

12/30/14

*Let it begin with me*

While driving into town yesterday, I heard it on the radio – the list of top news stories of 2014. I don't remember them all, but the words that stay with me are: Ebola, Ukraine, Nigerian schoolgirls, Ferguson, and Isis.

We once again stand on the brink of a new year. With the past year ending with words of such violence and strife, where do we find peace?

Peace begins with acceptance. Violence should not surprise us. Next year at this time, there will be a similar list of words reminding us of pain and suffering. Accepting this does not condone or support it. Rather it acknowledges, even embraces, the reality of it, so that we can move on.

Peace begins with compassion. In compassion, I experience life – with all its joy and grief – not just alongside others but with others. Bringing my full presence to share in a companion's experience offers support in whatever way is needed. By supporting one another, we can move on together.

Peace begins with me...and you. What validates the world around us is the life we bring to it. Stuff happens out there, but it all exists in here – in our minds and our hearts. That's where meaning occurs. Through forgiveness we let go of anger and anxiety to nurture calm and connection. We find peace and share peace, because we live peacefully.

I imagine many of you shaking your heads and thinking, "I've heard this before." (I'm doing it, too.) Finding peace through acceptance, compassion, and forgiveness is ancient stuff. And yet, there it is.

Your ultimate source of peace and happiness resides within you.

Have a happy New Year – practice forgiveness.

**Quote**

Compassion condones suffering in that it recognizes that suffering is life. Life is lived with the suffering and you will not get rid of it. If you say No to a single aspect of life you have unraveled the whole thing. *Joseph Campbell*

**Web**

Here is a brief reflection on suffering, compassion, forgiveness, and peace from Dharma Master Hsin Tao ([watch now](#)). Also, as a little bonus, here's a brief reflection from the Dalai Lama ([watch now](#)).

12/23/14

### *Family forgiveness*

I just returned from a family gathering. We did what you might expect: caught up on current activities, ate, shared stories of the past, ate some more, talked of future plans, ate a little more, and played games. It was a good time.

Part of the joy for me went beyond the food, talking and laughing. It also included conversations acknowledging the harder realities, the not-so-good situations, the missing of those not present, and the welcoming of new arrivals (my niece's boyfriend and my nephew's baby son).

Families come in many shapes and sizes. People come and go from families through marriages, divorces, children from a previous marriage, adoptions, and more. Sometimes we get together, sometimes we don't. Sometimes things go well, sometimes they don't.

This is not a new phenomenon. Yet, high holiday expectations set the bar at "all things merry and bright," even though we know it won't always be that way.

So, as you celebrate this season in whatever way you do with whomever you do, may you surrender to the celebration and hold whatever comes in love and forgiveness.

### **Quote**

The ineffable joy of forgiving and being forgiven forms an ecstasy that might well arouse the envy of the gods. *Elbert Hubbard*

### **Web**

Here are some suggestions for promoting forgiveness in the family ([read now](#))

12/16/14

*On love*

'Tis the season, as they say. The season fills with many activities, traditions, and feelings. One thread that runs through it all is love.

Poets, writers, composers, theologians, and greeting card purveyors have weighed in heavily on the subject of love. You'd think all that could be said, has been said. Yet, like many deeply human experiences...

it falls to each of us to come to grips with it ourselves.

...and not just once. At each age, we revisit these fundamental experiences and appropriate them to our lives. Here's my take on love, for today.

Love connects me to another at a deep, human level. It flows beneath my thinking and above my emotions.

My love speaks in unbidden kindnesses, unanticipated tears, and unquenchable affection.

With unconditional love, I bring this same deep regard to the greater public. I practice unconditional love by giving the other person the space they need to be themselves, without judgment, without fear.

Forgiveness is one conduit of unconditional love.

I offer this not as anything definitive or final but simply as one reflection, offered on one day. I also offer it to encourage your own reflection on love, to formulate an understanding, and commit it to writing.

Capture your take on love for today. For, as they say, 'tis the season.

**Quote**

It's your unlimited power to care and to love that can make the biggest difference in the quality of your life. *Anthony Robbins*

**Web**

Here's another take on love. In this TEDx talk, philosopher Yann Dall'Aglio explores the universal search for tenderness and connection in a world ever more focused on the individual ([watch now](#)).

12/9/14  
*Got hope?*

Over the past couple of months, I've been facilitating discussions – explorations really – with our area's Hispanic American Council. We're exploring how we can find our voice, claim our position, and work to improve the wider community.

The discussions move slowly by design, allowing space for consideration of others' comments. They move even slower because I must work through a translator.

Even so, hope is welling up: hope that divisions within the Hispanic community can be healed; hope that residents can interface with area agencies as partners; hope that, by sharing more together, each person's life will be enriched.

Often, groups like this view hope as wishing for things to change out there. We hope for improved economies, more opportunities, or greater acceptance from "them."

This group's hope roots itself in each individual's soul. It builds on truthful speech, compassionate empathy, unassuming curiosity, and self-respect.

These four pillars carry the weight of this emerging, hopeful community, a community transforming from

People in need whose lives we save  
to  
People we need whose lives we share

**Quote**

Forgiveness and reconciliation are not cheap, they are costly...Forgiveness is an act of much hope and not despair. It is to hope in the essential goodness of people and to have faith in their potential to change. It is to bet on that possibility... Ultimately there is no future without forgiveness. *Archbishop Desmond Tutu*

**Web**

The four pillars mentioned above draw from *The Four Agreements* by don Miguel Ruiz ([read more](#)).

12/2/14

*Giving Tuesday*

Today marks the third year of Giving Tuesday. It comes on the heels of Black Friday, Local Saturday, Sleep-in Sunday (I just made that up), and Cyber Monday. What's tomorrow? Wet Willy Wednesday? (Don't ask\*)

I'm usually not one to rally around any "National Day of...." I've missed International Forgiveness Day for the past five years. But I am a fan of giving.

Whenever I think of what makes life worth living, the act of giving enters the picture: giving undivided attention to my son; giving energy to celebrate with family and friends; giving my heart to my wife.

Giving a smile to child's wondering gaze; giving appreciation for deeds done; giving an affirming handshake or hug; giving joyous laughter when funny things just happen.

Also giving a small kindness to a stranger; giving understanding in the face of anger; giving space to someone needing to vent; giving presence to someone in pain; giving silence when words just won't do.

And giving compassion to a wounded soul; giving the light of hope when darkness prevails; giving the grace of a second – or third – chance.

Like most of you, I've been on the giving end and the receiving end of all that and more. But, as we all know, it's always more blessed to give.

So celebrate the day...and give.

Best,

Thom

\*A wet willy is a kid's trick consisting of putting one's index finger in one's mouth, wetting it thoroughly, and then sticking it in someone's ear. Ugh!

**Quote**

It is in giving that we receive. *Francis of Assisi*

**Web**

More on Giving Tuesday ([read now](#)).

11/25/14

*Focus on gratitude*

It's Thanksgiving week. I know you're busy. I'll keep this brief.

Be grateful...it'll help.

As we make our way through this week – compressed week at work, travelling or hosting guests, scrambling back to the grocery, planning kitchen & seating logistics...details, details, details – please take time to stop, take a deep breath, and be grateful.

Do this every day...more than once.

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 capture moments here and there to be grateful. You'll be happier and healthier if you do.

Happy Thanksgiving!

**Quote**

No matter what the offense, the process of forgiveness is the same: You let go of anger and hurt by being mindful and focusing on gratitude and kindness. Forgiveness concepts are simple. It's the execution that's hard. *Fred Luskin*

**Web**

Gratitude is good for you, your health and your relationships. Research is mounting on how it's also good for our communities ([read more](#)).

11/18/14

*Make my day*

According to the folks at RandomActsOfKindness.org, last Thursday (Nov 13) was *World Kindness Day* (missed it again!).

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."

Kindness is also a practice of successful leaders. Executive Coach Mary Jo Asmus writes that most successful leaders engage in similar practices (though they rarely refer to them as practices). These include: journaling, gratitude, healthy eating, exercise, intentional acts of kindness, meditation, and spiritual/religious practice.

These practices also contribute to job satisfaction. Mary Jo cites Good Think, Inc. CEO Shawn Achor whose research shows that 90% of happiness at work comes from how we process our work internally and 10% is influenced by external factors. "Working harder or trying to find the job of your dreams just won't produce sustainable happiness. It comes from inside."

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

**Quote**

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

*Katherine Francke*

**Web**

Here's Shawn Achor's informative (and entertaining) TEDx talk ([watch now](#)).

11/11/14

*Got a minute?*

Many organizations list mission, vision & values on their websites. When we think of organizational values, words like honesty, integrity, and service generally surface. Generosity is not commonly listed, unless perhaps it's United Way campaign time.

Yet, in the book, *Change Anything*, the authors give a nod to generosity when discussing getting one's career on track. Identifying what separates the best from the rest, they list three things: know your stuff, focus on the right stuff, and build a reputation for being helpful.

They look to "Individuals who are singled out by their colleagues as the go-to folks in the company" and say that "*people describe them as experts who are generous with their time.*"

We also know them by other descriptions: team players, mission-focused, and helpful. "Theirs is not primarily a self-serving motivation. Top people are widely known...because *they help others solve their problems.*"

This works for staff as well as volunteers. At the heart of it, generosity is about placing your focus outside self, outside organization, and on to the greater purpose, the greater cause. It may seem counterintuitive, but the more we focus on the greater goal beyond our organization, the better it is for our organization and career.

A possible pitfall is helping so much that one's own work doesn't get done. Certainly, boundaries must be observed. Remember, the second point above was "focus on the right stuff."

So, next time you hear someone say, "Got a minute?" hear it as an opportunity to connect and contribute to a generous culture.

**Quote**

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

**Web**

Here's a TEDx talk by one of the co-authors of *Change Anything* ([watch now](#))

11/4/14

*To the polls*

Today, we elect our representatives, some senators and governors...and so much more. I'm not referring to the many other political races going on but to the hundreds of people represented by these offices.

While each governor and congressperson wields power, each is also advised, guided, and challenged by many others. Every one of those persons knows that if she doesn't raise her voice, then her opinion – her wisdom, perspective, and insight – goes unheard.

Similarly, we each have wisdom, perspective, and insight to be heard. As we live, work, and play within our families, workplaces, civic institutions, houses of worship and elsewhere, we must listen and carefully consider the opinions of others. And we must offer our own voice as well. It is our responsibility.

As we close this election season, I offer an insight from Parker Palmer. He claims that institutions – political, religious, business, and others – are their own worst enemies. Why? Because those within the institutions – even those considered most powerful – often shirk their responsibility to voice their opinions especially when outside voices (what he calls, "signals from another planet") are taking the institution in a poor direction.

Institutions are the products of the people who create them...and who re-create them. The only ones that can make the changes needed are those who work within.

So, embrace democracy – let your voice be heard!

**Quote**

Reality is unforgivingly complex. *Anne Lamott*

**Web**

Parker Palmer describes how institutions are their own worst enemies ([watch video](#)).

10/28/14

*Pre-emptive strike*

The battle heats up once again. With tempers kindled, faded lines redrawn, and ammunition stores refilled, the faithful are standing tall to fight...

The War on Christmas

Yes, the season returns! It's the most wonderful time of the year, so pundits, bloggers, and commentators scramble to find a new twist, a yet-undiscovered egregious greeting, a more heinous violation...anything to keep the public interested in what they have to say.

Even though the committed folks at [DefendingChristmas.com](http://DefendingChristmas.com) remind us that celebrating Christmas shows no signs of diminishing, "Happy Holidays" is not an anti-Christmas greeting, and "Santa" was not coined as an anagram for "Satan," many will again sound the alarm.

Anticipating another drawn-out war on error, I've determined my strategy:

**PRE-EMPTIVE FORGIVENESS**

I understand that the media industry is highly competitive and, like other businesses, the holiday season revenue can make or break their year. I understand their need to attract viewers, boost ratings, and secure advertising dollars. I accept that "it's their job" and the common practice is to overblow every nuance.

So, with understanding and acceptance, I'll forgive now and turn my efforts to celebrating my favorite time of the year.

**Quote**

Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it. *Charles Swindoll*

**Web**

Here's holiday news – a Home for the Holidays effort in Kalamazoo to put 80 homeless families in permanent, stable housing so they don't have to spend the holidays in a shelter ([read more](#)).

10/21/14

*It is what it is*

Sometimes the first step is recognizing that there is a first step.

At work, at home, and elsewhere, there are times when I find myself at odds with the situation before me. I'm stuck...befuddled. When I don't know where to turn, I find that there is one thing that will turn me back around.

Acceptance

Once I accept (i.e., acknowledge) that I am stuck then I know where I am. It drops a pin on the map of my emotional journey, allowing me to better see possible routes out of my funk.

My common sticky places vary from navigating situations that try my values to managing people that try my patience, from my own short-fused stress to long-term challenges of self-care.

By taking a moment to observe the landscape and locate myself on it, I find a foothold and can choose to move in a new direction.

**Quote**

Compassion, forgiveness, these are the real, ultimate sources of power for peace and success in life. *Dalai Lama*

**Web**

In a brief post, attorney Sara Tollefson writes on how to bring compassion for self and others to your workplace. I find it as a key to avoid getting stuck ([read now](#)).

10/14/14

*Shall we NOT forgive?*

When we misuse powerful things, then things may go powerfully wrong.

That's the conclusion I came to after reading a recent article on why not to forgive. Writer David Bedrick points to the misuse of forgiveness saying that many psychologists treat forgiveness as a panacea, ignore an individual's unique pain and trauma, and shame victims by telling those not ready to forgive that they are hurting themselves.

Many definitions exist for *forgiveness*\*. Unfortunately, Bedrick doesn't define or describe how he understands forgiveness, so, he's a bit all over the map. He places many maladies at the doorstep of too-quick forgiveness: suppressed anger, botched reconciliation, faux justice, and more.

While I can take issue with the scattershot nature of this article, I cannot ignore the disturbing fact that Bedrick felt compelled to write it. It reminds me that forgiveness always requires that great care be taken.

Forgiveness, like a powerful medication, must be "used as directed." But here, the directions are unique for each person. Proper doses, proper intervals, and proper treatment periods vary widely. Similarly, interactions with other powerful processes (e.g., confrontation, reconciliation, and justice) must be carefully monitored.

When used properly, forgiveness can be a powerful healing force. We may support and encourage someone in their pain, but, ultimately, determining the pace of forgiveness falls into the hands of the one doing the forgiving.

\* I recognize that forgiveness, like many other words, has more than one definition. That being said, I generally define forgiveness as a process of understanding and acceptance; undertaken by oneself, for oneself; and separate from confrontation (addressing the issue with the other party), reconciliation (reuniting of relationship) or justice (holding someone accountable for their actions).

### **Quote**

The highest activity a human being can attain is learning for understanding, because to understand is to be free. *Baruch Spinoza*

### **Web**

Here's David Bedrick's brief article, *Forgiveness: Not Right Now, Thank You* ([read now](#))

10/7/14

*Is it all or nothing?*

In the musical *Oklahoma!* Will Parker sings "With me it's all or nothing. Is it all or nothing with you?"

While Will was commenting on his approach to romantic relationships, the "all or nothing" paradigm often applies to how we think of ourselves: unless I'm 100% good, then I'm not a good person. One slip-up ruins the entire endeavor.

Hip-hop radio host and commentator Jay Smooth says that this is especially true with respect to race. He has done work on how to tell someone that something they said sounds racist. The conversations too often dissolve from "what you said" to "what you are."

How do we accept critique...around racism or other issues? Can we accept that we made a mistake without hearing an overall indictment? What does our reaction tell us about our growing edges?

Jay's talk encourages us to allow for the complexity of who we are and not to be too quick to label ourselves good or bad. It's worth a listen.

**Quote**

The belief that you must be perfect in order to be good is an obstacle to being the best you can be. *Jay Smooth*

**Web**

Here is a link to Jay Smooth's TED talk ([watch now](#)).

9/30/14

*Little by little*

I often hear that forgiveness is complex, difficult to comprehend. However, I've found that forgiveness is easy to understand...people are complex.

But, I get it. Many and varied definitions of forgiveness come to us from religions, academics, and counselors, and most definitions (especially those from academics) go on and on, using several commas and assorted semi-colons. After reviewing several of these definitions, I distilled them down to this:

**Forgiveness is understanding and acceptance.**

Understanding involves gathering and comprehending the facts of the matter, identifying your behaviors related to the matter and examining your feelings related to the matter. Acceptance involves recognizing that what has happened cannot be changed, recognizing each person's role in the matter (including your own) and recognizing that everyone (yourself and others) deserves respect and care.

You notice that much of the explanation involves understanding and accepting yourself. We provide ourselves with the clearest windows on the complexities of the human condition, and often, our personal stories lead to amazing insights.

A young filmmaker, Jay Francisco Lopez, tells his story in, "Sin Padre," a film that premiered at the 2012 San Francisco Latino Film Festival. In a related interview, he calls making the film a "healing process." He says that in telling his story he found forgiveness, but there's more. "Forgiveness isn't easy, but it's OK, there's a way...I'm still taking it in little by little. It's just the beginning of the journey."

For those of us who aren't filmmakers, we can write. Look back at a recent event. What about that event stands out to you as especially delightful or troubling? Describe the event, describe your response, and describe how you feel about it now. What does this tell you about yourself? Clarify the insight and then accept it as part of who you are.

Each insight, each glimmer of understanding coupled with acceptance, takes us one more step down the path of happier, healthier living.

**Quote**

Knowing others is wisdom; Knowing the self is enlightenment; Mastering others requires force; Mastering the self needs strength. *Lao-Tzu*

**Web**

Read the interview with filmmaker Jay Francisco Lopez ([read now](#)).

9/23/14

*Waking up*

In a recent post, Jack Kornfield recalled this quote from Mark Twain:

“My life has been filled with terrible misfortunes... most of which never happened.”

I’m regularly amazed at the stories we create about ourselves, our situations, and the world around us. With just a few dramatic elements, we’ll weave stories of betrayal, deceit, conspiracy, and incompetence...and dwell on them.

Told in the break room, the kitchen, the coffee shop, from the pundit’s chair, or just in our individual minds, these victim stories spawn fear, anger, self-doubt and more. They cloud our understanding of self and others and contribute to a sense of isolation.

Kornfield suggests that we wake up to this victimizing pattern and hold it with compassion. Through heightened awareness and compassion we re-engage the world, recover our true feelings, and openly acknowledge and accept the world before us.

It’s what Fred Luskin calls turning your victim story into a hero story. For Kornfield, it was a life-changing process. What does it hold for you?

**Quote**

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

**Web**

Here is the brief post by Jack Kornfield on The Mind and the Heart ([read now](#))

9/16/14

### *Supportive presence*

Recently, I watched a conversation play out that illustrated the difference between talking with someone and supporting someone.

Person One reflected upon a life situation, presenting not only a specific issue but also their concern and puzzlement. Person Two engaged with questions that elicited more information about both the situation and their response. You could see the gears turning in Person One's mind – leaning forward, exploring thoughts and feelings, peeling back layers of understanding.

Then Person Two tossed in an observation, connecting the situation to their own life and experience. Immediately, the conversation withdrew from the well of Person One's experience and moved to a pitch-and-catch of their varied experiences. Person One leaned back, less engaged.

Asking open questions gives the person space to explore their issue more deeply and discover their interactions with it. Holding that space-time exclusively for the person gives them room to listen to their own voice, contemplate in hospitable silence, and glean their own internal wisdom.

It provides a path to self-understanding, self-acceptance, and self-forgiveness.

To me, that's what *support* looks like. It's more being with someone in their situation than talking with someone about their situation.

What would you add?

### **Quote**

Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. The friends who listen to us are the ones we move toward. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand. *Karl Menniger*

### **Web**

Here's a brief video in which Parker Palmer talks of how we honor and support one another within a circle of trust. ([watch now](#))

9/9/14

### *Courageous listening*

It happened again...so annoying.

I'm in the middle of a one-on-one conversation, and we're digging into the issues – really engaged. A person's phone buzzes, barely perceptible, and the person's face breaks. The look of "I wonder who's contacting me" dances across the eyes. The conversation enters a roundabout as the other asks, "Do you need to get that?"

So annoying because it was my phone. It was my face. They were my eyes.

I've written before of generosity (a [Fundamental of Forgiveness](#)) as attending to the person before us – being fully present. But it's more than that.

In her recent post, Mary Jo Asmus, elucidates this beautifully. She writes about courageous listening and says, "You have to be still: You need to listen with your body, heart, and mind."

How does one listen with body, heart, and mind? It reminds me of how Parker Palmer defines "heart" in his book, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*. He says:

Heart...reaches far beyond our feelings. It points to a larger way of knowing – of receiving and reflecting on our experience – that goes deeper than the mind alone can take us. The heart is where we integrate the intellect with the rest of our faculties, such as emotion, imagination, and intuition. It is where we learn how to "think the world together," not apart, and find the courage to act on what we know.

Courageous listening focuses all you have on the person. It's not just *undivided* attention. It's *unified* attention. One of the results, as Mary Jo writes, is an understanding that leads to compassion, empathy, and better relationships.

It's something I'm still working on.

### **Quote**

If we can change ourselves, we can change the world. We're not the victims of the world we see, we're the victims of the way we see the world. This is the essence of Compassionate Listening: seeing the person next to you as a part of yourself. *Dennis Kucinich*

### **Web**

Treat yourself to Mary Jo's recent blog post, [The courage to listen](#).

9/2/14

*What's that you say?*

Some years ago Clint Smith participated in his annual Lenten sacrifice by giving up something very important to him: speaking. As he engaged his practice, he realized the sobering fact that he had given up his voice long before.

Now a teacher, Smith helps his students explore their own fear-filled silences through poetry and encourages them to tell their truth.

Parker Palmer calls this process "finding your personal voice and agency." Often trained to be more audience than participant, we lack confidence in our own perspectives and influence to make a difference. By offering our own version of truth, and checking and correcting it against the truth of others, we find greater insight and energy.

Yet, with pundits, commentators, bloggers, and others filling airwaves and inboxes with talking points, many are left wondering: what's the point of talking?

That's why, for me, the key word in Palmer's phrase, "personal voice and agency," is *personal*. I'm not interested in *their* observations: what do *you* see? I don't want *an opinion*: I want *your opinion*. Don't share *thoughts* on the matter: share *your thoughts*.

Part of our self-awareness and self-acceptance is recognizing, "I don't have the one true answer." Another part is recognizing, "The answer I have is important for today and needs to be spoken."

All you have to offer is *your perspective*. And that's what makes it so very important.

**Quote**

In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends.  
*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

**Web**

Clint Smith offered his perspective – "The Danger of Silence" – to a TEDx audience last July ([watch now](#)).

8/26/14

*Give 'em a break*

Labor Day weekend arrives soon. Regardless of what job you do or where you do it, a key contributor to making a job a “good job” is the people with whom you work – colleagues, suppliers, customers, et al. If you enjoy the people, chances are you enjoy the job.

My “best fit” job is a job where I can be myself – that is, a place where I can be authentic and genuine, not having to be someone different or set aside certain values to accomplish the tasks before me. I want to connect with the people and the work in such a way that I learn, grow, and discover more about myself and the world around me.

Practicing the [Fundamentals of Forgiveness](#) – gratitude, kindness, and generosity – is something I can do at work, at home...everywhere. These practices engage me with others in meaningful ways and help me discover who I am. They affirm life while improving my attitude and productivity. There’s simply no downside to being grateful, kind, and generous.

Happy Labor Day!

**Quote**

Never give up on people because, sooner or later, they will astonish you. *Randy Pausch*

**Web**

Here is a post about why forgiveness is important in the workplace ([read article](#))

8/19/14

*Where do you [choose to] live?*

“Where do you live?” It’s a common question, but what if we twist it a bit?

Do you live in fear? Do you live in gratitude? Do you live in denial? Do you live in the moment? Where do you dwell...emotionally...spiritually...practically?

Honestly, I answer, “yes” to all the above. I move from place to place throughout my day and my week. At times, I brace in fear; later, I open to whatever the moment brings. Yet, while my initial feeling or response to an event may just bubble up from inside, how long I dwell in that place is often up to me.

We cannot control how we feel. Feelings and responses emerge unbidden from a complex web of nature and nurture that defy any attempt to untangle. So, let that one go (Why do I respond that way? I don’t know...I just do.). However, we can choose not to live out of those unbidden feelings. We can feel anger but not be angry. We can feel fear but not be fearful.

We feel, and we can acknowledge those feelings. And then, we can choose where to live...how to be.

**Quote**

Absolutely nothing in your life has to change for you to feel better; it is possible to learn to be happy without changing anything in your life except your relationship to your thinking.

*Richard Carlson*

**Web**

Fred Luskin provides a helpful perspective as he reminds us that we live our lives in a sea of vulnerability. ([watch the video](#))

8/12/14

*A single day...a single moment*

Many years ago I stood with my girlfriend next to my packed car. I was leaving for a summer job and wouldn't see her again for many weeks. Without warning my eyes gushed forth tears of...I wasn't sure...but tears nonetheless. Something deep inside already grieved the separation, something that eluded my rational brain and verbal capacity.

Years later and now married, we watched Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (one of her...OK, "our"...favorites) and I heard Mr. Darcy confess to Elizabeth Bennett, "You have bewitched me body and soul and I love...I love...I love you. I never wish to be parted from you from this day on."

Mr. Darcy said exactly what I was feeling on that day, standing by my packed car with her.

...

I've been posting these emails every Tuesday for the past five years and today happens to be Tuesday, August 12 – our 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

Now, I've lived over 28 million minutes and forgotten nearly 28 million of them. But, of the relative few that I remember and cherish, my wife's in all of them.

Today, I'm far beyond bewitched – I'm all in. We've shared more life together than we've lived separately, and she holds residence in me. I suppose that's what they mean by two becoming one.

Simply stated: Laurel, you'll live in my heart forever...and I like it like that!

**Quote**

The way of peace is the way of love. Love is the greatest power on earth. It conquers all things. *Peace Pilgrim*

**Web**

*Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage* offers a great resource to bring forgiveness into a marriage – no matter how slight or severe the situation. ([read now](#))

8/5/14

*Non (verbal) violence*

It's often hidden. It may appear antithetical to who we are. Yet, most of us have one. It's the self-slam.

"I'm such an idiot."

"I'm so stupid."

"I'm not that nice of person."

"I'm just a dweeb."

And the list goes on.

What's your favorite self-slam? Why do we do this to ourselves?

In his recent article, *Stop the Violence Within*, Will Donnelly reminds us that we cannot be free and happy while engaging in this "insidious self abuse." He examines his internal voice – which has become subtler over time – and finds that it brings out his harsh judgmental side.

"It all boils down to this: I am simply being mentally violent, and violence is never, ever good."

What to do? Donnelly suggests that yoga helps increase our self awareness and control of this inner violent voice. Another recent post suggests encouraging forgiveness by reminding ourselves of our positive qualities and contributions – a practice of the Babemba tribe of South Africa.

What do you do to silence or counteract your self-slams...your verbal violence?

We may not be able to stop the self-slam from rising, but we can control our response and "steer ourselves clear in the direction of kindness, or non violence...to decide to make love your prime directive."

**Quote**

Once exposed, a secret loses all its power. *Anne Aguirre*

**Web**

Two short articles inspired today's post: [Stop the Violence Within](#) by Will Donnelly and the Fetzer Institute's [August forgiveness post](#).

P.S. Last Sunday was International Forgiveness Day – missed it again. If you missed it too, then join me in celebrating [Great Lakes Forgiveness Day!](#)

July 29, 2014  
*On not letting go*

My son likes the [NASA photo](#) that shows earth posing beneath Saturn's rings. Besides being a truly awesome sight, it always reminds me of an undeniable fact:

Everything on earth is connected.

Back on earth...many years ago, two policemen were driving past a spot in Hawaii where several people had jumped to their deaths. They saw a man beyond the railing, preparing to jump. The car stopped. One officer jumped out and caught the man just as he jumped. Both officer and man were about to fall when the second officer pulled the two of them back.

When a reporter asked the first officer why he risked his life to save this person he did not know, the officer responded, "I couldn't let go. If I had let that young man go, I couldn't have lived another day of my life."

Nineteenth century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer describes the above as a breakthrough to the realization that you and the other are one, two aspects of one life. Our separateness is only the effect of how we experience one another under our conditions of space and time. Or, as Joseph Campbell puts it:

"Our true reality is in our identity and unity with all life."

This true reality informs my understanding of our inner draw to be in relationship and to forgive when relationships suffer. The pain of being out-of-relationship, whether pronounced or subtle, runs deep and keeps us ill at ease. To forgive reconnects us with the other person...reconnects us with ourselves.

And we find peace.

**Quote**

Forgiveness is not always easy. At times, it feels more painful than the wound we suffered, to forgive the one that inflicted it. And yet, there is no peace without forgiveness. *Marianne Williamson*

**Web**

Here is a video of the discussion between Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers where Campbell discusses the above story. To see this excerpt, watch the video at 28:15 – 33:00. ([watch now](#))

July 22, 2014  
*Improve your story*

From time to time my forgiveness discussions run into the brick wall of practicality. Claiming to be a realist or simply practical, a person opts to carry the grudge as a matter of political prudence or self-protection. Or there's an appeal to the Myers-Briggs Indicator, "I'm a thinker, not a feeler." Yet...

...forgiveness is one of the most practical things I know.

I recently discovered additional support from the world of business in Cindy Wigglesworth's *SQ21*. Wigglesworth is a Houston-based consultant who spent several years in Human Resources with Exxon. Within her 21 skills of Spiritual Intelligence (i.e., SQ21), she states that forgiveness is a key skill in keeping the Higher Self in charge (skill 13).

A primary forgiveness practice in the workplace (and beyond) is reframing or resetting the story of blame that brews in your mind when someone annoys or hurts you. This is similar to Fred Luskin's (*Forgive for Good*) nine steps to forgiveness where the ninth step is to "Amend your grievance story to remind you of the heroic choice to forgive."

Wigglesworth offers a doorway into this story transformation. She asks, "What would it take for ME to do this obnoxious thing that this person is doing?" As we begin to posit scenarios that could lead us down that path, we broaden the possibilities and counter-balance the blaming stories. Then, we realize a humbling fact:

I don't really know what's going on with that person.

Armed with a clear understanding of unknowing, we may give the benefit of the doubt, let our annoyance and anger subside, forgive ourselves for jumping to conclusions, and, perhaps, offer to assist the formerly-known-as-obnoxious person before us.

### **Quote**

Forgiveness is the journey of moving from telling the story as a victim to telling the story as a hero. Forgiveness means that your story changes so that you and not the grievance are in control. *Fred Luskin*

### **Web**

Cindy Wigglesworth's Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) is based upon the concept of multiple intelligences and completes a triad along with Cognitive Intelligence (IQ) and Emotional Intelligence (EQ). She sets for the basics of Spiritual Intelligence in a recent TEDx talk ([watch now](#))

July 15, 2014  
*A balancing act*

You may be familiar with the phrase, “if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.” When I read articles that are critical of forgiveness, it often critiques along this line of thought. Forgiveness, they say, doesn’t work in every situation.

Forgiveness, like all practices and disciplines, has its place and time. It’s powerful to be sure, but forcing it or misapplying it creates problems, not solutions. We cannot rely on just one tool for happier, healthier living.

Alvaro Fernandez (sharpbrains.com) offers us a balanced approach as it pertains to brain health. The four pillars he suggests are:

- Physical exercise
- Balanced diet
- Stress management
- Brain exercise

More recent studies also show that these areas work synergistically – each magnifying the effect of the other – to further improve your health.

Practicing forgiveness is a powerful relational tool and it helps with stress management. However, no one thing – not even forgiveness – will ensure healthier, happier living. A balanced approach, including regular exercise, good diet, stress management and regular learning, provides a better path. Life hangs in the balance.

**Quote**

To keep your balance, you must keep moving. *Albert Einstein*

**Web**

Read Alvaro Fernandez’s full article on sharpbrains.com ([read now](#)).

July 8, 2014

*Embrace unforgiveness*

Words are tricky little things. Have you ever noticed, for example, how we *embrace* positive things yet we *hold on* to negative things? We embrace opportunities, causes, or loved ones; yet we hold on to problems, excuses, and those we blame.

What if we flipped it? What if we *embrace* our problems, excuses, or those we blame?

A post on Care2.com addresses the problem of unforgiveness, citing work done by Release! ([releasenow.org](http://releasenow.org)). "Unforgiveness," they say, "can ruin relationships, rob us of our happiness, and even impact our physical health." They go on to say that, "unforgiveness is also one of the problems that is most likely to be ignored and dismissed."

So, what if we stopped ignoring and dismissing it and embraced it? What if we accepted, welcomed, cherished, and cared for our problems, excuses, and those we blame?

In the post, the writer offers an exercise that encourages embracing persons or situations as a way to forgive: sending thoughts and emotions to the heart and sending compassion to the person or situation. Embracing removes the negative label from the matter, accepts it as a legitimate and real part of life, and then bathes it in care and compassion. This acceptance and care opens paths away toward empathy, unity, and forgiveness.

So, hold on to nothing and embrace life – all of life.

**Quote**

Never does the human soul appear so strong as when it foregoes revenge and dares to forgive an injury. *E. H. Chapin*

**Web**

Read the full post discussed above at [Care2.com](http://Care2.com).

July 1, 2014  
*The space between*

One of my favorite business writers is Jim Collins (*Good to Great*). He writes of the Stockdale Paradox. Named after Rear Admiral James Stockdale who spent over seven years as a prisoner of war in Viet Nam, the Stockdale Paradox says:

You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end – which you can never afford to lose – with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality whatever they might be.

This sense of living in the space between *what is* and *what should be* is what Parker Palmer calls the tragic gap. It's that place between reality and possibility that will never be closed. And it is here, in the midst of that paradoxical tension that we discover our capacity to achieve the greatest good.

This is the place in which we experience forgiveness.

When we hold the tension between reality and possibility, acknowledging and accepting the facts of the matter and also acknowledging and accepting that the situation is not as it could or should be, we find the wherewithal to let go of anger, resentment, and bitterness. But it may mean holding that tension for quite some time.

While being in that place and holding the tension, we will be tempted to step to one side (corrosive cynicism) or another (irrelevant idealism) – taking us out of the action. By staying in the gap, holding the space, we eventually will prevail.

Stockdale says it this way:

I never lost faith in the end of the story, I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade.

**Quote**

Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing, there is a field. I'll meet you there. When the soul lies down in that grass, the world is too full to talk about. Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other" doesn't make sense. *Rumi*

**Web**

In this brief video, Parker Palmer further describes the tragic gap ([watch video](#))

June 24, 2014

*What's in a question?*

One day, a friend of mine asked me, "Are you still beating your wife?"

First: it was a joke. Second: it's theoretically funny because my answer (i.e., "no") does not deny the assumed fact that I've been beating my wife. It's a loaded question in that it contains an implied assumption of wife beating.

In discussions about last week's post on the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation, I ran into these questions:

- Is an apology necessary for forgiveness?
- Do you need justice in order to forgive?
- Are certain acts unforgiveable?
- Have you truly forgiven if there is no reconciliation?
- Do certain traditions require you to forgive?
- Can a person forgive too quickly?

While these may be helpful questions in understanding how a particular religion understands their path to forgiveness, they do not get to the heart of the experience.

They are loaded questions. They imply that forgiveness has certain requirements that must be met before forgiveness can happen. However, the evidence suggests otherwise.

People have experienced forgiveness without apology, without justice, and without reconciliation. People have forgiven heinous acts of murder and genocide. People have also forgiven almost instantly. Bookshelves and blogs are full of these stories.

We need to move the discussion forward.

"Forgiveness" describes the healing experience rather than prescribes the healing process. While we may take actions to promote forgiveness, it is not an act or process but the consequence of many actions. The actions may take several forms and often they are guided by cultural or religious practices as well as the nature of the relationship at stake.

The Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation seeks to promote forgiveness in a fractured world. What questions will help move that discussion along?

### **Quote**

The cure for the pain is in the pain. *Rumi*

### **Web**

Here's a video with several scholars and religious leaders discussing the question, "Is an apology necessary before forgiveness can be given?" This fascinating discussion shows that our deeply rooted traditions pave a number of paths to forgiveness. ([watch now](#))

June 17, 2014  
*It's academic*

Last week I came across a blog post by Marina Cantacuzino (*The Forgiveness Project*) introducing the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation (CFR). Inspired by Karen Armstrong's *Charter for Compassion*, CFR seeks to inspire healing and reconciliation in a fractured world.

But forgiveness is a thorny subject.

At last April's International Symposium on Forgiveness and Reconciliation, 30 leading thinkers, activists, and observers from several peacemaking and reconciliation organizations gathered in the UK to discuss key questions and critical issues relative to creating the CFR. And they ran into a sticky wicket.

As Cantacuzino reported, forgiveness is "...a concept so hard to pin down." Further, "opinions differed on the human capacity for evil and the limits and possibilities of forgiveness within that context" and "Conflicting positions and multiple definitions create an ever-shifting landscape with consensus hard to achieve."

She listed a number of those differing opinions and conflicting positions. The report suggests that the participants attempted (or will attempt) to reconcile these various opinions and beliefs about forgiveness into a single concept, definition or activity.

If that's their goal, they may as well stop right now. It won't happen.

Forgiveness is not a concept or an activity, it's an experience...it's a powerful healing experience, and, on this, the symposium participants reportedly all agree. "At the inaugural symposium in Birmingham everyone agreed about the healing power of forgiveness and the necessity to promote it in a fractured world."

Cantacuzino writes that the CFR "will draw attention to the activity of forgiveness" and it recognizes the voluntary nature of "the process of forgiveness." These statements betray the underlying need for the CFR to define or at least reference a single forgiveness activity and a single forgiveness process.

When *Season of Forgiveness* began, I noticed that virtually every writer and researcher I read felt the need to offer a new, comprehensive definition of forgiveness. Often verbose and complex, the definitions served an academic need and...well...that was about it.

What's the desired outcome for the CFR project? Cantacuzino writes, "to inspire people to use forgiveness as a practical solution to repair broken communities and transform conflict" and to "awaken this spirit of forgiveness."

I suggest that the CFR project set aside the insurmountable, academic, and ultimately divisive task of defining the concept and process of forgiveness and build upon its consensus that forgiveness, arrived at through varied forms and processes, is a powerful healing experience.

That would be inspiring!

(con't)

**Quote**

People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive. *Joseph Campbell*

**Web**

Read Marina Cantacuzino's full post on the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation ([read now](#))

June 10, 2014  
*Disingenuous*

My smartphone amazes me.

Sometimes I just cradle it in my hand: admiring its smooth, sleek style; feeling its techno-dense weight; and marveling at its capacity and capabilities. I pause in wonder at how it has changed the course of my life – the course of history – and I'm awestruck.

But I don't love my smartphone.

Since my average drive time is about ten minutes, I don't answer the phone or respond to texts while driving (even at stoplights). If I'm speaking to someone face-to-face, I let the call go to voicemail and the texts wait until the conversation is ended. If I don't wish to be interrupted (at a theatre or at home), I actually turn my phone off.

(confession: with respect to the above, my record is not perfect)

Generosity (a [Fundamental of Forgiveness](#)) means giving our time, patience, attention and understanding to attend to the person in front of us. It means blocking out distractions, such as cell phones, TV's, others walking by, surrounding activities, enticing reading materials, etc.

It's becoming harder and harder to practice generosity in this way...and we know it. The smart phone beckons so we sneak peaks at the text while trying to show the other person that we're still listening to them – our head bobbing up and down from person to phone. When we do this, we're being *disingenuous* (i.e., giving the false appearance of giving someone our attention).

Giving someone our full attention is hard but not impossible. Perhaps we can conspire together to increase generosity. Are you willing to join me in...

...sorry, I've got to take this call.

**Quote**

Whatever you pay attention to grows. *Anonymous*

**Web**

Here's a recent reminder from wiseGEEK on cell phone etiquette ([read now](#))

June 3, 2014  
*Did you see that?*

A friend of mine recently told me of reading her younger brother's memoirs. Much of it was their shared story of growing up together, yet her recollection was often different than her brother's.

How did so much escape her notice?

In a recent episode of *On Being*, guest Ellen Langer observed, "most of us live mindlessly most of the time." She goes on to explain that the simple act of actively noticing things is enlivening. That is, it literally makes you a healthier, more alive person.

She suggests a quick exercise. Notice five new things about a person who you know very well (spouse, good friend), and that person will come alive to you in a different way.

We tend to observe people and quickly attach an understanding to what we see. From that point, we make sense of that person and their behaviors through this understanding.

Langer reminds us that it is our view of the person that makes them who they are. As we open up to noticing new things about the person, our view changes, and we come to understand the person better.

*Things that happen to me are a result of how I see them.*

Noticing, as Langer describes it, sits at the heart of forgiveness. As we notice new things about someone who hurt us, we come to understand that what they did made sense to them at that time. It may be flawed logic and it most likely comes out of their own hurt and pain, but you eventually come to get it. And, in doing so, you see the other person as fully human.

**Quote**

The meaning of life is to see. *Hui Neng*

**Web**

Listen to the full interview with Ellen Langer (51 minutes). ([listen now](#))

May 27, 2014

*This is your brain on gratitude*

Brain stuff fascinates me. Recent research on how our brain adapts and adjusts to accommodate new learning and new surroundings contradicts much that I learned as a young student.

The idea that our brains are hard-wired a certain way and we just have to live it, is not so. New practices and activities rewire the connections in our brains (neuroplasticity). And age is no barrier. We can learn new tricks well into our 80's and 90's.

Take habits, for example. When we develop a habit, the brain activity associated with that action moves from our prefrontal cortex (think to act) into our basal ganglia (automatic action). It's an efficiency move – it means we can act, in a sense, without thinking.

Habits can also link together. Charles Duhigg (*The Power of Habit*) identifies a keystone habit, a habit that sets off a chain reaction affecting other habits. For example, many people who begin an exercise regimen will begin using their credit card less, procrastinate less, do household chores earlier, etc. Duhigg says, "Something about exercise makes other habits more malleable."

I've seen this keystone effect with gratitude as well. Many people have reported to me that when they practice gratitude other things fall into line. They care for themselves better. They're better able to help others. They simply navigate life's ups and downs better.

Practicing gratitude can include various activities. The ones most common include being mindful of gratitude during the day, saying "thank you" more often, or keeping a gratitude journal.

Gratitude is a [Fundamental of Forgiveness](#) because it helps create the resiliency needed to acknowledge what life delivers and to work with it in a spirit of humility.

**Quote**

...a human being can alter his life by altering his attitude. *William James*

**Web**

Here's an interview with Charles Duhigg from *Harvard Business Review* on how habits impact our lives and organizations. ([read now](#))

May 20, 2014  
*Shifting the story*

Memorial Day weekend arrives soon. It's a day to remember. What will we remember? That is to say,

What stories will we tell?

Our individual stories may recall previous Memorial Days, other holiday experiences, shared local and national histories, and more. How we tell our stories makes all the difference.

When things happen we capture them in many ways – visuals, sounds, smells, physical impact, emotional impact. These dismembered parts get *re-membered* in the form of a story. The telling of the story calls up emotions and physical responses, and through repeated tellings, we create neural connections so that simple reminders can recall the full emotional and physical responses.

This is why a small thing can bring back warm, joyful memories or set off a bracing anger.

To forgive is to change the story. In a recent interview, Stanford researcher Fred Luskin ([Forgive for Good](#)) says that, after twenty years of studying, practicing and teaching forgiveness, he's come to the conclusion that "forgiveness is simply coming up with a different story to talk about your own life."

We can tell the tale of being hurt and being the victim. We can tell the tale of life being unfair and expectations being shattered. We can tell the tale of how we acknowledged all of this and found a way to let it go and move on. "It's just a shift of story."

**Quote**

Everything in life can be taken from you except one thing—how you will respond to the situation. This is what determines the quality of the life we've lived. *Viktor Frankel*

**Web**

Here's a 10' clip of Fred Luskin responding to various questions about forgiveness. In response to the final question he talks of changing your story as the key to forgiveness ([watch video](#)).

May 13, 2014

*The humor connection*

I enjoy finding humor in situations. Often the funniest things are not jokes but revealing comments made in the moment.

Humor springing from the moment not only makes us laugh but it also connects us.

In his book *Hidden Wholeness*, Parker Palmer notes that laughter is “vital to creating safe space for the soul.” In sharing moments of laughter, we share our real selves and develop trust.

Karen Ridd used the humor connection to cut through political and military conflict. In her recent *Open Democracy* article, she tells of a tense situation renewing her visa in El Salvador. With half a dozen men yelling at her and stories in her head of others who had been detained or disappeared after visits to this office, she declared, “I’m not a terrorist, I’m a clown,” and used animal balloons to transform a tense, volatile situation into one of joviality.

While humor establishes human connection, even between those in conflict, it also runs the risk of crossing the line into humiliation that alienates the other. Having walked that line in a dangerous situation, Ridd reminds us, “We can expose the folly in what someone is doing without ridiculing the person or group they belong to.”

Offered in the right spirit, humor dives under the immediate circumstances to reveal reality. It’s a form of compassion that names a truth and makes us laugh.

The humor connection creates a human connection.

**Quote**

The best way to destroy an enemy is to make him a friend. *Abraham Lincoln*

**Web**

Read Karen Ridd’s story of how she used humor to nonviolent resolution ([read now](#))

May 6, 2014  
*The game is afoot*

Desmond Tutu's **Global Forgiveness Challenge** began last Sunday. It's thirty days of exploring, discovering, and engaging in reflections and stories on forgiveness.

Here's a sample:

Science is perhaps beginning to recognize what we in Africa have long known—we need each other. We are deeply connected to one another whether we recognize it or not. We call it "Ubuntu," which is the understanding that we are who we are through one another.

...Choosing to forgive does not erase the reality of an injury nor does it ask us to pretend that what happened did not happen. It is quite the opposite. Real forgiveness and real healing require us to be honest about what has happened.

But first, we must make the choice.

One choice you can make today is to join the challenge. It's not too late ([start now](#)).

**Quote**

Forgiveness is an act of much hope and not despair. It is to hope in the essential goodness of people and to have faith in their potential to change. *Desmond Tutu*

**Web**

Here's a brief video of Desmond Tutu in Kalamazoo describing why people our attraction to goodness ([watch now](#)).

April 29, 2014

*The greatest spectacle in forgiveness*

I want to share an invitation with you.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu invites you to join with thousands around the world for a 30-day global forgiveness challenge. I'm already signed up!

The challenge begins May 4. Each day you'll receive an email offering inspirational stories, forgiveness exercises and more. I'm looking forward to it.

I briefly met Tutu in 1982 (I shook his hand and he said "hi") when he came to Tacoma, Washington in his campaign to end Apartheid. He spoke of atrocities and humorously contrasted his stature in the church with his lack of voting rights at home. He also embodied an intense focus and a kind, humble spirit.

He is a man who knows forgiveness.

In his book, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Tutu recounts his experience with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post-Apartheid South Africa. Story after story attests to the resilience of the human spirit and what forgiveness can do to heal and restore people to community. It's gut-wrenching. It's harsh. It's unbelievable. And it's real.

Let's join virtual hands and take this global challenge together.

**Quote**

Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that will overwhelm the world. *Desmond Tutu*

**Web**

Find out more about the Global Forgiveness Challenge ([read now](#))

April 22, 2014  
*Practice compassion*

I like being in my *right mind*. Fortunately, I seem to be in it most of the time, but sometimes I take a detour. During those detours, I say (or don't say) things and do (or don't do) things that I despise and regret.

I prefer being in my *right mind*.

One of the first to suffer when we're not in our right mind is the self. We engage seemingly small instances of self-abuse, we: eat too much, drink too much, want too much, stop exercising, or describe ourselves in all sorts of unflattering ways. Then, having compounded the situation, we take it out on others – kicking the proverbial cat or worse.

Compassion begins when we realize that those who lash out at us (self or other) are not in their right mind. [Jan Chozen Bays](#) puts it this way, “[Perpetrators] act out of their own suffering.”

Or, to put it another way, “Why would someone who is living a happy, healthy, fulfilling life [i.e., *in their right mind*] deliberately hurt someone else?”

How we treat others and how we treat ourselves go hand-in-hand. Practicing compassion and forgiveness for self and others reduces the self-abuse, improves relationships, and help us settle back into our right minds.

And that's a fine place to be.

**Quote**

If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion. *Dalai Lama*

**Web**

Here is a brief blog entry on self-compassion – what it is and how to practice. ([read post](#))

The **Charter for Compassion** calls us all to commit to a more compassionate life ([read here](#))

April 15, 2014  
*On second chances*

It snowed last night.

Many of you know that I live in Southwest Michigan. It suits me well. I tolerate snow and cold much better than high heat. Yet, like most, I was ready for this winter to end. It was longer, colder, and snowier than most.

I thought it had ended. The walls of snow encasing my driveway have been gone for days and even the mountains of snow in the large parking lots are down to their final bits of icy dirt.

Then, last night, it snowed one last(?) time. And, it's gorgeous!

It's as if Snow waited until just before the brilliant green of spring to remind us of her beauty. As if she says, "Look at who I am. Don't go into spring angry with me. Remember me this way. Miss me."

So, I'll give winter a second chance.

Looking out on the snow-covered yard, the pine trees laced with white, the streets glistening under the lights, I smile and sigh. "You really are beautiful, Winter."

And in that moment, I get it. I'm not giving winter a second chance. She's giving me a second chance. Winter's brief pause to turn, smile and wave as she walks off to her summer sleep offers me an opportunity to gain perspective and let go of my annoyance and bitterness. "I'm sorry, Winter, for not letting you be cold and snow for as long as you see fit...for not letting you simply be who you are."

If I didn't like winter, I'd move south. But, I love Winter. And today, she loved me back.

**Quote**

To forgive is the highest, most beautiful form of love. In return, you will receive untold peace and happiness. *Robert Muller*

**Web**

Take an 8-minute break from your day with this snow-beautiful reminder from relaxdaily ([watch now](#))

April 8, 2014

*Is everyone above average?*

Each week on *A Prairie Home Companion*, Garrison Keillor reminds his fans that, in Lake Wobegon, "all the children are above average." Of course, "all" being "above average" creates a mathematical problem. But, why let that stand in our way?

We all want to feel special, capable, and worthy; but there will always be someone better and, according to Kristin Neff, we don't cope with that very well.

Neff (University of Texas, Austin), a researcher on self-compassion, writes about our need to feel special and be above average. Conversely, we also feel the need to be self-critical to motivate improvement. She writes:

"Most of us are incredibly hard on ourselves when we finally admit some flaw or shortcoming: 'I'm not good enough. I'm worthless.'"

Her answer is to stop judging ourselves and accept ourselves with an open heart. In a twist on the Golden Rule, she advises "To treat ourselves with the same kindness, caring, and compassion we would show to a good friend – or even a stranger, for that matter."

Her research shows that while there is a lot of overlap with self-esteem, self-compassion is not contingent on outcomes, not comparison-based, and it removes the problem of narcissism. Those who practice self-compassion just take better care of themselves and cope better with disappointment and failure.

Self-compassion sits at the heart of forgiveness as well as gratitude, kindness, and generosity. We can practice these just as liberally with ourselves as we do with others, recognizing that the challenge is not to be "better than" but simply to be.

**Quote**

Compassion, forgiveness, these are the real, ultimate sources of power for peace and success in life. *Dalai Lama*

**Web**

Kristin Neff writes at length on self-compassion and her research ([read article](#)). She also presented her work in a TEDx talk ([watch now](#)).

April 1, 2014  
*To save the world*

The Season for Nonviolence ends this Friday, April 4 – the anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. And the ever-present question stands before us as the proverbial elephantine avatar in our virtual room.

So what?

I observed another season, this time reflecting upon how I show up in life. I observed my actions and wondered about the choices I've made. I considered the language I've used to describe those actions. I also revisited the importance of proactively forgiving, caring for myself, and accepting – even embracing – what life dishes out. I acknowledged that the blurry lines that divide us also provide us with fertile soil for growth.

While that's all well and good, what's changed?

You've changed. In his book, *Hidden Wholeness*, Parker Palmer writes

...every time we get in touch with the truth source we carry within, there is net moral gain for all concerned. Even if we fail to follow its guidance fully, we are nudged a bit further in that direction.

You've nudged yourself a little further toward your true self. You've lessened the gap between who you are in the world and who you are inside. You've taken another step toward wholeness and integrity.

That's what we do. We take steps. When we pause to listen, we catch whispers from our inner teacher (our true self), reflect upon them, and then choose to live more fully into our human possibilities. We move upon a path, drawn by the source of our deep happiness – of our bliss. And when we find it, even in small part, life in its timeless, ineffable glory bursts forth...

...and the world is saved, if just for the moment.

### **Quote**

You have to find the hub of energy within you: follow your bliss. Find out where it is and don't be afraid to follow it. In doing this, you save the world. You evoke vitality and the influence of a vital person vitalizes others. 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**

Enjoy this video of Parker Palmer describing how to live undivided life. ([watch now](#))

March 25, 2014  
*Blurring the lines*

In this *Season for Nonviolence* we've travelled paths of self-reflection and individual action. As we enter these final two weeks, we turn to our collective life.

How do we belong to communities, religions, and nations and live in harmony with those belonging to other communities, religions, and nations? How do we interact across those dividing lines in ways that are caring and life giving?

While such a complex issue cannot be fully addressed in a short post, a solid initial step may be found in the following insights from well-known writer on living systems, Margaret Wheatley:

*Progress, evolution, and growth stem not from isolation but from cooperative relationships.*

We live within the gap between two great imperatives, the drive for self-determination and the need for human connection. To wall ourselves off from others is to rely on a survival-of-the-fittest form of growth that most commonly results in isolation, loneliness, and self-delusion.

In living systems, individuals (or individual communities or nations) openly engage their surroundings and figure out how to be together in ways that also best support themselves. As they decide changes they need to make, they recognize and accept that others influence those decisions. Once they take their adaptive action, their neighbors observe, consider, and then choose their adaptive actions. And so forth.

"Individuals become so intermeshed in this process of co-evolving," writes Wheatley, "that it becomes impossible to distinguish the boundary between the self and other, or self and environment."

In this continual exchange of information, ideas, and energy we capitalize on our diversity as we engage the common purpose of not just survival but of vital living. Our interactions affirm our uniqueness, create stability and protection, and develop new capacities.

Wheatley sums it up well. "Rather than being a self-protective wall, boundaries become the place of meeting and exchange...an important place of growth."

**Quote**

You can never direct a living system; you can only disturb it. *Margaret Wheatley*

**Web**

Enjoy Wheatley's chapter on "The Promise and Paradox of Community" from her 1998 book, *The Community of the Future*. ([read now](#))

March 18, 2014

*Accept, affirm, participate*

Yesterday, many of us celebrated St. Patrick's Day – wearing green, decorating with shamrocks, and invoking the "luck of the Irish." So, I wonder, what can luck tell us about nonviolence?

My good friends Merriam Webster define luck as "things that happen to a person because of chance." They occur outside our intention or desire; outside our control.

But, we really don't like things being out of our control. In fact, Richard Wiseman (*The Luck Factor*) offers four principles to create good fortune in life and career. He advises us to take more notice of chance opportunities, listen to our lucky hunches, expect good fortune, and turn bad luck into good by recognizing that it could have been worse.

But, what if the worst happens?

When Tariq Khamisa, a 20-year old student delivering pizzas, was shot and killed, "the worst" visited his family. Nine months later, Tariq's father, Azim, approached the grandfather of his son's murderer and asked him to become his partner. "Help me stop kids from killing kids."

The fact is that things happen outside our control. Yet we retain the power of our response, and we have many choices. Some choose to deny events and stay hidden from life, continually playing the victim and wishing things were different. This prevents healing, sows anger, and maintains a low quality of life.

Others choose a healing path, allowing grief while accepting and participating fully in life as it comes. This opens us to the possibilities of this new – though uninvited – life, develops compassion, and provides wisdom that may be shared with others. Azim chose this path, even to the point of welcoming his son's murderer into his work and family.

Paradoxically, our acceptance, affirmation, and participation in the tragedies and pains of life deepen our capacity to live peaceful, loving lives. The pendulum swings both ways in equal length.

**Quote**

Forgiveness is something you do for yourself. It's healthy to forgive. Now, the magic is that, through forgiveness, I've been able to heal. *Azim Khamisa*

**Web**

Azim Khamisa and Ples Felix talk about their relationship and their work teaching nonviolence. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=813IRQoOIBY>

March 11, 2014  
*Care for yourself*

A good friend of mine reminds me from time to time that great wisdom is not just prescriptive but also descriptive. That is, it tells us what to do but it also describes what's going on.

*Love your neighbor as you love yourself*

Applying this understanding to the Golden Rule, we see that how we treat others is a reflection of how we treat ourselves. So, in this Season of Nonviolence, if we wish to practice nonviolence in our relationships with others, we must begin by caring for ourselves, by not violating our own integrity.

Overeating, overworking, ignoring problems, and inactivity lead to anxiety, stress, overweight, and illness. These create barriers to our health and happiness, affecting our body, mind, and spirit. These mark a path of self-violence and self-destruction.

Nonviolent living begins by getting on a different path.

We can build our nonviolent skills through daily training. We can

- Meditate to develop a healthy spirit
- Eat right & exercise to develop a healthy body
- Learn to develop a healthy mind

New habits take time and effort. By working on one challenge at a time, we eventually establish healthier, nonviolent habits that improve our lives and the lives of those around us.

In reflecting on the tragic murder of his son, Azim Khamisa said that it was his meditation practice that prepared him to handle his loss and helped him to grieve and recover. He then turned that recovery into an outreach that has touched millions of children.

When we care for ourselves, we let the small hits of life stay small, prepare ourselves for the big hits that eventually will come, and position ourselves to be a source of encouragement for others.

**Quote**

How we spend our days is how we spend our lives. *Annie Dillard*

**Web**

Recent brain research demonstrates how good nutrition, exercise, learning, relaxation practices (e.g., meditation), and connecting with others work together to improve our health. ([Six tips to build resilience](#)) ([Ten habits of effective brains](#))

March 4, 2014

## *Forgiveness*

At this midpoint of the Season for Nonviolence (January 30 – April 4) we look to incorporating nonviolent practices into our lives. What actions can we choose to help us live more peacefully?

Forgiveness. Forgiveness is an outward expression reflecting an inward healing. In this way, all forgiveness is self-forgiveness in that it happens within us. Whether someone asks for forgiveness or not, we can act to free ourselves from deep-seated anger and bitterness.

Fred Luskin (*Forgive for Good*) says that there are two steps to forgiveness, grieving and letting go. Once we have grieved – i.e., worked through denial, anger, creative reasoning, and sadness, to acceptance – then we let it go. This takes time. We may mark the point of having let go of our grudge by approaching the offender and offering our forgiveness.

One amazing thing about this process 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, at the end of their process, cannot approach the offender, so they offer 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 and peace.

### **Quote**

The only way to a peaceful life is by living peacefully. *Azim Khamisa*

### **Web**

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

February 25, 2014  
*Co-creation*

When we began this Season for Nonviolence, I posed the question, "How do you participate in your life?" Now, let's consider, How do we participate in our lives...particularly in our collective use of language and images?

Violent images fill our day-to-day speech. We fight for justice, battle negative emotions, shoot an email, strike at the heart of the matter, and wage a war on practically every social ill ([more examples](#)).

There are alternatives. We may consider several other domains for metaphors, such as: carpentry, weaving, gardening or architecture ([read more](#))

During the week ahead, try this: listen and take note of language and images you hear and use. Then, if you wish, incorporate alternative images.

It may open new insights and opportunities.

Our contemplation, speaking and acting reinforce one another – a triune expression of values and beliefs. Co-creating our culture means that we carefully choose our actions, words and points for reflection.

**Quote**

...a human being can alter his life by altering his attitude. *William James*

**Web**

Find out much more on this topic from the Center for Nonviolent Communication ([visit now](#))

February 18, 2014

*Make them pay*

It's a classic movie line. One group/country/faction inflicts injury on another, and the vengeful response rings out. "Make 'em pay!" Then, with the administration of a proportional response, justice apparently is served.

But that's the movies.

In reality, when one inflicts injury on another, many have already paid. When 14 year-old Tony Hicks heeded his gang leader's command to "bust him," he fired a single shot, killing the 20 year-old pizza deliveryman, Tariq Khamisa.

In that moment, who paid for Tariq's murder?

Tariq. Tony. Ples Felix (Tony's grandfather). Azim Khamisa (Tariq's father). Tariq's mother and sister. Tariq's girlfriend. Tony's fellow gang members. A community that helped raise a 14 year-old murderer. Countless others who remain unnamed.

When violence happens, we all pay. When responding to violence, we can choose to heal.

Faced with his son's murder, Azim Khamisa grieved deeply. He emerged from his grief knowing that there were victims at both ends of the gun. Eventually he partnered with Ples Felix and together they reach out to help young men and women avoid life-taking choices. Azim forgave Tony, and in reaching out, he has redeemed his life.

Let us broaden our view. We can hold people responsible for their actions without participating in violent revenge. When violence happens - when someone's integrity is violated - we can grieve, we can heal, and we can appeal to our better selves.

**Quote**

Nonviolence is not passivity. We need to solve problems through dialogue in a spirit of reconciliation. This is the real meaning of nonviolence and the source of world peace. *Dalai Lama*

**Web**

In this brief video, Parker Palmer speaks to our addiction to violence ([watch now](#)). Also learn more of Azim Khamisa's story ([read now](#)).

February 11, 2014  
*You are what you...*

In 2003, Bill Cosby wrote a book titled, "I am what I ate...and I'm frightened." His was a humorous conclusion reflecting regret and the understanding that what we consume affects who we are.

Most would agree. Parents acknowledge this as they monitor their child's diet, peer group and entertainment choices. We acknowledge this, too, as we comment how people or events bring out the best or worst in us. We seem to take on that which we engage. Our situations and surroundings draw out our inner nature...our higher nature, our lower nature and every nature in between.

But that's not the whole story.

In his first inaugural address, Lincoln closed by appealing to "the better angels of our nature." He said,

*In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The Government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without yourselves being the aggressors. ... We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection.*

Lincoln acknowledged that momentum was building to civil war, that the situation was evoking aggressions. He also acknowledged that war was not inevitable. The people could choose.

In this Season for Nonviolence, as in every season, we find ourselves in situations and surroundings that we may or may not have chosen. Yet, we always choose our response. When life evokes what lies within - good, bad or indifferent - we choose how we wish to express it.

And that makes all the difference.

**Quote**

The spirit is really the bouquet of life. It is not something breathed into life, it comes out of life. *Joseph Campbell*

**Web**

A brief musical treat to evoke your better angels. Enjoy [Yo Yo Ma](#)

February 4, 2014  
*Why did I do that?*

As I participate in my life, I sometimes ask myself, "Why do I do the things I do?"

On occasion I'll look back, be amazed, and think, "That was awesome. Where did that come from?" More often, though, it's a matter of, "That was stupid. Where did that come from?"

Parker Palmer speaks of our identity and integrity tied to institutions and systems. We're enmeshed in them, but blaming them and other related circumstances gets us nowhere. He suggests that we need to detach ourselves and claim our own identity – to live undivided.

Azim Khamisa realized that by being complicit in the systems surrounding him, he helped create the environment that murdered his child. He also realized that he could choose to participate differently. Today he and his partner, Ples, tell their story to children and youth in an effort to save their lives.

What's your situation? How are you complicit in the systems around you? What's the choice before you?

**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**

Palmer's exploration of institutions and systems may help in discerning your situation. ([watch now](#))

Jan 28

*Full participation*

We begin this online observance of the Season for Nonviolence with the question, How do you participate in your life?

This is not a question of your journey or finding meaning or creating success. It's an inquiry into the nature of presence – your engagement with every day, every moment. Do you see life as happening around you?...as happening to you? Do you see yourself as part of what's happening?

In 1995, Azim Khamisa's son, Tariq, was delivering a pizza when he was shot and killed by a 14 year-old gang member. Soon after the murder, Azim realized that there were victims at both ends of the gun and that he, as an American, had participated in the society that put them there.

So, he decided to participate in a new way and set out to stop kids from killing kids. He partnered with Ples Felix, the assailant's grandfather, and together they've reached out to millions of young men and women.

Practicing nonviolence means upholding the integrity of self and others. That is, we participate in our lives not by explaining them away in terms of uncontrollable circumstances or by blaming others and ourselves. Rather, we participate by acknowledging people and events as they are, accepting them (vs. denying or judging them), and engaging them fully with compassion for all...and doing so, even in the face of deep suffering.

Stuff happens: joyful stuff, terrible stuff, and a lot of ordinary stuff. It happens, and we are there. Practicing nonviolence begins with unconditional acceptance of – and participation in – life as it is.

**Quote**

Your life is the fruit of your own doing. 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**

In this CBS interview, Azim Khamisa reflects on forgiveness and nonviolence within the act of claiming his participation in his son's murder ([watch now](#)).

January 21, 2014  
*Legacy*

During this past weekend we again marked the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The question it brought to mind for me this year was this: can forgiveness make its way into mainstream civic discourse?

One of the many unsettling dynamics in our political arena is how thin-skinned our politicians make themselves out to be (though they probably aren't so). Individuals are quick to take great personal offense at the mere implication of a slight, and these individuals are quick to go to the media and speak of their rage. The strategy becomes not so much rising above the fray as becoming the fray that pushes down the other person.

Exceptions to this political game seem few and far between. I wonder, however, if they aren't so few but simply less reported.

One exception I discovered was in Malaysia where, in the wake of multiple attacks on churches a few years ago, Christians and Muslims and "even politicians across the political divide" condemned the attacks. They made statements and took actions so that "an air of repentance and forgiveness prevailed." The writer called the acts "unprecedented."

Wisdom and maturity can prevail over shallow political maneuvering. Let's help make this our future.

**Quote**

Without forgiveness, there's no future. *Archbishop Desmond Tutu*

**Web**

A reflection on Dr. King's message of forgiveness ([read now](#))

January 14, 2014

*Looking back...moving forward*

On this eve of Martin Luther King, Jr's 85<sup>th</sup> birthday (born Jan 15, 1929), I recall that our Season of Forgiveness opened five years ago this week.

Season of Forgiveness began as a project conceived by a consortium of partner organizations in Kalamazoo, Michigan to promote a spirit of forgiveness throughout the community. The project sought to challenge individuals to improve their lives through the practice of forgiveness.

This community-wide, ten-week Season of Forgiveness was held in January-March, 2009 and included a series of speakers, conversations (formal and informal), explorations, and arts events. The legacy of the project includes [the website](#) and an ongoing effort to encourage and equip people to live happier, healthier, more productive lives.

The Season closed with a stirring performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony by the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra. In fact, this performance inspired the Season because the "Ode to Joy" has been used as a theme of forgiveness and reconciliation in various countries.

We look back so that we can move forward. Another Season is also about to begin that encourages people to move forward in the direction of peace through nonviolent choices and actions. The Season for Nonviolence, launched at the United Nations in 1998, marks the 64 days between the memorial anniversary of the assassination of Mohandas K. Gandhi on January 30 and that of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4.

In the weeks to come, we will observe the Season for Nonviolence. We invite you to participate in your own way, as we look back and move forward together.

**Quote**

We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies. *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

**Web**

Learn more about the [Season for Nonviolence](#).

January 7, 2014

*What do you hope for?*

Whether or not you make New Year's resolutions, the beginning of a year beckons us to look forward and hope.

What do you hope for?

We'll answer that question any number of ways. Yet, underneath it all, the likely answer for each of us is "happiness." The Dalai Lama says, "I believe that the very purpose of life is to be happy. From the very core of our being, we desire contentment." Happiness is the bottom line. In our jobs, in our families, even in our recent holiday celebrations and gift giving, it all, in the final analysis, is in pursuit of happiness...of contentment.

The past few days have seen extreme cold and snow in our area. During times like these, there's a collective focus on caring for the basic needs of food and shelter. People generously help each other and experience the joy of giving.

To again cite the Dalai Lama: "In my own limited experience I have found that the more we care for the happiness of others, the greater is our own sense of well-being." It is the essence of the statement, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

As we look ahead to 2014, let us not just be consumers. Rather, let us find blessing in being caretakers of each other's happiness.

**Quote**

Chase after money and security and your heart will never unclench.

Care about people's approval and you will be their prisoner.

Do your work, then step back. The only path to serenity. *Lao Tzu*

**Web**

Several stories of people helping people dot the recent news. Here's one story of one man and a snowblower ([read story](#)).