

Week beginning 24th May Create a bit of heaven on Earth

Sooner or later, no matter which spiritual path we take towards having a healthy mind in a healthy body, no matter how many self-help books we read or processes we undertake, no matter how many prayers we say or pilgrimages we make, our inner work will never be complete without the experience of forgiving and of being forgiven. Without these experiences, there can be no true, inner peace or freedom. Heaven is on earth when forgiveness happens. Without the words 'I'm sorry' and 'I forgive you', the promises and vows of love ring very hollow indeed.

We cannot take any shortcuts or detours to avoid the reality of forgiveness. It is a profound spiritual power. There is no alternative. The reason is this: whatever the nature of the negative emotions from which we suffer and from which we crave some healing, we are essentially acting out of a sense of hurting, a basic pain. And where there's hurting, there's anger. And anger held on to, becomes resentment and even hatred, taking a huge toll on our emotional and physical health. The royal road to psychic balance, mental stability and even bodily well-being, passes through forgiveness. . . We are still the victims of those who hurt us, as long as we keep our hearts closed to them. . . As long as we are blaming someone by clinging to old anger we continue to block out the light from our souls.

There is something important I want to say in this reflection about forgiveness, whether it is the forgiveness of others, or, what is almost always more difficult, the forgiveness of ourselves. It has to do with understanding forgiveness, not as repeated acts, out of duty or for eternal reward, whether seven or seventy times seven. It is about becoming and being a forgiving person all of the time. It is about being permanently wrapped in the grace of compassionate awareness of others, in general, or of another human being in particular, in whom war is being waged between the forces of light and darkness; of understanding the precariousness and fragility of sanity and of the infinite and bewildering complexity of the human spirit . . . It is only those familiar with the ambiguity of their own strange contradictions and paradoxes of inner and outer behaviour, who are sacraments of divine forgiveness. Such people will never judge or condemn. Their self-aware hearts are too wise. 'To know all,' wrote Antoine de St-Exupery, as he realised with shocking clarity in the despair of the desert, 'is to forgive all.' Such are the times when we allow the rainbows of heaven to break through the mists of earth. (Travelling Light pp 101, 102, 103)

Follow-up - If you would like to explore mindful meditation, try this simple daily praxis:

Begin, today, with a decision to forgive from your heart the person who has hurt you most or is now hurting you deeply. So often, as with the initial step in overcoming addiction, it is a matter of one full-blooded and grace-inspired decision, in God's name, to let go . . . You have probably been thinking and praying about this for some time. What remains is the whole-hearted decision to begin something unbelievably liberating and new. Maybe today is your day to turn the key on your own prison door and walk out, no longer a victim of the past but a free person . . . Today could indeed be the first day of the rest of your new abundant life. With these quite but deep reflections, bring your meditation to an end. Try to keep something of this conscious resolution near to your thoughts throughout the day. (Travelling Light p105)