturation has involved many paths and a curious left and right-brained balance that has had me building microchips in one vocation and sitting bedside with precious dying folks and their loved ones in another.

I have more than 5 years' experience as a Hospice Chaplain in California, as well as hospital and psych hospital Chaplain experience in both Oregon and Washington. I graduated with an MDIV from Starr King School for the Ministry, where I served as Student Representative to the Committee for Educating to Counter Oppressions and build Just & Sustainable communities from 2007-2008 and as Student Body co-President from 2009-2010. I spent a year in Dallas, Texas at our 3rd largest UU congregation collaborating as a Ministerial Intern & Social Justice Minister. I also served as a Director of Religious Exploration in both our Santa Cruz and Monterey Peninsula Congregations from 2012-2015.

I love sermons and singing. I love empowering youth & adults. I love exploring faith traditions and spiritual practices in the hopes that each of us might achieve.

"Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life." (From our UU Sources)

If you google my name, you can find a lot more about me, some videos, and some of my writings on the Internet. You might also enjoy reading some of my thoughts at [shamscohen@blogspot.com](mailto:shamscohen@blogspot.com).

Beyond all that, I simply revel in the fulfillment of a great yearning, to have been invited into deeper relationship with you and your mighty fellowshiping band of celebrants there on Old Blossom Hill Rd. I believe that you are each experts in your own lives, and that together we can dance (both literally and figuratively) in the space where the goodness of the whole is most definitely more than the sum of its parts. It matters how we treat each other, and upon what we place our focus. Come, let us covenant together, and continue to begin.

Yours in Faith & Spirit,

**Shams Cohen, MDiv**