

## 2018 Advent Forgiveness

Happy Sunday! If you have little ones in the house or holiday plans then you know that Christmas Day is approaching. Advent is a time of preparation for this new beginning, this new consciousness that the birth of Christ represents in our Unity traditions. Our series for Advent this year has been a mash-up or an odd pairing from two different sources: the nativity story and Edwene Gaines book, The Four Spiritual Laws of Prosperity. We covered the idea of tithing as we examined giving and the gifts of the wise men from the East. Last week we talked about discovering and following our divine purpose and setting goals as a way to create an opening through which Spirit pours our good out into our lives. We ask for support and the Universe responds. We overcome any sense of unworthiness as we reflect on the surprise that Mary may have felt and remember that we also carry that divine potential within us.

Today's frog to swallow, as Edwene refers to challenges, is forgiveness. Now before you think this is odd and Edwene is the only one linking forgiveness and prosperity you should know that Eric Butterworth has a chapter on forgiveness in Spiritual Economics and Charles Fillmore's forgiveness chapter in **Prosperity** is titled, "God Will Pay Your Debts". In that chapter Fillmore says, "If you are not receiving the spiritual understand you feel you should have, you should search your mind carefully for unforgiving thoughts." He goes on to say, "Debt is a contradiction of the universal equilibrium, and there is no such thing as lack of equilibrium in all the universe. Therefore, in Spirit and in Truth there is no debt." Fillmore explains the illusion of debt or the idea someone owes us is a creation of lack **in our mind** that can be eliminated **in our mind**. Edwene says, "If we refuse to forgive, we are clinging to self-defeating feelings such as guilt, shame, blame, hurt and resentment, and when we do this, we cannot feel truly worthy of having the best God can give us; we cannot—and will not—accept God's gifts." Oh, back to one of the questions I raised last week: Am I worthy of God's good?

A couple of you might be thinking ahead to try to figure out where I'm going in the nativity story to find forgiveness. You think it's not in there. Doesn't usually get a lot of focus but yes it's there. Let's check the gospel of Matthew: "*When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. [awkward] Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose **her** to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of*

*David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit'. When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus."*

Joseph was not thrilled with the pregnancy of his **virgin** betrothed. I mean, the story is a little improbable, I have to give the man that. I am never clear when I read this who is being spared public disgrace by his abandoning her. And the idea women can be dismissed quietly is ancient history. But the angels intervene with Joseph in a dream. The metaphysics of that intervention for me is that often the best wisdom and guidance comes when I can suspend all of my intellectual thinking and reasoning—like when I'm asleep. I'm also not entirely clear how completely Joseph forgave her but I'm giving Joseph the benefit of the doubt. This is a story about a shift in consciousness, not a literal story. This is about forgiving even when all appearances indicate we are **right!** Isn't that one of the challenges of forgiveness: letting go of my need to be or at least my need to *appear* right, vindicated, and the better person? But what happens when I hold on to those thoughts of "I'm right and I'm not forgiving you"? In the forgiveness chapter Fillmore shares his famous idea, "Thoughts are things' and take up space in the mind realm." Cluttered with thoughts of lack, hurt or anger, we have no room for thoughts of love and infinite abundance. Thoughts of withholding forgiveness are the biggest kinks or knots we can put in the channel of flow for God's good. They just are. And they are thoughts. Who creates thoughts? Us—the great thinkers of thoughts! So how about housecleaning our minds? Before you feel overwhelmed about where to start, I created a handout with 10 practices for forgiveness. Let's start with those. Some are adapted from Edwene's book and some are from other forgiveness practices I've learned.

1. We'll start by re-conditioning our mind with affirmations. Our mind has probably been trained to belief that forgiveness is difficult so just begin by saying: I forgive easily, freely and generously. See, you're on your way. You'll need to forgive yourself as well as family and a bunch of others. Just let you mind adjust to the idea it's all ok. You don't need to hold on to the pain of not forgiving. You don't need those thoughts taking up valuable space in your mind.

2. Now, try a simple nightly practice to keep forgiveness in your awareness. It's pretty gentle: Who did I place outside my heart today? Take a moment sometime before sleep to bring those little acts to mind.

Jot them down if you like. Do you want to carry that un-forgiveness into tomorrow or are you ready to forgive yourself and the other person tonight?

Remember there is no lack in the universe. You aren't losing anything by letting go of whatever motivates your un-forgiving thought.

3. Pick an annual time to inventory your forgiveness work. It could be now, at the end of the calendar year. It could be around your birthday as you begin a new natal year. It could be World Day of Prayer. Just sit down and think about what un-forgiving thoughts you continue to rent space in your head to. If you clean those thoughts out, there is more room for creative, loving thoughts. You choose. And don't be too upset if a couple un-forgiving thoughts keep appearing on the annual list. Forgiveness can be like an onion, layer by layer we clear away our beliefs. Or, if it is someone close in your life, you may feel they give you something new to forgive annually—or more often. When that is the case, I often find there is a core issue I can forgive and then I discover I don't need to judge the little daily stuff. If you think there is nothing to forgive but life is not what you'd like, most of the teachers would say, "Dig a little deeper". You might find some forgiveness work to do.

4. Pray for the good of others. Jesus talked about forgiveness A LOT! It was the sub-theme for "Love One Another" and today is the Advent Sunday of Love. To love one another, we need to stop judging and practice forgiving. In Matthew he said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." OK, if you perceive them as enemies, you know where to start. Stop calling them enemies. How many of you have an ex? Ex spouse, ex-roommate, ex-boss. Ex's are an easy place to start forgiving because many of us have a **story** about how they got to be an ex and how they did us wrong. Edwene tells a story about working on forgiving an ex-husband (she had more than one) and beginning to pray for his good. She felt like she wanted to be in a good place and stay there so it might be a good idea if she prayed for him to be in a good place. Then she says he sent her a letter saying he had a good life and hoped she did too, and enclosed a check for \$3,000 for an old debt. Well, Edwene was a firm believer in praying for the good of others after that. Fillmore talks about praying for the good of those you believe owe you something, because the debt is an illusion anyway and holding good thoughts helps clear out the lack thoughts. Just pray for others and see what happens.

5. Choose a trusted person and speak out loud what you need to forgive yourself for. This is part of 12 Step work for those who engage in those practices. A fearless moral inventory of ourselves. Not to condemn ourselves,

we may be pretty good at that already. But to allow those quiet thoughts of condemnation to be lifted up into the healing light and allowed to dissolve. Maybe we feel we don't need to forgive ourselves for anything. That belief usually includes a puffy pride and sense of self-righteousness, and our belief is flawed. Acknowledging what I need to forgive myself for is both humbling and brave and authentic. If we believe we are always right, then we are probably always judging others. We can start by forgiving ourselves for our judgments and condemnation of others. This is not intended to be a public flogging but a moment of self-clarity.

6. Partner with the Divine and forgive together. Call upon the strength and wisdom of the name you give a higher power to support you in knowing that you are completely loved and forgiven. From this place of peace, consider forgiving others. Sometimes we just don't think we can do this forgiveness work on our own. What we need to forgive is just too big. So call on Jesus, Buddha, the Dali Lama, Quan Yin, Ganesh. Whatever image brings you comfort, allow that divine expression to support your work. Feel yourself loved and whole. Know that there is no lack in you or in the Universe. Bring the person or circumstance you want to forgive to mind as you are supported. You know that Jesus or the Dali Lama will forgive so you feel your energy joined together and forgive together. This can be one layer of a process. There are some guided meditations online to help you.

7. Reframe an event you are struggling with by reflecting on how you've grown through this experience. Rewrite the story shifting your role from the role of victim to the role of hero. Claim this as your story, letting go of the old story. This is a practice you may find in Colin Tappin's book, Radical Forgiveness or Gary Simmons book, I-of-the-storm. It is really about letting go of old stories that we may believe are part of our identity but it is time to let go of. We are unique expressions of the divine mystery of God. We don't need a story of being victims or helpless or wronged by another. We are divinely powerful in ways that do not depend on earthly judgments. Make that your new story.

8. See the other person (and yourself) as pure soul; connect with the beginning to forgive later mistakes. Imagine Joseph trying to condemn the newborn baby Jesus as a mistake or a sin. Babies connect us with forgiveness through their purity. We all begin created in divine love. One of my favorite lines in "Mary Did You Know" is "Did you that when you kiss your baby's face, you've kissed the face of God?" Every child, every person bears

the face of God. See yourself as the innocent child you began as. See those you want to forgive in that same beginning. We do not know everyone's story. We often don't know why we do the things we do. Behold the child-like essence of their divinity and forgive the adult.

9. Set aside blame. Free from blame, make peace with what is. The blame game really has no winners. Wherever you place the blame, you cannot change the outcome. I think blame comes from our very human need to "know" or "collect facts" or "be right" about something that probably causes us pain and sadness. In my previous work life I did something that was called, "Root Cause Analysis". It was a systematic examination of an adverse event to find every circumstance, policy, resource or condition that contributed to the event. It was everything that we could do something about once we stopped saying, "It was his fault". When we stop blaming something outside us as being the source of some lack we perceive in our lives and within us, we are on the way to forgiving, to making peace with what is and understanding there is no lack in the spiritual realm.

10. Envision your freedom and affirm, "It is done!" When we forgive we feel lighter and freer. We feel like a weight is lifted, whether we feel forgiven ourselves or we have let go of a tie to someone else. We free ourselves from the burden of painful thoughts and feelings. We breathe deeply and feel our heart space expand. Feel that feeling. Know this is the freedom you were created to feel and affirm, "It is done!" Keep affirming and knowing complete freedom is possible and live from that feeling of freedom as you become more and more open to the flow of your prosperity in mind, health, relationships and finances.

Is anyone writing the affirmations from the prosperity sheets? What do you notice? I invite you to take the Forgiveness Practice handout home and feel free to use it. Use at least one awareness practice and then see if any of the shifting practices resonate with you. The end of the calendar year is a great time to reflect on forgiveness work. This is not once and done. These are practices, like brushing your teeth and taking a bath, we do every day.

Our final Law is not one Edwene lists out-right in her book but I simply cannot do a series on Prosperity without the law of Gratitude. As I like to say, Gratitude is the measure of the altitude of your attitude. The Advent Sunday is Joy and gratitude is a way of rejoicing. Seems like the right way to end our Advent series and practice prosperity.