

Happy Holidays

Personal Safety Nets® e-Newsletter



FORGIVENESS: Giving Yourself & Others A Gift

December 2014, Issue 75

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LETTERS & STORIES



Editor's note: This piece comes to us from our ol' friend and nationally-known songwriter and performer, [Michael Tomlinson](#). Michael posted this on his [Facebook](#) page recently and we wanted to convey his wonderful and useful thoughts and ideas - so he let us reprint it here for our readers. (Watch for Michael's generous offer at the end of this article!)



"I'D LIKE TO TELL YOU A STORY ABOUT FORGIVENESS."

Is there a theme in life that will touch your heart more deeply than one of experiencing forgiveness? I was watching a movie recently and when it was over I sat in the dark theater, filled with feelings of forgiveness and insights about forgiveness.

Giving Yourself & Others A Gift

In our November 2014 [edition](#) we talked about giving "gifts" that offer help to others. Some cost little or nothing - services you can offer to another who might not be able to get them done by themselves. But we've also talked about giving yourself "gifts" - from lowering your [stress level](#) by joining a singing group, to getting your life on track by asking the question: what will my own [success look like?](#), to learning the importance of [laughter in your life](#). With the end of the year upon us, **we wanted to offer you a way to give yourself one of the most important gifts - the gift of forgiveness!**

FORGIVENESS IS
AN ACT OF LOVE.

Here's some useful information and a plan of action courtesy of PSN and one of the leaders in the field, [Robert Caldwell, M. Div., CPC, LPC](#), who for more than twenty-five years has practiced individual, group, and couple psychotherapy in Bethesda, MD and Washington, DC. He has also been president of the [Maryland Mental Health Counselors Association](#).

As we live, we accumulate experiences - some leave permanent wounds and handicaps. We store many of these as resentments and develop a repertory of coping programs: going numb, denying, forgetting, dissociating, or getting even: overtly by direct action, or covertly by fantasy reprisals called resentments.



All of these defenses enable us to avoid forgiveness. According to Dr. Caldwell, "forgiveness is hard to do and hard to sustain. To a considerable degree **we take an easier path: we live by the energy of our resentments and the power we gain by refusing to forgive.**"

Sometimes, after an injury to our psyche there is a period--from a few days to beyond this lifetime--in which we don't forgive, because we are neither able nor ready. We feel hurt, confused and smarting from being hurt. **We don't know what will happen next or exactly what we should do.**

Instead of stepping up to a course of action, we give puffed-up pleasure to our egos, making ourselves the "good guy" even at the cost (alienation) of assigning the 'bad guy' role to the other person." **There is a bonus for self-righteousness - we ignore flaws in ourselves,**" according to Caldwell.



"We save ourselves from facing our vulnerabilities . . . maintaining a kind of tense, mechanical balance--formalistic and non-empathic. For many, this is as close as we come to keeping an inner and outer peace."

I realized how not forgiving weighs us down and how we misunderstand what forgiveness is. I was in such a space of calm introspection that I didn't want to move. You know the feeling, when you can get to the middle of a thought, a powerful concept, and you can actually exist there at the calm center of it a little while and you do not want to move a muscle because the truth is so real.

There have been experiences of great forgiveness in my life. My forgiveness of others, others' forgiveness of me. It is all the same. It all comes down to the profound revelation that we are the same, we are all worthy of life and love, and regardless of how it may look sometimes, we are all acting within the limits of our understanding.



The greatest moment of forgiveness I have ever experienced was my own forgiveness of myself. I can remember a specific moment when I was 30 years old and thought I was unforgivable. And yet, some flash of knowing, some blessed moment of grace, spoke to me and said, "Forgive yourself." And I did. I dared to. I was astonished beyond words to find that forgiveness begins with a decision. I'd grown up where guilt was taught as a virtue. So to reach a moment where I knew I had done harm - and to see that forgiveness was possible and that I did not need to continue to suffer because I'd done harm - was a revelation that changed my life. You will never do less harm in the world because you hold yourself in unforgiveness.

You cannot reach a place of true forgiveness protecting your pride. Yes, I have pride. But in forgiveness, I allow it to fall way back in line. Forgiveness is humbleness, it is surrender and allowing. And in it you will find the greatest freedom you have ever known. If you are carrying around



Our refusal to forgive becomes a part of our self-definition. While we become accustomed to a style of not forgiving, thinking it has given us power, we have, in fact, lost a functional awareness that life has any options other than holding on to grievances.

When possessed by an incapacity to forgive, we are more alone and alienated from others. **We often continue to work and play with the unforgivable, "but everything in our own lives is diminished in zest and focus and effectiveness."**

Caldwell says, "in refusing to forgive others . . . we "let ourselves off-the-hook by keeping them on it, but we are really failing to forgive ourselves."

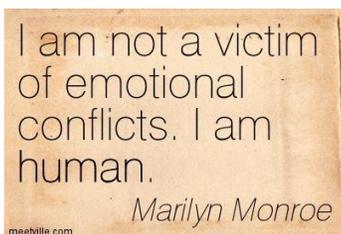


What we're really doing is shunning any awareness of our own deficiencies and antisocial behaviors, because we lack the skills and compassion to build self-forgiveness. "We have trapped ourselves into believing that our unhappiness originates outside ourselves--in what another did to us, rather than within, in our reactions to what was done to us, in our own pain, and rage, and hopelessness."

The beginning of learning to forgive means taking seriously our own experiences of our hurts and our complicity in how we have shaped and experienced life's happenings. **We need to retrain our focus away from what had been done to us by others. What has happened to us, has indeed happened--and the way we see these things, and feel about them, and seek to act about them, the way we mold and hold them is who we are.** "To allow ourselves to experience and acknowledge our pain, as indeed belonging to us, is the beginning of a path of self-awareness that can lead to healthy forgiveness."

Permita-se!

Instead of seeing yourself as a victim, try to re-picture yourself as the strong and unthreatened one. It's time to understand that you can protect yourself from hurt, and you have within yourself, the powers of self-healing, and the capacity for honest forgiveness.



Dr. Caldwell says, "when we begin to claim our powers, to shift from a victim stance to being in charge of our own experience, a fundamental movement into strength occurs. . . . **We become aware of how the development of our personal power is what changes our world, and not vice-versa.**"

Take a look at your strength. **Try to combat an attempt to see the world as filled with dualities: either weak and strong, beautiful and ugly, good and bad, lovable and unlovable, winner or loser.** "This leads us to see ourselves as strong as we see others as weak, we are good as we see others as bad. This is the path which sustains not-forgiving, for to forgive would be to weaken ourselves and become vulnerable to others."



Give yourself a New Year "gift" - look at your strength another way! While it may sound esoteric - try to see all of life's events as fluid possibilities for creativity. **Move away from seeing the interactions of your life - not in an "I win" means "you lose" context.**

old blame and resentment, you are carrying a heavy, dead-weight burden, my friend. Drop it. Bless it. Let it go and take deep breaths where it used to be.

Fill those hard places with your breath and love will follow. Isn't it so much better to allow light in where you held blame and resentment all this time? No matter what you believe someone has done to you, or what you believe you have done to someone else, nothing is unforgivable for a heart seeking honest and earnest forgiveness. You have it. I have it. We just need to soften and allow ourselves to receive it.

I hope something that I've written here resonates with you, because I cannot think of anything in my life that has given me more peace than my lessons of forgiveness. I wish them for you too."



My song, "One Breath," has been a comfort, a reminder and a catalyst for many people - helping and allowing the peace of forgiveness to flow into them. It is on my *The Way Out West* cd. I am more than happy to email it to you for free if you would like it.

~ Michael Tomlinson
mt@michaeltomlinson.com

Another editor's note: A while back, in our October 2009 [edition](#), Michael wrote "'Home: The Street You Live On.'" One [click](#) and you can read it.

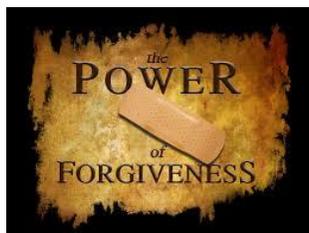
Personal Safety Nets is Happening!

People ask us all the time: **Where do you put on your seminars?** While we try to keep you informed, not all are open to the public. We'll mark the ones open and a phone number for you

This will help you draw closer to the idea that forgiveness is learning to identify, to empathize with others. "An "us" and "them" approach to relationships simply will never allow us to experience ourselves as forgiving people, says Caldwell."

Remember: Acceptance does not imply that we approve of all behaviors either in ourselves or others!

Forgiveness is a life journey. **Forgiveness cannot be forced.** Forgiveness is part of a life development process that values your courage to be happy and belong creatively to others. It is a move away from valuing being "right" or "getting even."



Forgiveness is a pro-active enterprise. Forgiveness takes great courage and assertiveness, for in forgiving we do not react to what others think or do, but act out of our own desires to make our own world more stable.

Confront selected offenders. If the person is available, and within your orbit of interaction, you may move a great psychic distance toward forgiving them, if you let yourself make known your feelings toward them. Since forgiveness is fundamentally about personal power.

It's tough. But **nothing is more empowering that engaging the one who has hurt you in some sort of acknowledgment of your feeling.** The point is to come out of hiding, flex your body/mind, risk taking your space, claim your right to respect and consideration, and offer to the other an opportunity to exchange feelings and to apologize. This action establishes you in the world; the response you receive is secondary.



Forgiveness is not forgetting. What has happened, happened. It was painful. **Forgiveness has to do with learning not to be controlled by feelings of resentment and revenge.** Our memories contribute to helping us guard against damaging experiences being repeated.

Don't expect perfection. We are ever vulnerable to have old hurts recalled as well as being injured anew. We will sometimes be able to forgive, but you my maintain grudges.

The new possibility is to know you may have the wherewithal to give yourself the option to accept the other and interact with the other--to the degree you are able--in spite of being wronged, for the "wrong" does not have a great an emotional hold or power it once had.

My life isn't perfect, but it does have perfect moments.

Remember, only the strong can forgive, and though none of us reach an ideal strength, all of us can become stronger. Forgiveness and strength always travel together!



to call to see if there's room for you.

Here's where Personal Safety Nets® will be presenting the seminar: "Understanding and Using Your Personal Safety Net" during January, 2015.

Remember:
If you're interested in having PSN work with your organization, give us a call at [206-659-0665](tel:206-659-0665).



We'll be back at [ANEW](#) - at the start of a new quarter - an organization w all ages, races and backgrounds with training preparation leading to career pathways. (Not open to the general public)



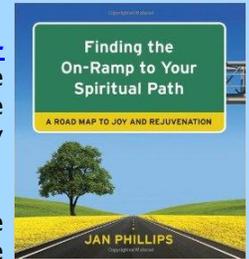
We'll be working with the staff - who [advocate](#) for the right of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to live, learn, work and play in the community, improving the quality of life for all of us. (Not open to the general public)



We'll be at the new [Center for Healthy Living](#) in Lynnwood, WA, a one-stop-shop where services

Finding the On-Ramp - YIELD

The following excerpt is from Jan Phillip's [Finding the On-Ramp to Your Spiritual Path](#) (Chpt. 3: Yield). Those who've attending one of our PSN workshops, may have heard a similar discussion - always appropriate, especially during the holiday season.



"In our lives, we are the playwrights who set the stage. We choose certain careers, relationships, and lifestyles as the



backdrop for our creation, and that is the set until we choose something else. What happens on that stage, though, is not always up to us, since it is peopled with individuals who have lives and imaginations of their own. **What is up to us is how we respond to the actions and interact with the other characters and our own inner thoughts. This is the dance we're in, and we get to choose whether we lead or follow.**

When we think of yielding or surrendering, it feels more like following than leading, but, in a way, the reverse is true.

Whenever we come up against a challenging person or situation, we're often inclined to judge or blame. This happens constantly, on the highway, in the workplace, in the grocery store, in our living rooms and bedrooms. If we feel edgy, we look for someone to blame. *It can't be me that's wrong; it must be them. I would be fine if they would just do this or that. I feel terrible because this situation is all wrong.*



If we follow our instinct, then, we walk right into the illusion that someone or something else is responsible for our feelings. If we surrender that illusion and take control of our thoughts, we take the lead in the dance. Instead of following our feelings, we learn to direct them.



The next time you find yourself disgruntled, check inside to see if there's a voice saying, "It should be *this* way, not *that* way." If that's the case, give it up. It *is* the way it *is*. Our happiness comes from contact with reality. The more we learn to accept it and flow with it, the happier we become. **Trying to change reality, trying to control the behaviors of other people - this is what causes unhappiness."**

Tell Your Story - Help Others!

Tell us how you have (or haven't) dealt with a situation by building a network **for yourself or someone close to you**, or how you've gathering with others to solve problems.



[Tell us what worked & what didn't.](#)

Sharing is a wonderful thing and your story will certainly be a helpful learning tool for many others!

are offered to seniors and adults with disabilities, to present to the greater community.

(Contact Ruth Egger at [425-290-1268](tel:425-290-1268) to attend.)



Senior Companions

Make Independence a Reality



We'll be visiting with the volunteers at a number of King County [locations](#) to talk about how vital their services are and how important a personal safety net is to them and those they help.

(Contact Nicole Paladino at [206-329-0515](tel:206-329-0515) x.3 for more information)

Telling us your story is easy using your smart-phone and uploading to info@personalsafetynets.org or by clicking [here](#) and writing.