

Don't Get Mad - Forgive

One of the things we need to learn and work at if we are to be happy and our society fulfilled is to forgive ourselves and others.

To be social is to be forgiving.

The importance of practicing forgiveness has been a spiritual principle throughout the ages. Prophets, saints and scriptures admonish us to forgive, and this axiom is a mainstay of virtually every religious and philosophical doctrine.

For better or worse we have to judge each other and bring wrong to account, but we are safe in the business only when we remember that both the judge and the judged are themselves under judgment. None of us are perfect, though a few consider themselves near to it.

It is easy to be a critic and to level judgment towards others, usually those to whom we are distant and with whom we are not well acquainted. We are prone to express zero tolerance and "tough" love towards those we see as transgressors. We stoutly uphold law and order, but often fail when it comes to love and justice; for justice is distinguished by mercy.

Social responsibility demands that we search out the truth, try to appreciate the complexities in any situation. We must see the others strengths and not just their shortcomings.

Learning forgiveness - both granting it to others and accepting it for ourselves - is one of the primary means of maturing and becoming a whole person. When we

offer forgiveness we are able to constructively deal with our feelings of hurt, resentment, and self-pity, and are less likely to compound these difficulties.

To forgive begins as an act of will. We've got to want to. Simply going through the motions of forgiving or accepting forgiveness will not get us very far. We must squarely face our feelings and be honest with ourselves and the other.

Forgiveness is something we must work hard at to achieve. It does not come easily, it must be learned and developed. Forgiveness is so easy in the abstract, so difficult in the concrete, actual situation.

Love is the motive behind forgiveness. It will make resentment and anger melt and allow us to offer more chances for the wrongs to be righted.

It is not a sign of weakness to forgive, but rather of strength, courage, and self-awareness. There is a Muslim teaching that one must seek reasons to forgive others their wrongs, and if you can't find one reason then the fault lies in you.

RELIGION & POLITICS

Anyone who isn't interested in politics isn't religious.

Politics affects almost every area of one's life. Who we vote for influences the running of our community, the care and attention given to us as citizens, how we treat our needy, and what we do with our resources.

Politics even affects our religion. Our love toward our neighbour, our loyalty to our God, our religious motivation, are empowered or diminished by our politics.

"We owe each other love, and the action that flows from that. We express that love in deeds, in actions, in laws, institutions, entitlements," declared the former premier of Ontario, Bob Rae. The religious person has a deep concern for the welfare of others, especially the poor and the disadvantaged.

"Politics in Canada has always been the art of making the necessary possible," wrote Canadian author Peter C. Newman. The fathers of the Canadian Confederation spoke of "peace, order, and good government," not of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Peace, order, good government, these sound like goals that can be attained with diligence and prudence. Liberty and the pursuit of happiness are transcendental goals. It is as though the boredoms and frustrations of social life, inequality and exploitation, subjection and domination, all that seems to stand between us and the realization of the good society, can be overcome by a single liberating act. The pursuit of transcendental goals may breed violence, often rhetorical, sometimes physical. So declares the historian, J.M. Cameron.

The religious person wants to do all he or she can to try to help one another out of sheer humanitarian impulses. Christians who have

experienced the divine love which inspired the first Christians have an obsession to reach out and help their needy neighbours.

The New Testament tells a story about "a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and lead a life of daily luxury. And there was a poor man called Lazarus who was put down at his gate. He was covered with sores. He used to long to be fed with the scraps from the rich man's table." (St. Luke 16:19f).

There is a picture of our world now. Some of us suffer needs our richer neighbours do not suffer, and all of us see thousands who are very much worse off than the worst of us. At our doors lies a needy multitude requiring our assistance.

We may well declare that we did not put them where they are, therefore they are no responsibility of ours. We are not stealing the food of those unemployed or on welfare. We gave the poor no invitation to look to us for assistance.

The more we can avoid thinking about the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, staying within our borders, living our own lives, the less pain they cause us. However, such a position sometimes makes one a bit angry that someone isn't doing something about the problem of poverty and disadvantage.

Religion cures us of blindness, compelling us to see our needy neighbour. It causes us to see the pleading faces of those in need of our help.

In the New Testament story both men died. However, the poor man was more justified after death than the rich, non-caring man. When death comes to us, as it does to all of us, how awful to think, or have others think, of what we *might* have done and

(Religion & Politics, cont'd)

might have been, the opportunities forever lost, the human relationships neglected, the stirrings of conscience that used to come but then were smothered until they came no more. When it is too late we may wish that all were different, wish that the light of the spirit had been kept burning in our souls.

Religion leads us to clean up the dirt - wherever we find it - also in political life. "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is that good people do nothing," said Edmund Burke.

We can have a tremendous influence in politics by informing ourselves on the issues and voting responsibly and by taking part in local politics. And the higher one goes, the more influence one can exert.

Politicians have great responsibility, but also great opportunity, and with our help and guidance can be powerful leaven in the affairs of humanity.

ENDING POVERTY NOT A DAYDREAM

Ending poverty worldwide is not a daydream, in fact, with a little will, and surprising little money, extreme poverty can be wiped from the face of the earth within a generation, declares a report of the United Nations.

Though we can easily feel overwhelmed as we look at the extent of the poverty of so many of our society and of the developing countries of the world, yet the existence of such want amid the world's overflowing riches is a scandal, and eliminating it is an unavoidable moral duty.

Arguing that giving to those in need encourages a weakening of a

strong self-reliance, many today deny any ownership of the poors' problems.

As long as our economy is dominated by monopoly capitalism, and our society is permeated by values of personal gain, the supremacy of private property and the protection of the wealthy, poverty will be inevitable.

Religion connects the poverty of the materially impoverished with the poverty of the spiritually impoverished. It challenges the comfortable and the complacent, the affluent and the privileged with their own poverty.

And what applies to us as individuals applies to us collectively as a society. A good society seeks greater equity in the distribution of its wealth, realizing that greater equity creates greater equality.

Instead of dividing our collective means so as to give much to a few and too little to too many we may share in ways that those who have too little do not have to live with too little.

"Both humankind and economics must finally be studied in the light of God," stated the theologian, Nels Ferre.

The test of any economic practice, programme, or system is what it does for people; what it does for them and what it does to them. The human person is worth more than all things material.

Religious persons can help in the overcoming of poverty with ideas, ideals, motives and purposes.

We cannot live together as brothers and sisters until we share together in the general welfare of one another.

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YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO DIFFER

It has been said that the most immutable barrier in human relations is between one person's thoughts and another's. It is important for people to communicate with one another, and any resistance has to be diminished or overcome.

The Bible states in the Letter to the Christians at Ephesus that, "We are meant to speak the truth in love." What this is really saying is that on many issues we have the right and the responsibility to speak out and to share our understandings and knowledge. It means we have the right to differ.

We are not to acquiesce in any situation we honestly think is wrong or unsuitable. As well, we are to defend the right of others to disagree.

Freedom of speech can never be taken for granted.

Truth can never be ultimately worsted in a free and open encounter. Everyone must be entitled to hold and express an opinion as long as it does not constitute an incitement to violence or cause harm to others.

Our present "corporatist" attitude denigrates individual opinion or belief sharing, marginalizing those who do try to put forth a point of view.

It is a feature of humankind that religious, quasi-religious, and pseudo-religious principles are the least negotiable among us. Yet this is an area of life we know the least and assume the most. Dogma becomes rigid, and dogmas combat each other.

There must be freedom and opportunity between them for individual discussion and contribution if fuller truth is to emerge.

We must not be frightened from sharing our thoughts and experiences with others.

As the old motto declares: "In

things essential, unity; in things doubtful, liberty; in all things, charity."

We are wrong when we discourage individuals from expressing viewpoints and fail to listen to understand where they may be coming from.

It is not sermons we are so much in need of as discussion groups.

And when we differ cannot it be done in love?

BAHA'IS, CHRISTIANS SHARE KNOWLEDGE

Justice is conceived as the foundation stone of the coming global civilization, teaches the Baha'i faith.

Founded a century and a half ago, the Baha'i faith community is the youngest of the world's independent religions. It is based on the claims of Baha'u'llah, the eastern prophet who acted as a messenger of God to the age of humanity's maturity.

"The purpose of justice," Baha'u'llah's writing states, "is the appearance of unity among men." Love, mercy, and forgiveness are among the qualities that must distinguish human beings in their personal relationships one with another, the Baha'i teach.

The Baha'i share with Christianity in this knowledge. Both have teaching about social issues, racial integration, the equality of the sexes, and disarmament.

The basic message of Baha'ism is that of unity. They believe in and work toward the harmonization of all people, world-wide. They see our human oneness and the earth as our common homeland. This is a vital message in this present time of emphasis upon individualism, nationalism, provincialism and tribalism.