

Kennebunk Unitarian Universalist Church

August 28, 2011

Guest minister, Rev. Abbe Anderson

Prelude: *The Heart of the Matter* Don Henley, JD Souther

I got the call today, I didn't wanna hear, but I knew that it would come.
An old true friend of ours was talkin' on the phone. She said you found
someone.

And I thought of all the bad luck, and the struggles we went through
And how I lost me and you lost you
What are these voices outside love's open door
Make us throw off our contentment and beg for something more?

Chorus

I'm learning to live without you now but I miss you sometimes.
The more I know, the less I understand.
All the things I thought I knew, I'm learning again.
I've been tryin' to get down to the Heart of the Matter
But my will gets weak and my thoughts seem to scatter
But I think it's about forgiveness, forgiveness
Even if, even if you don't love me anymore

These times are so uncertain. There's a yearning undefined
People filled with rage
We all need a little tenderness
How can love survive in such a graceless age?
The trust and self-assurance that lead to happiness,
They're the very things we kill, I guess.
Pride and competition cannot fill these empty arms,
And the work I put between us, you know it doesn't keep me warm.

I'm learning to live without you now, but I miss you, Baby.
The more I know, the less I understand,
All the things I thought I figured out, I have to learn again.
I've been tryin' to get down to the heart of the matter
But everything changes, and my friends seem to scatter
But I think it's about forgiveness, forgiveness
Even if, even if you don't love me anymore

Bridge:

There are people in your life who've come and gone.

They let you down. You know they and hurt your pride
You better put it all behind you; cause life goes on.
You keep carryin' that anger, it'll eat you up inside, baby.

I've been tryin' to get down to the heart of the matter,
But my will gets weak and my thoughts seem to scatter,
But I think it's about forgiveness, forgiveness
Even if, even if you don't love me.

I've been tryin' to get down to the Heart of the Matter
Because the flesh will get weak and the ashes will scatter,
So I'm thinkin' about forgiveness, forgiveness
Even if, even if you don't love me.

Forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness
Even if you don't love me anymore.

Opening comments, candles of Joy and Concern

Intro

Today's topic is forgiveness. I want to offer you a collage of readings and contemplations in lieu of a discussion. The Sufis who trained me are an experiential bunch, and believe the subject reveals itself to us better directly than through conversation.

This morning, I'm going to conduct a Universal Worship Service. Hazrat Inayat Khan, an Indian who brought Sufism to the West 100 years ago, created the Universal Worship format and its prayers. It reflects the ritualistic formality of that time and the message of spiritual liberty that UU's hold dear today. I invite you to share in the readings of the prayers as you feel comfortable, beginning with the invocation, followed by the prayer, Saum, both of which are printed in your order of service.

Invocation

"Toward the One, The Perfection of Love, Harmony and Beauty, The Only Being United with All the Illuminated Souls Who form the Embodiment of the Master, The sprit of Guidance."

Saum

"Praise be to Thee, Most Supreme God, Omnipotent, Omnipresent, All-pervading, The Only Being. Take us in Thy Parental Arms. Raise us from the

denseness of the earth. Thy Beauty do we worship. To Thee do we give willing surrender. Most Merciful and Compassionate God, The Idealized Lord of the whole humanity, Thee only do we worship, and toward Thee alone do we aspire. Open our hearts toward Thy Beauty. Illuminate our souls with Divine Light. O Thou, the Perfection of Love, Harmony and Beauty, All-powerful Creator, Sustainer, Judge and Forgiver of our shortcomings, Lord God of the East and of the West, of the worlds above and below, and of the seen and unseen beings, pour upon us Thy Love and Thy Light. Give sustenance to our bodies, hearts and souls. Use us for the purpose that Thy Wisdom chooseth, and guide us on the path of Thine Own Goodness. Draw us closer to Thee every moment of our Life, until in us be reflected Thy Grace, Thy Glory, Thy Wisdom, Thy Joy and Thy Peace." Amin

To the glory of the Omnipresent God we kindle the light symbolically representing The Hindu Religion

"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is an attribute of the strong" Mahatma Gandhi

"Forgiveness subdues all in this world; what can a wicked person do unto him who carries the sabre of forgiveness in his hand? Fire falling on the grassless ground is extinguished of itself. Forgiveness is the one supreme peace" (From the *Mahabharata*),

We offer to the Omniscient God our reverence, our homage, and our gratitude for the light of the Divine Wisdom.

To the glory of the Omnipresent God we kindle the light symbolically representing The Buddhist religion.

Attunement: Forgiveness Practice

By [Pema Chodron](#) From *The Places That Scare You*

"There is a simple practice we can do to cultivate forgiveness. First, we acknowledge what we feel- shame, revenge, embarrassment, remorse. Then we forgive ourselves for being human. Then, in the spirit of not wallowing in the pain, we let go and make a fresh start. We don't have to carry the burden with us anymore. We can acknowledge, forgive, and start anew. If we practice this way, little by little we'll learn to abide with the feelings of regret for having hurt our selves and others. We will also learn self-forgiveness. Eventually, at our own speed, we'll even find our capacity to forgive those who have done us harm. We will discover forgiveness as a natural expression of the open heart, an expression

of our basic goodness. This potential is inherent in every moment. Each moment is an opportunity to make a fresh start.”

"Be like the Sandalwood which perfumes the ax that wounds it." *Dhammapada*

“Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else, but you are the one who gets burned” — The Buddha

You will not be punished for your anger, you will be punished by your anger.”
— The Buddha

We offer to the Omniscient God our reverence, our homage, and our gratitude for the light of the divine Compassion

To the glory of the Omnipresent God we kindle the light symbolically representing The Zoroastrian religion.

“All that we ought to have thought and have not thought; All that we ought to have spoken and have not spoken; All that we ought to have done and have not done; All that we ought not to have thought and yet have thought; All that we ought not to have spoken and yet have spoken; All that we ought not to have done and yet have done; For thoughts, words and works, pray we, O God, for forgiveness.” (From the *Zend-Avesta*)

We offer to the Omniscient God our reverence, our homage and our gratitude for the light of the Divine Purity.

To the glory of the Omnipresent God we kindle the light symbolically representing the religion of Judaism.

“It is forbidden to be obdurate and not allow your self to be appeased. On the contrary, one should be easily pacified and find it difficult to become angry. When asked by an offender for forgiveness, one should forgive with a sincere mind and a willing spirit.” — Mishneh Torah, *Teshuvah* 2:10

“Who takes vengeance or bears a grudge acts like one who, having cut one hand while handling a knife, avenges himself by stabbing the other hand.” — Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 9.4

We offer to the Omniscient God our reverence, our homage, and our gratitude for the light of the Divine Covenant.

To the glory of the Omnipresent God we kindle the light symbolically representing The Christian religion.

“Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing back; and your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind toward the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, even as your Father is also merciful. Don’t judge, and you won’t be judged. Don’t condemn, and you won’t be condemned. Set free, and you will be set free.” Luke 6:35

We offer to the Omniscient God our Reverence, our Homage and Our gratitude for the light of the Divine Self-Sacrifice.

To the glory of the Omnipresent God we kindle the light symbolically representing the religion of Islam.

The mystical Muslims called Sufis chant the divine names of God. There is a whole category of them devoted to forgiveness. Several of these contain the letters, GFR, which have as a root, the Arabic word for propolis. Propolis is a resinous mixture collected by honeybees to seal unwanted open spaces in their hive. People used to rub propolis on their leather water pouches to smooth over their cracks so they wouldn’t leak. It has also been used as a sedative, to treat burns, lower blood pressure and support immune function.

We can infer from these benefits the healing power the Muslims ascribe to forgiveness.

Two of these divine names are *ghaffar* and *ghaffur*. *Ghaffar* is chanted to invoke the One who can forgive you for doing that thing you have had every intention of stopping, but haven’t yet managed to quit. Someone asked a sage if God ever got tired of forgiving the same thing over and over again, and he answered, “No, but you might tired of doing it.”

The other divine name is *ghaffour*. This invokes the One who will forgive the unforgivable. There may be things we would love to forgive either in ourselves or others, but we can’t bring ourselves to do so.

Invoking the divine names calls in the Special Forces. If we were able to stop repeating our unwanted behavior, or to forgive ourselves for that thing we did that we eternally regret, we would not need to ask for help. But invoking the divine name gives us access to the part of ourselves that knows how to do it.

Let’s chant these names, opening ourselves to this divine forgiveness.

Ya ghaffar/ya ghaffour.

Feel the energy of love penetrating the bottomless pit of your guilt, offering a healing passage back into your heart.

The following exercise is this month's suggested practice from the Sufi Order International: "Think of people in your life who irritate or provoke you. Can you see how they are helping you to work through some aspect of your own stuckness and contraction, a painful habit or reactivity that keeps you disconnected from your own soul essence? Instead of complaining about them, how could you thank them for this?"

- Now include difficult people and situations that you find incapable of embracing or accepting. How can you shift awareness from the claustrophobic pre-occupation with yourself to expand into a greater field of luminous witnessing, to see yourself in them? Can you let them reveal to you how their pain is your pain; their joy is your joy?"

"O God! Cover my defects, and give me peace from my apprehension. O God! Forgive me my delinquency and my ignorance, my immoderation in my concerns, and also that fault of mine whereof Thou art better aware than myself. O God! Forgive me for that fault of mine whereof Thou art better aware than myself." -- Islamic Forgiveness prayer

We offer to the Omniscient God our reverence, our homage, and our gratitude for the light of the Divine Unity.

Indigenous

To the Glory of the Omnipresent God we kindle the light symbolically representing the Indigenous traditions.

"How to forgive...even when you don't feel like it

By [Dave Cowan](#)

HO'OPONOPONO An Ancient Gift for Modern Times

"Ho'oponopono is an ancient practice rooted in the traditional culture of Hawaii. In olden times, when a tribe or family member was in any kind of serious difficulty; illness, victim or perpetrator of crime, victim of a natural disaster, etc, the whole family or tribe would gather around the person and silently search their own hearts for whatever role they may have played in this person's suffering. When they came to an understanding, they would silently ask for

forgiveness and then leave the circle. Eventually all that was left was one healed individual in the middle.

This is 'quantum' healing on the level of the One Mind...acting on the recognition that we are not separated, and that if you suffer within my perception, I share that suffering too. The results seem to confirm the theory that as we heal within ourselves, there is a spontaneous quantum wave of healing generated that affects all.

More recently, a Hawaiian Social Worker, Dr. Hew Len, discovered this technique worked well in an institutional setting. He found himself as the night person taking care of a ward for the criminally insane. These were serious offenders, many of whom were shackled. As he had not much else to do, he would sit up at night and pull down the file of each inmate, look at the picture, and simply repeat, "I Love You, I am Sorry, Please Forgive Me, Thank You" until he felt an inner shift, a lightness coming in as he regarded this person's picture.

Without any other direct contact, but by simply repeating this exercise night after night, eventually, after a few months all the inmates got well except a couple who were transferred to minimum security facilities. They eventually shut down the ward, and Dr. Len was out of a job!

Anytime we feel a loss of Peace and Joy (our natural state) when we think of a person or situation, there is an opportunity to 'clean', as Dr. Len puts it. We can also apply the practice to objects or anything that comes into view that disturbs our Peace.

Eventually, you can internalize the intent and shorten the words to "I love You, Thank You". You can be 'running' the words even while you are engaged in conversation, or any time at all!

You do not have to 'feel' the forgiveness; just be willing to give it a try. Here is the deeper meaning behind what you are saying when you practice Ho'oponopono:

"I Love You" – I include you as part of my Self. I respect and give you total Freedom to be who you are and make your own decisions about what lessons you need to learn. I rejoice in our Oneness, as I know your Healing is my Healing.

“I am Sorry” – for the role I have played in your suffering. I know there really is only One Problem...Separation, and that you and I chose to separate from our Oneness at the same time. Therefore, I bear the burden and share the responsibility for your suffering, which is my suffering too.

“Please Forgive Me” – I ask you to see me in my Innocence, which is who I truly am, as I see you in yours. There is only One of us here. I trust you to Love me, for I know Who you really are.

“Thank You’ – for the opportunity to heal the unconscious guilt in my mind. For it is only because I have this guilt that I can perceive any fault in you. You have acted as my mirror, and in receiving your forgiveness, I extend it in Love back to you.

Ho’oponopono is a precious gift, ‘held in waiting’, as it was, by the traditional peoples of the Planet for this time of transformation. It is only through True Forgiveness, which ultimately leads to the knowing ‘there is nothing to Forgive’, that we can heal the schisms on this planet between people, races, and nations and with Earth, herself. Forgiveness is our fastest ticket and ‘golden doorway’ out of here to the Real World awaiting us all.”

The person who taught me Ho’oponopono said it was a great ego buster. Let’s take a minute to try it out on anything that’s bothering us. Just bring a troubling situation to mind and repeat to yourself, internally, “I’m sorry. Forgive me. I love you. Thank you.”

We offer to the Omniscient God our reverence, our homage and our gratitude for the light of the Divine Dignity.

To the Glory of the Omnipresent God, we kindle the light symbolically representing the Divine Feminine.

We honor Mother Nature today in all her power and her glory.

We offer to the Omniscient God our reverence, our homage and our gratitude for the light of Divine Love.

Let’s stand and say the prayer, Salat.

Salat

“Most gracious Lord, Master, Messiah and Savior of Humanity, we greet Thee with all humility. Thou art the First Cause and the Last Effect, the Divine Light and the Sprit of Guidance, Alpha and Omega. Thy Light is in all forms, Thy Love in all beings: in a loving mother, in a kind father, in an innocent child, in a helpful friend, in an inspiring teacher. Allow us to recognize Thee in all Thy holy names and forms: as Rama, as Krishna, as Shiva, as Buddha. Let us know Thee as Abraham, as Solomon, as Zarathustra, as Moses, as Jesus, as Mohammad, and in man other names and forms known and unknown to the world. We adore Thy Past. Thy Presence deeply enlightens our being. And we look for Thy blessing in the future, oh Messenger, Christ, Nabi, the Rasul of God. Thou Whose heart constantly reaches upward, Thou comest on earth with a message, as a dove from above when Dharma decays, and speakest the Word that is put into Thy mouth, as the light filleth the crescent moon. Let the Star of the Divine Light shining in Thy heart be reflected in the hearts of thy devotees. May the Message of God reach far and wide, illuminating and making the whole Humanity as one single family in the parenthood of God. “ Amin

To the Glory of the omnipresent God, we kindle the light symbolically representing all those who, whether known or unknown to the world, have held aloft the light of Truth through the darkness of human ignorance.

“The quality of forgiveness that burns up all things except beauty is the quality of love.” --Hazrat Inayat Khan

We offer to the Omniscient God our reverence, our homage and our gratitude for the light of the Divine Truth.

Sermon

For most of my life, forgiveness has been a “should.” My relationship with forgiveness is tenuous at best. I can have the intention to forgive, but its actual presence comes as grace.

I don't want to present this topic in any sort of judgmental light. Forgiveness comes when it comes.

I've wondered why I so often prefer to judge rather than to forgive. I've decided my resistance is armor shielding my heart from the work it, alone, needs to do. If I can sit in the pain of a remembered hurt until it loses its sting, forgiveness comes naturally.

This is hard work. It is no wonder most marriages fall apart. Unmet needs, insults and injuries accumulate. Resentments build. We lack the courage to feel our pain outright, so we blame one another.

When we can't face our own vulnerability directly, it corrodes our relationships. Our buried resentments feed divisiveness within groups, between organizations, religions, political parties, and countries.

If I don't have the courage to sincerely face my own feeling of betrayal, powerlessness, fear, shyness, pain, what right do I have to expect understanding from anyone else, let alone my country?

I can understand why people might have done what they did that hurt me, but I might not yet be willing to forgive them. I think forgiveness must be a genuine stream of love that flows from the heart, and the more I try to force the heart open, the faster it remains shut.

It's simplest to just sit with what is. Where is the hurt? When did I feel that hurt before? Can I breathe into the pain with compassion, instead of retreating to the mind's stories about what should have happened, and how I should behave next time to make sure it never happens again?

I was once given the assignment, on retreat, of going through my address book and clearing all my resentments against everyone in it. I may have made it up to the D's before the retreat ended. Even so, I felt great. I left with good intentions to make complete the alphabet, but who wants to hole up in their room with their address book and photo albums dredging up all the hurts that the accumulated memories of names and faces and events offer?

I'm attending another retreat next weekend. Maybe I'll make it through another few letters. In any case, life is full of opportunities to forgive.

Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan tells the story of the elephant and the chickens. The chickens are obnoxious, pecking at the elephant's feet, and the elephant doesn't like it. But the elephant is such a noble being that he can't be bothered to react to them. If we can remember our greatness, then the feelings of being personally slighted will fade.

But even if we can forgive those around us for offending us, personally, I'm sure all of us could give impassioned rants on the abuses of power in our midst. Wouldn't forgiving a tyrant just ensure that more people lost their jobs, civil rights, homes, clean water, and affordable health care?

The Dalai Lama presents a beautiful example of how to deal with the worst oppressors. He knows that everyone wants a happy life, and, as a human being, suffers. He has galvanized people worldwide with his message of compassion. It is that much more compelling because we know what he has been through. We need to work for justice with compassionate hearts. This requires ongoing personal maintenance.

I don't know why tyrants suffer, and I don't want take time figuring it out. But if our basic nature is to love and care for one another, then some major obstruction to that nature must have been a force in their lives. How can we harness the power of love within ourselves to present a compelling alternative to these wounded wielders of power?

I directed a peace organization for a year. I have never seen an angrier bunch of people in my life. I had never been angrier, myself. I realized the peace work was mine to do, and it remains mine to do.

We need to do what we can to preserve the quality of life on this planet for all beings, but we also need to own our own reactions to situations, and be willing to experience them in their depth so that they may be released instead of boomeranging onto one another.

The Jews believe forgiveness must come from the person we offended. God can forgive us for sins against God, but people must forgive us for our transgressions against them. What if they don't? What if they're dead? Ultimately, we must forgive ourselves.

The problems in the world are staggering. We each have a cause that motivates us most strongly to action. While it's true that we each ought to minimize our carbon footprint and the suffering we inflict on the world, we have different abilities, concerns, responsibilities and resources. We do what we can. It is woefully inadequate, but let's forgive ourselves.

"The courage to be is the courage to accept oneself, in spite of being unacceptable." ~Paul Tillich

Offertory music: *Baby Can I Hold You* Tracy Chapman

Sorry is all that you can say.
Years gone by and still words don't come easily
Like sorry, like sorry.
Forgive me is all that you can say
Years gone by and still words don't come easily
Like forgive me, forgive me

Chorus:

But you can say baby, baby can I hold you tonight,
Maybe if I told you the right words at the right time you'd be mine.

I love you Is all that you can say
Years gone by and still words don't come easily
Like I love you I love you
Chorus

Let's stand and say the prayer, Khatum.

Khatum

"O Thou Who art the Perfection of Love, Harmony and Beauty, The Lord of Heaven and earth, open our hearts, that we may hear Thy Voice, which constantly cometh from within. Disclose to us Thy Divine Light, which is hidden in our souls, that we may know and understand life better. Most Merciful and Compassionate God give us Thy great Goodness; teach us Thy loving Forgiveness. Raise us above the distinctions and differences, which divide us. Send us the Peace of Thy Divine Spirit, and unite us all in Thy Perfect being." Amin

Blessing

"May the Blessing of God rest upon you. May God's Peace abide with you. May God's Presence illuminate your Heart now and forevermore."

"The hand you take across the aisle may not be one you know, but listen to its story before you let it go, before you let it go."

Postlude: Paradise in Troubled Waters by Cheryl Wheeler

Winter's voice had barely spoken. Everyone was bummed and broken
Hangin' on to threads the way we do.
Shielding eyes from TV screens with African starvation scenes
And photographs in magazines of things that can't seem true.

Chorus:

Oh, paradise in troubled waters, situation grim
And we the reckless sons and daughters spread the luck so thin
Oh, the gross results and chain reaction too late understood
Leave us in embarrassed silence wishing that we could
Make the difference, see the light, carry the flag, lead the fight
Save the whales, save the seals, save the trees and birds and fields
And save each other.

So we read the news with helpless eyes and look for ways to compromise.

But mostly we just do the best we can.
Is it just a part of what we are to want too much and go too far
And contemplate with no regard what we don't understand.

chorus