

Theme for January – Forgiveness:

The Practice of Release

As Unitarian Universalists we claim that there is inherent worth and dignity in every person. But sometimes it is hard to maintain that claim when we hurt others or others hurt us. This is when the question of forgiveness comes in, a word which means ‘to give up’ or ‘give away.’

What does it mean to forgive someone, or forgive ourselves? Forgiveness is a practice that keeps us in relationship with each other because as human beings we make mistakes, we hurt others, and we hurt ourselves.

It is the most simplest of acts to say "I'm sorry," but it can also be the most difficult thing to do in our lives. To say I'm sorry is to admit we are not perfect. When we are forgiven or we forgive another we can move on, we can release ourselves or the other person from the bonds of resentment, anger, sadness and start anew.

Forgiveness is an intentional act that brings us closer to ourselves, someone else or what we call God. Without it, we can suffer longer than we have to. At the same time, forgiveness cannot be forced. Sometimes it takes time to allow oneself to forgive. But we must be willing to look at it and ask "is it time to forgive?"

What is more difficult - to forgive oneself or forgive another? What if there is no one to blame? What if an act of nature or god causes something painful and there is no human being to forgive? When is holding on to resentment or anger more harmful than the act of letting go and releasing another?

I forgive you. Will you forgive me? Can we bring ourselves to those words? When we let go of anger and forgive someone who doesn't deserve to be forgiven, does it help our own soul?

Ask yourself - who do I need to forgive or who do I need to ask forgiveness from? Not an easy task, but one that bears great benefit if you have the courage to embrace it.

*Questions for Discussion and Discernment on your own, around the table,
or with each other:*

- What is the price for not forgiving?
- How does our sense of fairness or lack of affect our ability to forgive?
- What role does trust play in forgiving someone?
- How difficult is it to forgive yourself?
- How can we forgive when we have no one to blame?
- Is forgiveness the same as absolution?
- Does an apology help you forgive?
- Is it easier or harder to forgive those closest to us?

Quotes and Short Readings

"Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude."

- MLK

"Forgiveness is giving up all hope of having had a different past."

- Anne Lamott

"True forgiveness is when you can say, "Thank you for that experience."

- Oprah Winfrey

The practice of forgiveness is our most important contribution to the healing of the world.

[Marianne Williamson](#)

If you let go a little, you will have a little peace. If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of peace.

[Ajahn Chah](#)

The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.

[Mahatma Gandhi](#)

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and realize that prisoner was you.

[Lewis B. Smedes](#)

Remembering a wrong is like carrying a burden on the mind.

[Buddha](#)

"If you knew how I felt inside, you would not act that way outside.

But most likely,

If I knew how you felt inside

I would not mind so much the way you act outside.

Why don't we try turning ourselves inside out?"

- Edward T. Atkinson

"We cannot let the world's wounds destroy our spirits. We cannot let our hurts and betrayals destroy our capacity for growth and caring. That there will be judgments and, perhaps, justice, is necessary. That the violence be confronted and, if possible, contained, is essential. But, most important, is our capacity to nurture a loving heart, to affirm and not to curse, to forgive even when we cannot completely forget."

- Glenn H. Turner

Forgiving people who have hurt you is your gift to them. Forgetting people who have hurt you is your gift to you. – Unknown

*"May the love which overcomes all differences
which heals all wounds,
which puts to flight all fears,
which reconciles all who are separated,
be in us and among us
now and always."*

- Frederick F. Gillis

This site addresses forgiveness in general and by various religions (eastern and western):

[Forgiveness - An Interfaith Perspective](#)

"Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies" Nelson Mandela

A real-life poignant story of forgiveness: [Story of Forgiveness](#)

.....Now a new kindness
Seems to have entered time
And I can see how that hurt
Has schooled my heart
In a compassion I would
Otherwise have never learned.

Somehow now
I have begun to glimpse
The unexpected fruit
Your dark gift had planted
And I thank you
For your unknown work.

~ John O'Donahue