

**January Theme**  
***Imperfection: The Practice of Forgiveness***

*Forgiving is deciding it is no longer useful, necessary, or healthy to hold onto being right, wrong, injured, angry, self-righteous, fearful ... It is to surrender to something larger, a higher power, or the enormity of life itself. It's letting go of resistance.*

*From: Perfectly Human  
 Sunday, November 17, 2013  
 Kamloops*

**Introduction**

Now enters the New Year, and we are prompted by culture, and our perpetual hope, to resolve to fix our faults. Not all of them, but a select set that bothers us and prevents the achievement of the perfection that seems essential for happiness. But consider the alternative, the value of turning a deaf ear to the siren song of Perfection, and following a different path to peace and true happiness.

Both ancient and modern teachings caution us that “perfect” is the enemy of the “good. Many of us know the familiar pain of meeting our own perceived imperfections with intolerance, expecting the unattainable from ourselves and suffering from our own tireless self- judgment. Isn't it time to ease up and forgive ourselves, and others, for this less than perfect reality? As we say every Sunday, those cracks are “how the light gets in” – and out.

So, if perfection is impossible, what can we do with our disappointments, frustrations, and feelings of hopelessness? Freedom from the pain of falling short of an ideal self, of a perfect job, marriage, family, can come from accepting “good” as good enough, in embracing the reality of our brokenness, and in this accepting, making ourselves whole.

When we err in our human relationships, and harm another physically or emotionally, we can begin to repair those breaks by seeking forgiveness. In seeking forgiveness, we admit our imperfection- our humility and our humanity- to another, in hopes we will be accepted in our frailty and loved regardless. One model of the forgiveness process defines three essential acts. The one who harmed (1.) apologizes for the harmful action, (2.) promises not to repeat that action, and (3.) makes some reparation that is acceptable to both parties. The one who is harmed may then grant forgiveness, but this is a choice and not an obligation.

True to this understanding of forgiveness as action, the Amish make a practice of “decisional forgiveness”, not waiting for the impulse to forgive to arise naturally but declaring it done. This speaks to the origins of the word, meaning an action of “giving away completely”. Others understand forgiveness as process that unfolds over time, and cannot be willed to happen on a convenient timeline. Christian belief is that God/Christ forgives all sins, and that a true Christian should behave the same way. In a Jewish teaching, God created humans to help repair the errors - evil, sickness- that came about in the imperfect process by which the universe is created. This practice of *tikun olam* – healing the broken world- calls for us to respond to a mandate we may hear echoed in our Unitarian Universalist principles. It holds our attention to the fact that Creation is ongoing, and that we are participants, more than just witnesses to this Becoming.

Forgiveness is the alternative to revenge; it is an act that empowers peace and resolution, and an end to otherwise unending violence and hate. But some actions may be so harmful, the consequences so deeply painful for individual or society, that authentic forgiveness cannot be found in the heart. And if the victim cannot find it in her authentic heart to forgive, then she may forgive herself for that, and ease her own suffering.

It is widely acknowledged that forgiveness benefits the forgiver as much as the one forgiven, improving emotional, relational and physical health by releasing the clenched heart.

In civil society, justice seeks the balance between punishment and forgiveness. Both are essential acts in shaping a society based on right relationship. But what happens to the experience of forgiveness when it is taken from the one wronged and granted to a judicial authority? The *Truth and Reconciliation* process that was applied in South Africa to begin to rectify the evils from apartheid is a good example of how a path of forgiveness can be shaped through the wilderness of pain and hate. And there is a movement here in the United States driven by those who believe that a system of reparations rather than retribution is a key change required for re-forming the criminal justice system.

### **Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, or with each other:**

1. How do we forgive ourselves for our mistakes and imperfections? Can we accept ourselves as “good enough,” though far from perfect? What is a “good-enough life”?
2. How does forgiveness serve you, both as giver and receiver of the blessing?
3. Have you experienced being forgiven, or forgiving another? How did it affect your life?
4. Are you now waiting to be forgiven? By whom? Do they know it? What do you expect or hope will change in yourself if you are forgiven?
5. Must someone seek your forgiveness in order for you to forgive them? What if they can’t or won’t?
6. Are there offenses too great to be forgiven?

### **Quotes and Short Readings**

There is no worse sickness for the soul, O you who are proud, than this pretense of perfection. The heart and eyes must bleed a lot before self-complacency falls away.

~Rumi

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.

Forgiveness is not a single action, but a process. By forgiving those who harmed us, we do not pretend that what harm they caused did not happen, or that it did not hurt. We can see that chronic resentment stands in the way of love. The bitterness that arises from a long-held wrong, gone over and over, encases the heart, making it difficult for love to get through.

~Sharon Salzberg from *OnBeing* <https://onbeing.org/blog/forgiveness-can-be-bittersweet>

Muslim weavers of “Oriental carpets” intentionally make an “error” in the weave to ensure imperfection, since only Allah can be perfect, and He, no others, is the only God.

For more on this month’s theme go to: <http://uuac.org/worship/themes-for-spiritual-practice/>

The Worship Associates are: Jennifer Ryan Brown, Alexandra Businger, Alan Cantor, Erin Collier, Jess Jonas, Katherine McHugh, Megan Momtaheni, and Gary Strichartz.

Rev. Jane Rzepka offers some “**statistics**” – this list of perfectly human characteristics.

- Out of every hundred people,
    - *Those who always know better: 52*
      - *Unsure of every step: almost all the rest*
    - *Ready to help, if it doesn't take long: 49 ...*
    - *Able to admire without envy: 18 ...*
    - *Those not to be messed with: four-and-forty*
    - *Living in constant fear of someone or something: 77*
      - *Capable of happiness: twenty-some-odd at most*
    - *Harmless alone, turning savage in crowds: more than half, for sure.*
      - *Cruel when forced by circumstances: it's better not to know, not even approximately ...*
    - *Balled up in pain and without a flashlight in the dark: 83, sooner or later*
    - *Those who are just: quite a few, 35*
      - *But if it takes effort to understand: 3*
    - *Worthy of empathy: 99*
- Mortal: 100 out of 100 – a figure that has never varied yet.*

By Wislawa Szymborska, translated by Joanna Trzeciak, excerpted from *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1997, as seen in CLF by Jane Rzepka, date not known.

### Forgive Me

Angels are wonderful but they are so, well, aloof.  
It's what I sense in the mud and the roots of the trees, or the well, or the barn, or the rock with its citron map of lichen that halts my feet and makes my eyes flare, feeling the presence of some spirit, some small god, who abides there.

If I were a perfect person, I would be bowing continuously.  
I'm not, though I pause wherever I feel this holiness, which is why I'm so often late coming back from wherever I went.

Forgive me.

*Mary Oliver, Blue Horses, 2014, Penguin Press*

For more on this month's theme go to: <http://uuac.org/worship/themes-for-spiritual-practice/>

The Worship Associates are: Jennifer Ryan Brown, Alexandra Businger, Alan Cantor, Erin Collier, Jess Jonas, Katherine McHugh, Megan Momtahaneni, and Gary Strichartz.

When you do the inner work of forgiveness, remember that you are not trying to fix yourself, another person, or a situation. You are not looking for justice in order to champion injustice. You are not a savior or a victim or a perpetrator. Those are roles that you constructed. You are not bound by them, nor is anyone else. from “Letting Go with Forgiveness”  
~Ana Holub from *DailyOM*

## Sources

Forgiveness is connected to memory and time. It asks us to engage our feelings about something in the past in order to change our experience in the present, and move into the future. Forgiveness is an act of vulnerability – both from the one seeking forgiveness and the one offering it – as it reveals the risks of trying to love in an imperfect world.  
<https://sanjoseuu.org/revnpjblog/?p=235>

What does it mean to be a people of Invitation? Inviting requires we make space in our lives and in our hearts – create a clearing, open our hands, and let life move freely in.

Sermon on Perfectionism & forgiveness  
[www.unitariancongregation.org/kamloops/Perfectly%20Human%20abridged.doc](http://www.unitariancongregation.org/kamloops/Perfectly%20Human%20abridged.doc)

Peacebuilding work - The Peace Company  
[www.thepeacecompany.com/peacelibrary/pdf/Peacebuilding\\_love\\_pt1.pdf](http://www.thepeacecompany.com/peacelibrary/pdf/Peacebuilding_love_pt1.pdf)

Perfectionism Poetry  
<https://allpoetry.com/poems/about/Perfectionism>

David Whyte explores forgiveness and anger in a section of *Consolations: The Solace, Nourishment and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words* (public library)  
<https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/05/15/david-whyte-consolations-anger-forgiveness-maturity/>

Meditation on Forgiveness on Yom Kippur  
<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/ceremony/143238.shtml>

For more on this month's theme go to: <http://uuac.org/worship/themes-for-spiritual-practice/>

The Worship Associates are: Jennifer Ryan Brown, Alexandra Businger, Alan Cantor, Erin Collier, Jess Jonas, Katherine McHugh, Megan Momtaheni, and Gary Strichartz.