

December 31, 2013
What's it all about?

Quick answer: it's people...not the Hokey Pokey.

Over the holidays I participated in an extended conversation with a retired salesman. Someone at the table asked for the secret of his success, and, without hesitation, he gave it to us: building relationships, bit by bit, every day.

"Phone calls and emails work great for checking in and maintaining relationships," he told us. "But establishing and building relationships requires face-to-face meetings. There's simply no short cut."

In my day job, I often consult with staff and boards of nonprofits, and I agree fully. Be it fundraising, marketing, supervision, board development, etc., experts in each area eventually say the same thing, "It's all about relationships."

Today is New Year's Eve, and most of us will hear some version of *Auld Lang Syne* tonight. This 18th Century Scottish song reminds us to remember those who've gone before and to stay close to the people who matter. Or, to say it a different way, life is all about relationships, so remember, cherish, and celebrate.

Happy New Year!

Quote

Never forget the three powerful resources you always have available to you: love, prayer, and forgiveness. *H. Jackson Brown, Jr.*

Web

Here's an entertaining article on the meaning of the lyrics to *Auld Lang Syne* ([read article](#))

December 24, 2013
Let there be light

This season's holidays welcome back the light. While the change is subtle in the lower 48 (about one minute more light each day), elsewhere it's more dramatic. In parts of Alaska, for example, there's seven minutes more light each day or an hour more every nine days.

As our northern world rediscovers its light, may we also rediscover our own light. Call it spirit, inner teacher, soul, still point, etc., each of us has a living well deep within – what Thomas Merton calls “a point of pure truth.” Although shy, it emerges when welcomed into a safe, hospitable space. Our times of reflection and contemplation can offer such space.

When it comes forth, we recognize who we really are. Unadorned and unmasked, this pure truth presents our values, our fears, and our yearnings. To embrace these and walk with them into our day-to-day lives is to live undivided...to be whole.

So, while the holidays often assume a hustle and bustle reputation, my wish for you is some quiet, reflective time that welcomes and receives your inner teacher. And may you enjoy each other's company.

Merry Christmas.

Quote

The divided life may be endemic, but wholeness is always a choice. *Parker Palmer*

Web

In this brief video, Parker Palmer speaks to the space between what is and what could be and how we can best live in that tension ([watch video](#)).

December 17, 2013
Being present

The other day, a friend of mine turned to me, gave a roll-of-the-eyes coupled with a huge sigh, and said, "Well, holiday party season has begun."

It's in the air. Even if your calendar is free of parties or gatherings, the idea floats on the seasonal tide. Complete with expectations, obligations, and hopefully a little fun, the get-together spirit brings its own dynamics, even pressures, especially with the trickiest of relationships – family.

We don't choose our family, but we choose how to be family. Often our longest lasting relationships, family walks with us during times of deepest joy and sorrow – sometimes even making their own unique contribution to said joys and sorrows.

So, as many of us prepare to gather once again, how will we choose to be family this year?

Scan the Internet and you can find plenty of help: 10 family games, 9 harmonious recipes, 8 ways to remix, etc. The many tips and guides speak to the fact that being family can be difficult.

One of the best bits of wisdom I've come across is simply this: whatever your gathering – from dozens to just yourself – be sure to show up.

Be present to the experience and the people involved. You are who you are, and so is everyone else. As much as you can, let this time together be its own time, uncolored by the past. Allow the movement of the moment to make all things new.

Happy holidays!

Quote

Eighty percent of success is showing up. *Woody Allen*

Web

Sometimes we need a few more tips to get through the gathering. Here's an article on how to maintain a relationship with a loved one who has hurt you ([read article](#)).

December 10, 2013
Being kind

Some years ago, we gathered with friends on Advent Sunday evenings to mark the day. The children read from a storybook that described the second Sunday in Advent as a day of "Peace – Kind Peace."

"Peace" often gets tossed around this time of year, on greeting cards and advertisements. According to my friends Merriam & Webster, it means, "freedom from disquieting emotions; a state of tranquility" – a counterpoint to shopping and traveling. Where is this peace to be found?

Offering a kindness to someone invokes such peace. As a [Fundamental of Forgiveness](#), the practice of kindness takes the approach of respect. Showing common courtesies, using your manners, and being helpful in any small way demonstrates respect for the person. Kindness makes us more fully aware of the other and affirms equality and unity of all people. Kindness recognizes that "we're all in this together."

One blessing of the season is that, when we show kindness to another, it comes back to us in the same moment. And – at least for that moment – there is peace.

Quote

The true fount of peace lies not in the machinations of politicians, but in the hearts of ordinary people – in the quiet dignity, humility and strength that is required not to strike back in vengeance, but to rise above the human desire for retribution that has always been the engine of human conflict, and to somehow find the grace to forgive. *Rory Fitzgerald*

Web

Here is a list of easy ways to brighten the day through kindness ([read list](#)).

December 3, 2013
Being generous

Today is Giving Tuesday. Begun just last year, Giving Tuesday is charitable giving's answer to Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

I support our wonderful nonprofits and the charitable folks that give generously. Arguably the soul of our cities and towns, the nonprofit community steps up to house, feed, and clothe as well as teach, connect and delight. A donation today helps meet a need and participates in a growing national movement.

I also support practicing generosity – a [Fundamental of Forgiveness](#). With so many distractions around us, it's difficult to give our full attention to the conversation with the person in front of us. Yet, when we generously give our time and attention, we provide the fertile ground needed for the relationship to grow.

So, I encourage you to make a donation. I also encourage you to block out distractions, avoid the temptation to multi-task, and give your time, attention, patience, and understanding generously to your conversations. It will strengthen your relationships and enrich your life.

So, Happy Giving Tuesday! Be generous.

Quote

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. *Winston Churchill*

Web

Find out more on Giving Tuesday ([read now](#)).

November 26, 2013
Being grateful

When I talk to groups about forgiveness, I often begin with the question, "What are you grateful for?" The response is always the same: people smile and then say, "family," "friends," and "health."

Gratitude (one of the [Fundamentals of Forgiveness](#)) goes beyond "thank you" and takes us to our core. It recognizes the fragility and randomness in life and takes nothing for granted.

In practicing gratitude, we are mindful of each moment and grateful for what we have and what we receive. Gratitude acknowledges and expresses our humility, recognizing that there are no entitlements and we are not in control of what life dishes out.

So, this week, I hope you'll celebrate and be grateful. You'll be happier and healthier if you do.

Quote

Forgiveness is the giving, and so the receiving, of life. *George MacDonald*

Web

Studies show that gratitude leads to a healthier, happier life ([read article](#)).

November 19, 2013
Inside We Trust

People deal with things on their own terms. This is especially true for relationships and related interpersonal processes such as trust, grief, forgiveness, and leadership.

With so many wise voices sharing tried and true approaches to forgiveness, leadership and more, I'm convinced that there are many ways to do it well. What seems to guide any one person in selecting a course of action is personal integrity. We choose based upon an integration of what makes sense to our inner wisdom as well as our external analysis.

In a video I recently viewed, Diana Chapman Walsh, president emerita of Wellesley College, offers her five attributes of trustworthy leadership: question ourselves, develop and attend to solid partnerships, avoid the use of force except as a last resort, value differences not only as a source of respect but as a source of creative information, and create a community.

What she says makes sense to me, but I'm not going to change my behavior simply because Ms. Walsh said it. I'll consider what she says, map it on to my own learning and experience, test it out, and then incorporate what works best for me...in this place, at this time.

While we learn from others, ultimately we will do what we will do...what is right for us to do. Giving our considered attention to this dynamic and taking full ownership of our actions creates an integrity that honors our whole self.

Quote

As adults, we must achieve a complex integration that spans the contradictions between inner and outer reality, that supports both personal integrity and the common good. No, it is not easy work. But...by doing it, we offer what is sacred within us to the life of the world.
Parker Palmer

Web

Here's the brief video of Diana Chapman Walsh's interview ([watch now](#)).

November 12, 2013
Living into the tension

I spend a lot of time studying leadership – within the workplace and in the larger community. Time and time again, and often contrary to popular perception, the best solutions come not from great leaders offering answers but from passionate people respectfully engaging each other.

This is especially clear in times of conflict.

In their book, *Leadership on the Line*, Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky write about managing conflict in the workplace. “The challenge of leadership...is to work with differences, passions, and conflicts in a way that diminishes their destructive potential and constructively harnesses their energy.”

They suggest four ideas for managing conflict: create a holding environment for the work (e.g., physical place, shared language, or clear rules); control the temperature (when to ramp-up tension or cool things off); set the pace (don't overwhelm with too much info or moving too fast); and show them the future (offer a compelling vision). ([see slideshare](#) – conflict begins slide 72)

By learning to work together within this awkward, tense environment, each of us can claim our voice and be leaders within our circles of influence. A large part of this leadership means keeping creative differences alive, allowing them to animate our communities and guide us toward common paths and innovative solutions.

Quote

Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future. *Paul Boese*

Web

Listen to Ronald Heifetz talk on adaptive leadership ([listen now](#)).

November 5, 2013

More than one way to skin a cat

First of all, I like cats. (Where does such a phrase come from?)

Second, I'm grateful that there are many ways to understand forgiveness.

Last weekend I had the opportunity to hear Father William Meninger describe his five steps to forgiveness. His description of the forgiveness process makes sense and, I'm sure, reflects the experience of many.

Compare this to Fred Luskin's [Nine Steps](#), which also makes sense and, I'm sure, reflects the experience of many. Or Nicole Lamarre's [six steps](#), Ned Hallowell's [four steps](#), or approaches by Enright, Smedes, Kraybill, or many others.

I'm sure all the above (and more) make sense and reflect the experience of many. And I'm glad people keep writing about their forgiveness journeys.

With many different approaches to forgiveness, those in need have choices. So if one approach doesn't seem to make sense to you, then keep looking. You're bound to find one that will work. They're all good.

The point is not to wallow in anger, bitterness or resentment any longer. Seek forgiveness. (Even your cat will thank you.)

Quote

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you. *Lewis Smedes*

Web

"More than one way to skin a cat" hails from the 1800's. [Read more](#).

October 29, 2013
The ins and outs

The past few days I've spent time contemplating the Möbius strip.

According to Wikipedia, a [Möbius strip](#) can "be formed by taking a strip of paper and giving it a half twist, and then joining the ends of the paper together to form a loop. If an ant crawled the length of the strip, it would return to its starting point having traversed the entire length of the strip (on both sides of the original paper) without ever crossing an edge."

In other words, the one path travels both the inside of the loop and the outside of the loop.

Living an undivided life means walking that Möbius path, allowing our inner truth to inform our outer work and vice versa, and recognizing that polarities and paradoxes, though seemingly at odds, are really analytical dissections of one lived reality.

The Möbius strip informs our interactions. I talk. I listen. If my listening doesn't affect my talking then it's as if there are parallel strips...disconnected, one never touching the other. However, if talking is informed by listening then it's a fluid interplay of thoughts and feelings. A Möbius discussion.

Forgiveness comes from a Möbius-like reconnection. As we forgive ourselves we forgive others. As we forgive others we forgive ourselves. It's a unified process.

The Möbius strip reminds us that in and out are only ways of understanding elements of movement. On the whole, there is no in and no out, only dynamism...only life.

Quote

...there is no "inside" and "outside" on the Möbius strip – the two apparently keep cocreating each other. ... The Möbius strip is like life itself: here, ultimately, there is only one reality.
Parker Palmer

Web

Hear Parker Palmer talk about living the undivided life in this brief video ([watch video](#)).

October 22, 2013
It's our choices

My wife just finished listening to the Harry Potter series again. (BTW, Jim Dale gives an excellent performance of reading these books!) One of the plot lines running through the series is the similarity between Harry and his nemesis Voldemort.

Harry is understandably troubled to have so many connections with such a wicked and dangerous wizard. In an earlier installment, the wise Headmaster Dumbledore tells Harry, "It is our choices...that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities."

Forgiveness is about the choices we make. Things happen and we get disappointed or upset, even enraged. What makes us who we are – our character, our integrity – is not about the feelings that arrive unbidden, rather it's about how we choose to act.

In the close of the final book Harry and Voldemort meet for a final duel. Just before it ends, Harry gives Voldemort the opportunity to choose a different path: "It's your one last chance," said Harry, "it's all you've got left...I've seen what you'll be otherwise...Be a man...try...Try for some remorse...."

In this act we see that, no matter what is in our past, each situation gives us the opportunity to choose anew – to continue on our current path or to turn a different direction.

Practicing the [Fundamentals of Forgiveness](#) (gratitude, kindness, and generosity) every day instills in us the practice of making thoughtful responses to the people and events in our lives. So, I encourage you to choose wisely...practice forgiveness.

Quote

In each moment, no matter what else is going on in our lives, we have choice. We have free will. We can blame someone else for a problem we're having, or we can take one hundred percent responsibility and love that person – love ourselves. In the end, all forgiveness is self-forgiveness. *Joanie Chappel*

Web

Here is an article by Danielle Tumminio who teaches "Christian Theology and Harry Potter." It's interesting if you're deep into HP. ([read now](#))

October 15, 2013
Work in progress

It began as a pleasant evening drive. We're cruising up the interstate in the right lane, and another car comes quickly up the left lane...and then slows to hover just behind my car in my blind spot.

I hate this!

I've studied and practiced forgiveness for years, so most things don't upset me. This, however, gets me every time.

So, what do I do when I feel this irrational head-heating, stomach-tensing zing that leaves me sputtering "arrg" and "grff?"

I recently discovered Tara Branch's (*True Refuge*) approach for dealing with difficult situations – RAIN.

R = Recognize your physical and emotional responses to the situation

A = Allow the situation to be as it is, without judging

I = Investigate your responses further with kind attention

N = Non-identification of self with your emotions and the resulting Natural Awareness

By taking a moment to recognize my responses, I give myself a pause. This space lets the sensations cool enough that I can let the situation be...anger- and sputter-free.

I also found that, once away from the situation, I can take a deeper look at my responses, investigating why this minor traffic thing qualifies as a "difficult situation" for me.

I'm still working on that one...probably will for a while. It's always a work in progress.

Quote

Your sense of who you are is not fused with or defined by any limited set of emotions, sensations or stories. *Tara Branch*

Web

Tara Branch describes how to work with difficulties in her article on the blessing of RAIN ([read article](#)).

October 8, 2013
Shutdown!

In one quiet statement, I dared offer a bit of my real self only to immediately be challenged to explain it and defend it, and then be advised against it.

It's a real voice

Most often statements filled with talking points and parroted opinions need to be challenged, explained and debated. At times, however, we need to speak from our quiet center – to explore truth and question, to listen and reflect, to move at our own pace.

My quiet statement came from deep within, a place known by many names – inner teacher; still, small voice; soul; bliss; identity; true self. All of these refer to an internal, unblemished wisdom that knows us completely and offers quiet guidance.

But, it's a shy voice...

Usually we recognize it, yet it may be reluctant to come forth. It can be drawn out by providing an open, non-judgmental, welcoming space and by asking questions that probe not the issue to be solved but our feelings and responses to the issue.

...that responds to grace...

We can offer this space to ourselves as well as to others. Offering this space – requiring time and patience – sits at the heart of generosity. It's allowing people to be who they are and where they are without tossing in our unsolicited advice or nudging prods...letting them come to their own insights and understanding.

...and love.

Quote

Truth is an internal conversation about things that matter, conducted with passion and discipline. *Parker Palmer*

Web

Here is a two-part practice guide for asking open and honest questions ([read part one](#)) ([read part two](#))

October 1, 2013
Choose this, not that

There's a book called, [Eat This, Not That](#). The idea of the book is this: you're going to eat at fast food places and buy products at the grocery, so why not make better choices (simple food swaps) that will increase nutrition, save hundreds of calories and improve your life.

The book gets to the heart of the matter: your quality of life is driven in large part by the choices you make. Certainly many things happen that are beyond our control, yet how we respond to those things rests fully with each of us. And, like in *Eat This, Not That*, most of those choices are simple swaps: choosing to let go of a small slight rather than simmer in anger; choosing to apologize rather than avoid a person; choosing to be grateful for what we have rather than bitter about what we think we should have.

Fred Luskin ([Forgive for Good](#)) says, "The problem with the world today is that everyone is asking, 'What's in it for me?' instead of asking, 'How can I be a better person?'" The irony, of course, is that by striving to be a better person, you find what is best for you.

Here's a suggestion...this week make the choice to offer kindness in response to anger or spite. It will break a cycle of pain and improve the chances for resolution.

Quote

In order to create a new "reality," we must discover how our current worldview affects the way we perceive and respond to problems. *Daniel Kim*

Web

Sometimes we make bad choices – why is that? This article gives some insight ([read now](#))

September 24, 2013
A Thousand Points of Quite

With the school year getting into full swing, I hear conversations about new relationships with teachers and classmates. Often, the continuum of How Well We Get Along involves the phenomenon of Clicking, expressed in points of Quite, as in: we clicked quite well or we didn't quite click.

I understand Clicking – it toggles on or off, we either connect or we don't. But, what is this "quite?" I turned to my friends Merriam and Webster and found that "quite" means "entirely or completely; exactly or precisely; to a very noticeable degree or extent." It's also "often used as an intensifier."

So, taking a little grammatical license, a Point of Quite marks an access point or place of resonance where we discover similarity and coherence with another person. Subtle or obvious, it's precision and completeness adds intensity to the connection so that we take notice and wish to know more. It draws us into relationship.

This happens between two people. But it also happens with oneself as we explore our inner life and find Points of Quite, precise places where we feel whole, unique and vital – our passions, our quirks, our gifts, our bliss. Indeed, the better we know our own Points of Quite, the easier we may Click with others.

That is, once we honor and accept ourselves – all that we are, just as we are – we more easily accept others as they are. We make the move from passion to compassion.

All journeys are inward journeys. All forgiveness is self-forgiveness.

Quote

The enormous breakthrough is that when you honor and accept the divine image within yourself, you cannot help but see it in everybody else, too, and you know it is just as undeserved and unmerited as it is in you. That is why you stop judging, and that is how you start loving unconditionally and without asking whether someone is worthy or not.
Richard Rohr

Web

In her review of Richard Rohr's "Breathing Underwater," Diane Scholten offers her surprise at Rohr's insights ([read review](#))

September 17, 2013

Focus

Autofocus used to bug me. I'd take a picture of two people standing side-by-side, and invariably the camera would capture the detail of the plant centered behind them and blur their faces.

I eventually learned the trick of mastering the autofocus, but it still bothered me. The auto feature distracted me from my desired focus of attention.

Now, more than ever, distractions abound. Our attention gets pulled in several directions every minute. Yet, research and practical experience show time again that our ability to focus – to pay attention in the right way, at the right time – is critical for success.

Focus not only directs our attention, it also brings things into clear view. As the detail sharpens, we discern where to invest our time, our energy, even our very lives. Clarity draws us toward our center.

Each of us has something inside that knows when we're in the center – when we're on the beam or off the beam. In accepting that knowledge and pursuing that center, we find our passion, our bliss, our happiness.

Allowing ourselves this journey requires a self-forgiveness that accepts the mistakes we'll make along the way. It requires courage as we put ourselves out there and learn in public. And it requires a focus gained from self-reflection (i.e., set manually) rather than dictated from outside ourselves (i.e., autofocus).

Quote

We are having experiences all the time which may on occasion render some sense of this, a little intuition of where your bliss is. Grab it. No one can tell you what it is going to be. You have to learn to recognize your own depth. *Joseph Campbell*

Web

Here's a brief clip of Daniel Goleman speaking on focus (it's also a promo for his new book)

– [watch clip](#)

September 10, 2013
Transformational change

“Today, I am an American.”

Twelve years ago this week, many around the world uttered this phrase as a demonstration of their unity with those who suffered the 9/11 attacks. Facing reality head-on, they claimed a compassionate connection with those deeply hurting.

This international soulful movement created an immediate bond born from common experience – people who knew suffering and loss reaching out to those recently afflicted. When we hurt together, our individual storylines interweave, and we experience a paradoxical blend: the comfort and camaraderie of relationship mixed with the trepidation and tension of difference.

Holding this paradox leads to transformational change. By staying in this soulful space long enough, we recognize our suffering (passion) as the same as the suffering in others. Eventually, our interweaving stories form a new fabric as we take the critical, courageous step of identifying with them...of suffering with them (compassion). We discover that our true reality rests in our identity and unity with all others.

Failing to stay with the paradox, failing to move from passion to compassion, we inevitably return to our routines, segregating ourselves into many false realities and lashing out because we know no other way to handle our suffering.

Who are you today? With whom will you compassionately connect? “Today, I am....”

Transformational change – be it improving our individual lives, our communities, or our world – requires not only a common vision for the future but a common identity in the present.

Quote

The big moment in [life] is the awakening of the heart to compassion, the transformation of passion into compassion. *Joseph Campbell*

Web

In this brief video, Parker Palmer speaks to the transforming role of suffering together ([watch video](#))

September 3, 2013
Heart to heart

Today marks my parents' 63rd wedding anniversary. They got to celebrate 50 of them.

I think of them often – sometimes for the weirdest reasons: I look in the mirror and see hints of my dad (everyday!); speak a phrase and hear my mom; sit a certain way, walk a certain way...all just glimpses.

This occurs with a few others as well – my grandfather, teachers, aunts and uncles – people who poke their heads into my consciousness from time to time because they occupy spaces in my heart.

Each occupant on this short list forged a meaningful connection with me sometime during my early years (up to age 18). Some I've known all my life, while others came and went over a few months. Yet, each took an interest, reached out in compassion, and accepted me unconditionally.

Opportunities often present themselves to influence the lives of children and most of that rests on simply taking a genuine interest in what they say or do, on their terms, simply because they're interested. One heart connecting with another.

Quote

When there is a mature relationship between people, there is always compassion and forgiveness. *Thich Nhat Hanh*

Web

Here's a brief Q&A on the influence parents have on children – how do these answers align with your perspective ([read post](#))?

August 27, 2013
Celebrate work...and life...together

Labor Day approaches – a day dedicated to the social and economic achievements of American workers.

The vocational advice I most often heard as a young man went something like, “if you love what you do, then you’ll never have to go to work.” This advice jumped to mind the other day when I heard someone talk about work-life balance. One lamented that, with all our communications devices, there’s simply no way to create a good work-life balance.

But, I thought, what if you love your job...what if you’re one of the lucky ones and “never have to go work?”

Also, those communications devices go both ways – life (i.e., friends, family, repairpersons) often crosses into work. The lines blur.

Work intrudes on family, family intrudes on friends, friends intrude on repairpersons, and repairpersons intrude on work (mix and match at will). We simply cannot click from one existential track to another so cleanly. In the end, it’s all a mash up.

Some suggest that, instead of trying for a healthy work-life balance, perhaps we could shoot for a healthy work-life integration. By letting one interrupt the other – without guilt or resentment – we lower our stress and accept that things can be messy.

For the weekend ahead, I think I’ll just let it be...and love it.

Quote

Chance, or what might seem to be chance, is the means through which life is realized. The problem is not to blame or explain but to handle the life that arises. Take it all *as if* it had been your intention, with that you evoke the participation of your will. *Joseph Campbell*

Web

Here are two perspectives on Work-Life Integration: one from a consultant nearing the end of his career ([read now](#)) and another from a young writer in the early years of her career ([read now](#)).

August 20, 2013
Prevent toxic grudge

When I finish my morning walk, I feel every inch of my body - the tops of my toes, the small of my back, even my ear lobes. It's all connected. The cool morning air awakens my attention to the indisputable fact that I feel with my entire body.

And it's true even when I'm not aware of it.

A mountain of scientific studies show that how we feel impacts not just our mood but our respirations, our posture, our heart rate, our blood pressure, and more.

When we carry a concern, it physically weighs us down. When we carry a grudge, anger's toxicity runs through our entire body. It's no wonder that many who forgive talk about being liberated and having a very real weight removed from their shoulders.

We can employ practices that help prevent the onset of toxic grudge. We can be grateful for the people in our lives and what they bring to our experience; we can be kind to all we meet, even when faced with their perceived unkindness; and we can be generous with our time and by giving others the benefit of the doubt when unsure of their intentions.

We feel completely, and we can live fully by practicing these [Fundamentals of Forgiveness](#).

Quote

We achieve inner health only through forgiveness - the forgiveness not only of others but also of ourselves. *Joshua Loth Liebman*

Web

Here's a brief article on how forgiveness affects our physical and emotional health ([read now](#)).

August 13, 2013
Shark Week – Grudge Week

I'm no fan of sharks or Shark Week. However, last week a friend of mine (thanks LB) suggested that a forgiveness-related parallel to Shark Week would be Grudge Week.

I accepted the challenge!

The parallels are legion. Here's a sampling:

Found in both salt & fresh water, there are over 470 species of sharks, ranging in size from the 7-inch dwarf lanternshark to the 40-foot whale shark, the largest fish in the sea, and residing in a wide range of depths – from the surface down to 6,600 feet

Found in humans of all ages, genders, and ethnicities, grudges range from small annoyances to deep-seated resentment and reside from top of mind to firmly lodged within our hearts.

Sharks are at the top of the food chain, yet certain species of sharks drown if they stop moving.

Grudges eat away at our best selves, yet they die if we stop them in their tracks by naming them, taking hold of them, and deliberately setting them aside.

Sharks have several sets of replaceable teeth, and their bite generates up to 40,000 lbs. of pressure, enough to remove a limb.

Grudges never lose their ability to bite and may do so with a force that severs a relationship.

The only threat to sharks is human activity.

The only threat to grudges is to claim our deeper humanity.

So, why the fascination with sharks? Again, the reasons may be legion, however, one connection may be the mythological significance of the belly of the big fish – similar to that which swallowed Jonah.

The shark represents the power of life residing in our unconscious (the sea). Uncontrolled by our consciousness, this power draws us to the edge and invites us on a quest. Whether diving in or thrown in, we enter the realm of the unconscious and are swallowed up. Our conscious self comes in contact with this charge of unconscious energy. At first, we're unable to handle it, and then, after facing all the trials and revelations of an often-terrifying journey, we come to terms with this power and emerge to a new way of life.

So, in essence, Shark Week draws us into a journey of discovering our deeper self – our passion, our bliss – and invites us to dedicate ourselves to that. Maybe I'll check it out.

Quote

It is in you. Go and find it. *Ancient saying*

Web

Here is a brief interview with Marie Forleo on some beginning steps to discovering your passion ([read article](#)).

August 6, 2013
Missed it yet again

Last Sunday – August 4 – was International Forgiveness Day and I missed it...again.

The Worldwide Forgiveness Alliance celebrated its 17th annual International Forgiveness Day, and I was clueless. Fortunately, another celebration isn't far away – Global Forgiveness Day is August 27 (unless you're looking at the Global Forgiveness Day that was July 7).

In fact, there are several Forgiveness Days throughout the year. In addition to the two in August, I found:

- Charlottesville, VA celebrated Community Forgiveness Day on April 21
- Positive People Partners celebrates National Forgiveness Day on October 27
- Maslenitsa (Eastern Slavic religious and folk holiday in early spring) celebrates Forgiveness Day as the last day of Cheesefare Week.

So, how does one celebrate on these days? Our friends at eHow.com give us this insight: "No matter which National Forgiveness Day you celebrate, the same compassion and reconciliation is celebrated." They also provide seven-step instructions for celebrating the day.

It seems observance-day anarchy runs rampant. So, I suggest we join the fun. Whatever day you open this email, declare it Great Lakes Forgiveness Day. Use the occasion to reflect on how you practice forgiveness in your own life and, if so inclined, reply to this email and share your approach with me. Perhaps your method will be a beneficial resource to others.

Happy Great Lakes Forgiveness Day!

Quote

I will greet this day with love in my heart. For this is the greatest secret of success in all ventures. Og Mandino (1923-1996)

Web

Make every day forgiveness day by practicing the Fundamentals of Forgiveness.

July 30, 2013

Didn't see that coming

Many consider talking about the weather as lame, but here I go: "It's been cold!" Near record lows in several Midwest cities and Michigan's Upper Peninsula saw HIGHS in the low 50's last weekend.

The Weather Channel cleverly called it "Julytober." I prefer "random acts of weather" – familiar temperatures but totally out of context.

Which reminds me: my favorite "random acts..." phrase is "random acts of kindness" (how's that for a segue). Kindness is defined as "of a sympathetic or helpful nature; of a forbearing nature." It is synonymous with gentle, attentive, considerate, and thoughtful.

As a [Fundamental of Forgiveness](#), the practice of kindness takes the approach of respect. Showing common courtesies, using your manners, and being helpful in any small way demonstrates respect for the person. Kindness makes us more fully aware of the other and affirms equality and unity of all people. Kindness recognizes that "we're all in this together."

So, we don't need to wait for a frosty day in July, we can perform random acts - or intentional acts - of kindness any day...every day. It will not only develop your capacity for forgiveness, it will make your day.

Quote

As perfume to the flower, so is kindness to speech.

Katherine Francke

Web

A great resource on all things kindness is the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation website ([visit now](#)).

July 23, 2013

What's the difference?

Not long ago, I was in a brief conversation about the difference between holding hands with fingers interlocked and holding hands without interlocking fingers. While the conversation didn't last long, the image did.

It reminded me of a *Mythbusters* episode that tested the strength of friction by interlocking the pages of two city phonebooks. It took two military tanks and 8,000 lbs. of force to separate them.

Relationships grow strong when our lives interlock. We can live and work next to people – we have many such acquaintances – but these relationships are easily separated. When our life interlocks with another through the daily give-and-take of life experience, the bond becomes virtually unbreakable. Like with the phonebooks, each day – each experience – is another interlaced page.

One thing that can make the difference between living *beside* someone and living *with* someone is [practicing generosity](#). With so many distractions around us, it's difficult to give our full attention to the conversation with the person in front of us. Yet, when we generously give our time and attention, we provide the fertile ground needed for the relationship to grow.

So, I encourage you to block out distractions, avoid the temptation to multi-task, and give your time, attention, patience, and understanding generously to your conversations. It will strengthen your relationships and enrich your life.

Quote

When there is a mature relationship between people, there is always compassion and forgiveness. *Thich Nhat Hanh*

Web

Here's a brief video summarizing the *Mythbusters* episode and showing the tanks finally separating the phonebooks ([watch now](#))

July 16, 2013
Handling Baggage

Everyone carries baggage. What we do with it - that's the question. Traveling this summer put this in perspective.

"Do you have any baggage?" The attendant asks. "Indeed I do."

I placed my baggage out for him to see. "Each bag will cost you."

"Hmm. But this bag here," I smiled hopefully, "it isn't *really* mine."

"Still, there's a cost," the attendant confirmed.

"Well, what if I just jammed it all together?"

"Oversized or overweight baggage costs you extra."

I should have guessed. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Sure."

"Well..."

"Carry on. As you travel, others will carry their own baggage. Be sure to use the space provided to be sure that everyone can deal effectively with their own baggage. If you cooperate with one another, each will reach his or her destination with little problem."

"Thanks."

Safe travels everyone,

July 9, 2013
Hmmm...

I need advice about an advice column – weird.

Last week, Dear Abby responded to a letter from a person who had endured bullying from second grade through graduation, including physical and emotional abuse. Following the 10-year high school reunion (which the person didn't attend) several Facebook messages were received saying how many wished to apologize. The writer had not responded, did not wish to reconnect, but also didn't want to be rude. What to do?

Abby replied that the person didn't need to be "nice" and she recommended silence since it "sends a strong message." Abby conceded that maturity may have caused them to see their errors, but suggested that those apologizing were trying to make themselves feel better. She closed by saying, "you are not obligated to accept apologies if doing so will make you feel worse."

Upon first reading this, I gave it my "really?" look. It struck me as off but I couldn't put my finger on why. Over the past couple of days, I've thought of her response. Here are a few of my thoughts:

The writer wants to respond in some fashion and wants to maintain personal values of being nice and not being rude. However, Abby basically recommends inaction: silence and not accepting apologies.

Silence may send a strong message, but the message is unclear. Plus, here was an opportunity to engage others around a very real issue that continues to nag all concerned ten years later. In similar situations, I've read of persons drafting responses that do not accept or reject apologies but thank those who reached out and explain their side of the story. They may or may not send the response, but writing it offered personal insight.

The writer endured years of bullying and wanted "to tell them all to go to hell." Perhaps the issue to address is not others trying to feel better but the writer's own need to continue healing.

I know it's just Dear Abby, but I find it an interesting (albeit brief) case study. What am I missing? How does this strike you? What thoughts do you have to offer?

Quote

Sincere forgiveness isn't colored with expectations that the other person apologize or change. Don't worry whether or not they finally understand you. Love them and release them. Life feeds back truth to people in its own way and time. *Sara Paddison*

Web

Here is the full letter and response from last week's Dear Abby ([read now](#)).

July 2, 2013
Being present to becoming

The tirade ended, "...and nothing you can say will change my mind!"

We're very committed to our beliefs – so committed, that oftentimes presenting facts that contradict us backfires, and we hold our positions even stronger.

[We hold these truths to be self-evident]

Researchers at the University of Michigan found that when misinformed people were presented with corrected facts, they often became even more strongly set in their beliefs. Much hinged on (1) how firmly held the beliefs are in the first place and (2) the way the corrected information is presented.

[that all men are created equal]

How irritating...yet, how true. Many times I bite my lip waiting for someone to "get it" or growl in frustration when another fails to accept confirmed facts. The thing most difficult for me to accept is another person's freedom to follow their heart, even if it means being wrong.

[that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights]

Recently, I heard a friend begin a conversation with, "I give myself permission to..." Hearing this, I also gave my permission – a space where he was free to speak, unconcerned for right and wrong, exploring personal understanding.

[that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness]

This moment taught me the patience to let people (myself and others) *become*, each at their own pace; the importance of developing the heart, the inner voice of personal wisdom and guidance; and the gift of being present to becoming.

Happy Independence Day.

Quote

The heart, first of all, is an integral way of knowing where intellect, intuition, feeling, imagination, and will come together. *Anonymous*

Web

Boston Globe article from 2010 describing the University of Michigan study and how we stay entrenched in our beliefs ([read article](#)).

June 25, 2013

Possession is 9/10ths the law

When I'm caught in a personal blunder or oversight, my internal first responders turn to humor. "Oh, the mushy peach at lunch softened my brain!"*

This rarely (read "never") goes over well. People inconvenienced by my forgetfulness or lack of attention miss the humor. Instead, they see someone failing to own his behavior. When I come back with, "I was only joking," it doesn't help.

It's pathetic...immature...and it serves no good end.

The common phrase, "possession is nine-tenths of the law" means ownership is easier to maintain if one has possession of something, or difficult to enforce if one does not. While this may be "fuzzy law," it rings true with behavior. When we take possession of our behavior, we take ownership of our personal integrity...of our lives.

This means accepting ourselves just as we are not only as a general concept but also when we are in midst of being who we are. Feeble attempts at blaming, excusing, or deflecting sling dripping spoons of can't-you-see-I'm-a-victim goo at anyone tolerant enough to listen. It gains us nothing but a stickier situation.

The first step to forgiveness of others and of self is taken when we accept the reality before us. You can't fold a towel until you pick it up, and you can't forgive or improve a behavior until you take possession of it.

Quote

In each moment, no matter what else is going on in our lives, we have choice. We have free will. We can blame someone else for a problem we're having, or we can take one hundred percent responsibility and love that person – love ourselves. In the end, all forgiveness is self-forgiveness. *Joanie Chappel*

Web

Here's a brief article on learning to take responsibility for your behavior ([read article](#)).

*You didn't laugh at this. Neither does my family.

June 18, 2013

How do you calm your mind?

The Dalai Lama points out that with a calm mind, you can analyze situations and make decisions in a more balanced way. With a disturbed mind, the analysis becomes skewed and decisions are not as easy nor as well developed.

Forgiveness practice – and practicing the [Fundamentals of Forgiveness](#) – has the benefit of developing a calmer mind by guiding us away from spiraling cycles of stress. By practicing gratitude, for example, we focus on what we're grateful for in our day rather than our disappointments. Dwelling on how unfair life can be often will spiral us into greater stress, creating discomfort and muddling our thought. Your tradition's spiritual disciplines (meditation, prayer) may also develop a calmer mind.

When you find yourself in a stressful situation, there are techniques that can calm your mind and body systems. Some of these include: deep breathing, closing your eyes for ten seconds, smiling, taking a walk (if time allows), asking questions to increase your understanding of the situation (e.g., What is threatening about the situation? What can you influence or not influence?), or whatever you find that works for you.

I encourage you to engage in practices or disciplines that will help with overall stress management as well as develop a "first aid kit" (e.g., deep breathing, counting to ten, etc) that will help you calm yourself when in a stressful situation. With a calmer mind you will be in a better place to respond to what life brings.

Quote

To the mind that is still, the whole universe surrenders. *Lao-Tzu*

Web

I've heard it said, "Breathing are the reins of our mind." By using our breath, we can calm and focus our minds. Here is a brief guide from Thich Nhat Hanh that speaks to this. ([read article](#))

June 11, 2013
Love your enemies

Few of us have real enemies. Those who have been in war or find themselves in situations I cannot imagine know what it's like to have enemies – that is, people seeking to destroy you.

I've had arguments or relationships where we just didn't click, but no one organized a band or posse to come get me. As annoying as a strained relationship can be, it's nothing compared to the intensity of a lethal threat.

Yet, some have met enemies and come to accept – even embrace – them as not only equals but as persons in need of compassion. One such person is Nelson Mandela. Now ailing at age 94, Mandela, having emerged from prison and ascended to the presidency, chose not to turn the tables of power but to include his former captors in a new government. He decided not to hate, not to seek revenge, but to forgive and move forward.

Today's South Africa is far from a perfect country, but that does not diminish Mandela's insight and example. Life, for individuals and for nations, is an ongoing experiment. Mandela's contribution to this line of research is succinctly summarized by Desmond Tutu, "there is no future without forgiveness."

Quote

Am I not destroying my enemies when I make friends of them? *Abraham Lincoln*

Web

Here is a brief article providing insight into Nelson Mandela's vision and legacy ([read article](#)).

June 4, 2013

We've got to go through it

When our kids were young, a favorite book was Michael Rosen's "We're Going on a Bear Hunt." On their quest, the family ran into several natural obstacles. At each, the prescription was the same:

We can't go over it
We can't go under it
Oh no! We've got to go through it!

Emotional healing works the same way. A soldier with post-traumatic stress disorder finally rid himself of recurring flashbacks by leaning into the emotions they triggered, feeling them as bravely as he could. Doing this in short sessions, again and again, allowed him to relax with his vulnerability. "Little by little, as he let the feelings arise, build in intensity, and pass away, his overwhelming sense of guilt and failure began to lighten up, and for the first time in three years, he was able to sleep through the night."*

Fred Luskin ([Forgive for Good](#)) says that forgiveness has only two steps: grieving and letting go. Grieving, after you have been wronged, means letting yourself feel the anger, hurt, and trauma in all its original pain.

We can't let something go until we've firmly grasped it. It's not fun and it may be scary. But, it's real life...and it's real healing.

As the book says, "Oh no! We've got to go through it!"

Quote

The only people we can really change are ourselves. Forgiving others is first and foremost healing our own hearts. *Henri Nouwen*

Web

Here is a woman's testimony on how she forgave her mother by realizing that her mother was acting out of her own understanding...doing the best she could do ([watch video](#)).

*Story as told by Pema Chodron, "Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change," pg. 121.

May 28, 2013
Inside safari

As a kid, I snooped...and not just at Christmas. I regularly went on indoor safaris in rooms where I rarely ventured, opening closets and cabinets, marveling at mundane things.

A favorite stop was my parent's bathroom. I relished rifling through the ever-changing mix of odds & ends in one drawer – a colorful montage of stuff emptied from pockets: a book of matches, a few coins, golf tees, a random grocery list, etc.

Some things remained constant. Among the products in my dad's small allotment of medicine cabinet space, I always found Vitalis. This yellow, alcohol-based hair care product (with V-7) promised to keep hair in place without greasy build-up.

I never used the stuff, but I loved the name – VITALIS. It sounded like a super-hero village. ("Everyone, return to Vitalis.") The name spoke strength, priority, and life.

Today, these qualities describe a vital person. As we listen to the voice within and find our path, we find vitality. Immersing into this life source, things around us come into focus, resolve strengthens, and life's effervescent joy springs forth.

However, it cannot be bottled, and no safari adventure will find it. Rather, we snoop within, opening doors and marveling at the mysteries of our mundane yet uniquely glorious life. Venture forth to discover your deeper vitality.

Quote

The influence of a vital person vitalizes. Any world is a valid world if it's alive. The thing to do is to bring life to it, and the only way to do that is to find in your own case where the life is and become alive yourself. *Joseph Campbell*

Web

Just for fun, I found this vintage 1950's ad for Vitalis on YouTube. Advertising hasn't changed much...talking animals, magic ingredients (V-7), and get-the-girl allure. ([watch video](#))

May 21, 2013
While we wait

Families anxiously waited at nearby churches
to hear if their loved ones were OK.

Time changes when we anxiously wait. The seconds fill with so many emotions and expectations. We sit with family or friends yet we endure the moments in a fit of solitude...worrying...hoping. We check the clock, but the effort tells us little. We wait.

We hold hands, share hugs, all the while keeping at least one eye on the loudspeaker, the phone, or the TV – the bearer of news yet to be delivered. We wait to hear...how our lives may change, how our hearts may break.

We wait as a family in sanctuary. We hold each other close, gathered in a place consecrated by our presence, made holy by the stark reality around us.

We wait with you.

Quote

Nothing we do...can be accomplished alone. *Reinhold Niebuhr*

Web

News of the tornado in Oklahoma continues to pour in. Here is a short article from which the quote above was taken ([read article](#)).

May 14, 2013
Just imagine...

I recently read this excerpt from *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman et al:

Brain studies have shown that imagining something in vivid detail can fire the same brain cells that are actually involved in that activity. In other words, the new brain circuitry appears to go through its paces, strengthening connections, even as a person merely repeats the sequence in his mind.... Experimenting with new behavior, then, and seizing opportunities inside and outside of work to practice them – as well as such methods as mental rehearsal – eventually triggers in one’s brain the neural connections necessary for genuine change to occur.

Athletes, musicians and others use visualization to aid their performance. But this technique can be applied to more transformative change as well. Imagining changed behavior changes our brain, setting biological and emotional responses to reinforce chosen ways of acting and reacting.

New opportunities stem from the mental practice of gratitude, kindness, and forgiveness in situations that have brought out other, less desirable behaviors. We become more attuned to the reactive triggers and pause to choose how to respond. Then, each choice – imagined or actual – reinforces the newly chosen behavior.

Cool. This behavioral switcheroo reminds me of a verse I learned decades ago:

First, the imagination creates the situation.
Then, the situation creates the imagination.
Of course, it could be the other way around.
Columbus was discovered by what he found.

Quote

I don’t sing because I’m happy. I’m happy because I sing. *William James*

Web

For a five-minute video introduction to emotional intelligence by Daniel Goleman, [click here](#).

May 7, 2013
Of annuals & perennials

As we turned the calendar from April to May, the weather warmed and spring freshness filled the air. Spring makes all things new! And yet, it's the not so new that captured my imagination this year.

While spring in full blossom boasts a colorful mix of annuals (yet to be planted), the earliest signs of seasonal transformation come from the perennials. In a season of newness, they are the old friends. Though we may alter the annual mix a bit each year, the perennial remains constant, holding claim on its place.

I am reminded of William Stafford's poem, *The Way It Is*, which begins:

There's a thread you follow. It goes among
things that change. But it doesn't change.

What are the threads you follow? What perennials hold claim in your life?

Quote

The more you know yourself, the more you forgive yourself. *Confucius*

Web

Here's the full text of William Stafford's [The Way It Is](#), plus some others.

April 30, 2013
Everything's connected

How often I forget that. I'm used to analyzing one thing over against another: this is left and this is right; this is positive and this is negative; this is OK and this is ill; etc. I forget that those are divisions I create to help me make sense of things. But those divisions don't exist. In the final analysis, it's all connected.

So, when I read another article on how practicing forgiveness helps our physical health, I pause, remember and reconnect. Like many, I know from experience that mental stress can lead to an upset stomach, a headache, and chest tightness. It makes us more susceptible to catching a cold or other virus that's going around.

I also know from experience that practices lowering stress (e.g., rest & exercise, practicing forgiveness, meditation/contemplation) reduce these symptoms and make us less susceptible to disease. Many scientific studies support this as well.

Today, we can improve our health by practicing gratitude, kindness, and generosity – the [Fundamentals of Forgiveness](#). You'll feel better.

Quote

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.
Lewis B. Smedes

Web

An article from the Mayo Clinic describes the correlation between forgiveness and improved health. It also provides the health effects of holding a grudge. ([read article](#)).

April 23, 2013
Achieving clarity

How do you achieve clarity on gnarly issues?

As highly-wired, multi-networked, resource-rich folks we likely turn to our various webs of family and friends as well as books and blogs. Yet, we may be overlooking the most powerful teacher of all – ourselves.

When my son was a preschooler, he simply would not act on a suggestion or direction from me until he had made it his own. His entire body revealed his process from “I’m not so sure” to “maybe” to “I have decided that I’ll do this.” It had to make sense to him and, in essence, become his idea.

As adults, I observe (in myself and others) that we’re little different. Simply being advised or directed toward a certain solution or course of action doesn’t mean we’ll give our assent. It needs to make sense to us. Often, this is a quick bit of consideration. But on those complex, many-layered issues, we need more.

We need to let our soul speak. Giving ourselves space and posing probing questions, we listen for the answer that has that quiet ping of truth. Until we take the time to individually consider, mull and reflect – listening to the guide within – we will not commit to serious action.

When we want to achieve “buy in” with an individual (self or others) or a group, the critical step is not *telling*, it’s *listening*. How do you best listen to your inner guide?

Quote

My friend...know that you are a man with a lantern who goes in search of the light. *Noah benShea*

Web

Poet Noah benShea writes on the importance and impact of making little changes in our lives ([read now](#)).

April 16, 2013
The power of one

One is the greatest number. It's large enough to hold the entire universe yet small enough for a particle to fill. Multiplied by itself, it equals itself. It cannot be divided and anything divided by itself equals one. Becoming one is the goal of marriage and of community. Those in close relationship are said to think and act as one.

The most powerful stories focus on one protagonist, because we most easily relate to another one. When tragedy strikes, the most gripping tales of horror and heroism tell of one person's experience.

Our individual lives resonate one with another. We feel compassion most keenly when faced with the suffering of one. We empathize most strongly with one in need.

Great is the influence of one look, one gesture, or one suggestion.

We cannot overestimate the power of one.

Quote

We are each other's harvest; we are each other's business; we are each other's magnitude and bond. *Gwendolyn Brooks*

Web

Looking upon a photo from Apollo 10, Joseph Campbell observed, "When you see the earth from the moon, you don't see any divisions there of nations or states. This might be the symbol for us today." ([see picture](#))

April 9, 2013

What's in your closet?

Spring is upon us, and often that means "spring cleaning" our houses and yards. But, what about spring cleaning our hearts and minds?

I'm a fan of reflection and contemplation. Periods of reflection help unveil the dark corners in my mind's deep closets. I learn things about myself – some good, others not so much – that I need to acknowledge, accept, and improve.

Forgiveness is about how we respond to people, events, and situations in our lives. When people hit our "hot buttons" (our tender, sensitive issues), our responses are intense. One way I identify my hot buttons is by looking at what irritates me about other people. My irrational rage at their actions mirrors my anger and disappointment at my own faults and flaws.

Spring may bring cleaning but it also brings rebirth and new possibilities. Reflection and meditation grant us the time and space to cool our hot buttons by identifying and naming them, and then honestly acknowledging and accepting them as part of who we are. Practicing the [Fundamentals of Forgiveness](#) (gratitude, kindness, and generosity) with others, and with ourselves, helps soothe those irritations.

Quote

Nothing contributes so much to tranquilizing the mind as a steady purpose - a point on which the soul may fix its intellectual eye. *Mary Wollstonecraft*

Web

Here's a blog suggesting ways we can create an extra hour each day for contemplation. Give it a go! ([read post](#))

April 2, 2013
The lighter side

Humor, like forgiveness, is a great stress reliever, boosts the immune system, and strengthens relationships. With April 1 having just passed, I thought we'd have a little fun today. So, without further adieu, here are...

Daffy-nitions of Reconciliation

Reconsillyation – relationship heals with fits of giggling

Recanciliation – believing its possible...not quite ready to act

Reconsimulation – let's just pretend things are OK

Meconciliation – reconnecting with yourself

Reconscintilation – puts a new spark in the relationship

Weeconciliation – relationship heals just a wee bit

Yippee!-conciliation – all is well! There is much rejoicing!

Humor and forgiveness are not only good for you; both are free and accessible anytime.

Quote

Be the strange you wish to see in the world. *Anonymous*

Web

Not enough fun? Then, read daffy-nitions of forgiveness. ([read now](#)).

March 26, 2013
Silence is golden

This week, for Christians, is Holy Week, which recounts the drama of Jesus's arrest, death, and resurrection.

*Hello darkness, my old friend
I've come to talk with you again*

For those who like ritual, it's a most thrilling time. Many years ago, I was the choir director in a Lutheran church. At the close of their Good Friday service, recounting the crucifixion, the pastor proclaimed, "It is finished," and slammed the Bible shut. As the dull thud echoed through the sanctuary, the congregation exited in silence.

*Because a vision softly creeping
Left its seeds while I was sleeping*

Many said that they didn't say a word for the entire drive home.

*And the vision that was planted in my brain
Still remains*

Whether you know the details of the stories or not, the essential element is this - **out of death comes life**. It dramatizes a dynamic we see time and time again:

Out of separation comes connection
Out of betrayal comes reconciliation
Out of suffering comes compassion
Out of hate comes love
Out of loss comes gain
Out of grief comes forgiveness

Within the sound of silence

While we conceive this movement as being "out there," it is always a movement within...often deep within.

Take time for silence – even for a few moments. It helps care for your deep within.

Quote

The final spiritual reference is to the silence beyond the sound. *Joseph Campbell*

Web

For more on the importance of silence, here is an excerpt from *Spirit of Silence: Making Space for Creativity* by John Lane ([read now](#)).

Also, listen to Simon & Garfunkel sing *The Sound of Silence* at the 25th Anniversary of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame concert (2009) – a mature rendition, 45 years after its first recording ([listen now](#))

March 19, 2013
On self-acceptance

As parents, grandparents, uncles/aunts, teachers, and caregivers, children look to us for acceptance. They want to know that they are worthy of our love and respect because of who they are (i.e., fellow human beings), not because of what they have done. So, how we handle their accomplishments and disappointments can leave a profound and lasting effect.

“Promoting self-forgiveness with youth” ([article here](#)) gives an example of how a teacher handled his disappointment with the class’s lack of preparation. He didn’t let them off the hook – he held them accountable for their mistakes. But he did it in a way that allowed them to take their lumps, forgive themselves, and move on to do better.

When we accept ourselves just as we are – strengths, weaknesses, accomplishments, failures – then we can embrace the truth and begin improving our lives. Without acceptance we often avoid the truth by blaming others or by engaging other unhealthy practices.

Modeling acceptance and self-forgiveness, and assisting our children in self-forgiveness, will help children learn how to hold themselves accountable and be responsible for their lives without getting mired in guilt and shame. ([more on self-forgiveness](#))

Quote

The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.
Carl Rogers

Web

How does self-forgiveness or self-compassion compare with self-esteem? Kristin Neff addressed this last month in a TED talk. ([watch video](#))

March 12, 2013

WIFM

Most of us have heard of WIFM – What’s In it For Me? I’ve come across this in various contexts, sometimes portrayed positively and other times negatively.

In forgiveness discussions, WIFM comes across as, “Why should I forgive that louse?” or “Doesn’t my forgiveness just let him off the hook?” Both followed by, “What’s in it for me?”

An insight from comparative religions (most which promote forgiveness) sheds light on this: the religious images are outward, but their reflection is inward. So, our reaching out with forgiveness reflects an inward healing.

Fred Luskin says that there are two steps to forgiveness, grieving and letting go. Once we have grieved – worked through the denial, anger, creative reasoning, sadness, and acceptance – then we let go. Often, we ritualize this letting go by approaching the offender and offering our forgiveness.

One amazing thing about this ritual is that the timing is totally up to you. Story after story affirms that the offender need not apologize or even be present for you to fully let go. Some have even offered forgiveness to the conjured image of the person in their imagination.

Azim Khamisa calls this extension of forgiveness a redemptive act. It reconnects you with the human family and gives you opportunity to offer the wisdom of your experience as a boon to your community.

Offenders may or may not find grace in your forgiveness – that’s not in your control. You will find healing.

Quote

The cave you fear to enter holds the treasures you seek. *Joseph Campbell*

Web

Harriet Brown describes her search for forgiveness and experience at a Fred Luskin workshop ([read article](#)).

March 5, 2013

Teach your children well

I'll cut right to the chase: Why don't we methodically train all our children in love and compassion? Why don't we intentionally attend to the practice everyday as adults?

One could argue that religion provides this training. At times, yes. Yet, religious lessons often teach compassion laced with division and intolerance. We need better.

In her TED talk, Joan Halifax reminds us that compassion is that capacity to see clearly into the nature of suffering, to recognize that we are not separate from that suffering, and to aspire to transform it.

She also points to a pitfall of compassion – our hope for specific outcomes. It's essential, she says, to not be attached to the outcome because it will distort our capacity to be fully present.

*Don't ever ask them why, if they told you, you would cry,
So just look at them and sigh and know they love you.*

Love and compassion are necessities for survival, and the capacities for both live within each of us. They need only be activated. Without them, we become paralyzed by pity, moral outrage, and fear.

*Can you hear and do you care and
Can't you see we must be free to
Teach your children what you believe in.
Make a world that we can live in.*

Recent advances in neuroscience show that cultivating compassion not only allows us to empathize more deeply but also be more resilient in the face of suffering. Compassion, like forgiveness, also enhances our immune system. There is no downside to compassion.

Teaching and practicing compassion is a tall order – sure it is. Dare to dream!

*Teach your children well,
Their father's hell did slowly go by,
And feed them on your dreams
The one they picked, the one you'll know by*

Quote

Love and compassion are necessities. They are not luxuries. Without them humanity cannot survive. *Dalai Lama*

Web

Two treats for you this week: listen to Joan Halifax give her TED talk ([listen now](#)) and listen to a live version of *Teach Your Children Well* ([listen now](#)). Enjoy!

February 26, 2013
March-like perfection

I'm a calendar guy. I plan, schedule, adjust and readjust, and it all happens on my calendar. That's why March is so beautiful.

March is February over again – with bonus days! Once I've grown accustomed to the flow of February's days, I get to stay in the same mode for March (save Leap Year). That little bit of consecutive calendar consistency tickles my orderly. What a gift!

Sometimes people strike me the same way. Their rock-solid, trustworthy behavior – while it may not tickle my orderly (wherever that is) – grants me the gift of predictability and security. This is especially true when their consistency aligns with my idea of good.

Of course, people continue to surprise me...and not always in a good way. Appointments forgotten, tasks undone, the obvious overlooked...what's going on? Are they misguided, caught in an incomprehensible logic web of doom, or trying to make my life a misery? No. They blundered.

People love and care, try to do their best, and, at times, forget. So, what can I do?

I remind myself of their intentions, shake off every imposed pathology and conspiracy, and give them another shot at March-like perfection. Then, I just smile at the whole darn thing.

Quote

In the end, all forgiveness is self-forgiveness. *Joanie Chappel*

Web

Here's a brief article on how and why giving the benefit of the doubt helps us live happier lives ([read now](#)).

February 19, 2013

What do you make of that?

When I hear that phrase, I picture two guys looking at the scene before them. One guy scratches his head and asks the other, "What do you make of that?"

It's a great question because it belies the fact that we don't see things as they are; rather, we see things as we imagine them to be. We have to *make sense* (i.e., create understanding) of things to store them in our minds.

How we make sense of things becomes a critical factor in how we experience joy and suffering in this world. Over the past few years I've read several stories of how ordinary individuals have taken tragic situations and used their experiences to bring joy and healing to themselves and others.

You've read many of these, too. It's common for us to respond, "I couldn't do that." What we forget, however, is that they didn't think they could do that, either. In fact, they didn't transform their tragedy right away. It often took many months of one-day-at-a-time healing.

But, what's the alternative? If not transformation, then what? In our community, family literacy efforts recognize that when you teach a family to read you often end a generations-old cycle of illiteracy. The doors of education open wide for parents and children, and even wider for grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Similarly, when we heal deep pain, we often break the lineage of hurt or keep it from taking root. We transform our present as well as our legacy.

If we set our intention on transformation and allow ourselves to look deeply into our own suffering, it will guide us and we will know what to do and what not to do to change our hearts. We will eventually arrive on the other side suffering and find ourselves.

Quote

We can tell a lot by what a person does with their suffering: do they transmit it or do they transform it. *Richard Rohr*

Web

In 1993, Thich Nhat Hanh wrote a brief essay on transforming suffering ([read it now](#))

February 12, 2013

Deep listening

Many of us have heard of and practiced active listening where we give the person space to speak and then restate what we hear in order to clarify our understanding.

What if we focused less on our understanding and more on the speaker's understanding herself?

Deep listening (or compassionate listening) helps the speaker explore his own inner life and process. As we listen, we reflect their words and ask open questions to draw them out not so that we understand but so that they discover their own understanding.

Thich Nhat Hanh writes of deep listening and loving speech as a practice of generosity. This captures fully the meaning of generosity of as a [Fundamental of Forgiveness](#).

Deep listening offers a priceless gift to a friend, colleague or anyone in need of relief. Be that gift.

Quote

It doesn't cost anything to have loving speech. *Vietnamese saying*

Web

Listen to Thich Nhat Hanh explain deep listening in this brief video ([watch now](#))

February 5, 2013
Live in the layers

Last weekend I had the good fortune to spend time on retreat. Part of the experience included exploring several poems. My favorite was [The Layers by Stanley Kunitz](#).

The leader read the poem as we followed on our own copies. A particular phrase sat heavy in my ear

Live in the layers,
Not on the litter.

While our discussion opened up several insightful interpretations, the one that I wish to share here says something like...

Choose to live, claiming all that has gone before, knowing that we recreate ourselves every day
Choose not to dwell on comparing and labeling experiences, constructing our own palettes of death

Self-forgiveness claims every moment of my life and names it "me." It offers no excuses, no argument, and no debate. Each experience a layer, I live in them all, denying none, exalting none; only grateful.

Forgive yourself...be yourself.

Quotes

I am what I am and that's all that I am. *Popeye*

I am who I am [or] I will be what I will be. *Common translations of YHWH – name of God given to Moses (Exodus 3:14)*

Web

Jen Weigel offers a brief article on the power of forgiving yourself. ([read article](#))

January 29, 2013
"Yes, but..."

I'm trying to rid this short, toxic phrase from my vocabulary. Why? Because, "yes, but..." is the shortest distance between common ground and misunderstanding.

I find, upon reflection, that I most often say, "yes, but..." when I wish to insert my not-so-humble opinion into a conversation. And, I may even interrupt my companion's train of thought to do so. (Woe to those who take a thoughtful pause!)

Why is my opinion so important right now? What am I so eager to defend? What am I afraid will happen if I'm not heard immediately? Why do I assume that I fully understand what my companion is trying to say?

Listening is hard work, and we don't have very many models of good listening to help guide us. The best listening advice I've ever heard came from a listening campaign sponsored by ISAAC (Interfaith Strategy for Advocacy and Action in the Community): they advised us to simply **be quiet** – don't speak until the person is finished talking. Perhaps if we listened more, we would have less to forgive.

Listen...clarify...understand...then discuss. How many of us seek someone who will listen to us without judgment...someone who will let us talk through an issue without having to weigh the impact and meaning of each and every word? How many of us are willing to offer that gift to family, friends, and colleagues?

We can offer the gift of listening. And, when we need it, we'll likely have to ask for it.

Quote

...grant that I may not so much seek...to be understood as to understand... *St. Francis of Assisi*

Web

Here's a brief article on active listening with a list of five key elements ([read article](http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm)) (<http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm>)

January 22, 2013
Kind of...

When I was a teenager, my friends and I often used the phrase, "kind of" (usually pronounced, "kind-a") as a statement of minor interest or attraction, as in, "Do you want to go to the movies?" "I kind-a do." Or, "Do you like the cake?" "Kind-a."

To say, "kind of..." meant that we were inclined toward the subject but not yet committed. We were leaning that way.

Acts of kindness are not much different. We incline toward the person, not necessarily committing to a long-term friendship or even extended acquaintance. We lean in and offer some assistance with no strings attached.

Friendships often form from a series of kind acts. Eighteenth century poet Samuel Johnson reminds us

We cannot tell the precise moment when friendship formed. As in filling a vessel drop by drop, there is at last a drop which makes it run over; so in a series of kindness there is at last one which makes the heart run over.

Practicing kindness (a [Fundamental of Forgiveness](#)) through common courtesies or small helps embodies equality. It recognizes that each of us is worthy of the same measure of respect and consideration and that "we're all in this together."

So, feel free to lean in and do some good. It's kind of you.

Quote

I have never met a person whose greatest need was anything other than real, unconditional love. You can find it in a simple act of kindness toward someone who needs help. There is no mistaking love...it is the common fiber of life, the flame that heats the soul, energizes our spirit and supplies passion to our lives. *Elisabeth Kubler-Ross*

Web

It may surprise you to know that February 11-17, 2013 is Random Acts of Kindness Week. While I don't highlight many of these observances (they are legion), I think this one deserves notice ([read more](#)).

January 15, 2013
Our authentic guide

Real stories move me the most.

For the past few years, I've had an alert set for "forgiveness." The alert scours the internet every 24 hours and sends me an email with links to new posts containing the word, "forgiveness."

After sifting through headlines on loan forgiveness and celebrities or the recently convicted begging for forgiveness, I find stories on forgiveness research, acts of forgiveness, and blog posts on forgiveness. The true treasures most often turn up in blogs.

Admittedly, most blogs are not treasures (I call them "blah blah blahs"). From time to time, however, a post sheds pretense and speaks authentically, sharing experience and insight. These posts reveal a snippet of deep, human reality and touch my soul.

Each time I read one of these, I'm reminded that the path to forgiveness – indeed, the path to relationships of all sorts – is paved with authenticity. Facing the facts before us (the beautiful and the brutal), accepting and expressing who we truly are (no matter how inarticulate), and keeping faith in the outcome moves our lives forward.

Moments of naked reality reside below the surface of appearance, judgment and blame. They mark our path as milestones and serve as beacons to the road ahead. What are your milestones...what do they illuminate for you?

Quote

Better reality than a dream: if something is real, then it's real and you're not to blame.
Umberto Eco

Web

Allison Vesterfelt recently posted a blog treasure. Her path to forgiveness reminds me of researcher Fred Luskin's two-steps to forgiveness: grieve (get in touch with the pain in all its original trauma) and let go (little by little). ([read her post](#))

January 8, 2013
Show me the data

[Season of Forgiveness](#) started four years ago with the goal of encouraging and equipping people to live happier, healthier more productive lives through understanding and acceptance. Much of this effort builds upon a growing body of scientific studies showing the direct connections between forgiveness and good health.

Recently, Greater Good published its [Top 10 Insights from “The Science of a Meaningful Life” in 2012](#). The article cites the explosion of scientific research on gratitude, mindfulness, kindness, and other related themes. Here’s a sampling:

Happiness is more strongly associated with the level of respect and admiration we receive from peers than to money or high status.

Kindness rocks! Several studies over the past six years have found that kids as young as 18 months will spontaneously help people in need. Further, kids in middle school who were kind to others were more well-liked – helping their own popularity even as they helped other people.

Gratitude and appreciation helps maintain healthy, happy romantic relationships.

An emerging body of research indicates that we can train people – in schools, workplaces, churches, and elsewhere – to be compassionate, thereby easing suffering in themselves and other people.

There are pitfalls. For example, over-valuing happiness can lead to too much focus on the self at the expense of connecting with others, leaving a person feeling lonely in stressful times.

There’s much more. Studies such as these remind me that we continue to learn more and more – confirming ancient wisdom as well as opening new doors of insight. The data shows that growth and change are possible at any age, and that the long arc of history not only bends toward justice but also towards compassion.

That’s encouraging!

Quote

I believe all suffering is caused by ignorance. People inflict pain on others in the selfish pursuit of their happiness or satisfaction. Yet true happiness comes from a sense of inner peace and contentment, which in turn must be achieved through the cultivation of altruism, of love and compassion and elimination of ignorance, selfishness and greed. *Dalai Lama*

Web

When it comes to compassion, many of us are hardest on ourselves. The little voice inside criticizes us mercilessly. Research suggests that self-compassion offers us a way to silence the critic and find an island of calm. ([read article](#))

January 1, 2013
Turn the page

It's that time again...

Every month I turn the page of the wall calendar to the next month. It's almost a ritual – a quick review of days past, an anticipation of what lies ahead. In January, one calendar is removed and another posted.

What lies ahead – joy, sorrow, melancholy...the ebb and flow of a lived life. Yet, just as we set aside the previous year's calendar, we can choose to set aside burdens that weigh us down.

Holding on to hatred and resentment tears at our soul. When we forgive, we acknowledge not only the futility of holding a grudge but the diminished quality of life that comes with playing the victim. We embrace the very real pain of the situation, devoid of judgment or blame, and set our intention to give up the resentment. As we understand and accept how the situation has affected us, we come to better understand the human condition and develop empathy and compassion.

Whether or not we're carrying a grudge, we can "build our forgiveness muscles" by regular practice of the [Fundamentals of Forgiveness](#) – gratitude, kindness, and generosity. If for no other reason than your good health, consider making this practice a resolution for the new year.

All the best for 2013.

Quote

In order to create a new "reality," we must discover how our current worldview affects the way we perceive and respond to problems. *Daniel Kim*

Web

An Australian blogger posted [30 Ways to Teach Children about Gratitude and Kindness](#). It has some great ideas...good for adults, too!