

Reading Whitman's words, "So much to hope for, so much to forgive," I was drawn into the relationship between my need to be forgiven and my ability to hope. What does forgiveness require of us? Can hope be real if its foundation is built on assumptions based in a past which is the source of the problem? Can anyone, unable to find forgiveness, step out toward real hope? Is it possible for individuals or society to move forward in a progressive and liberal way carrying the sins of our parents and our culture with us? Is it possible to offer a fresh and original critique when grounded in the behaviours and thought processes of the past? Can we understand forgiveness as more than another system so abused by religious institutions that it has lost any effectiveness? Can we find the clarity to forgive original sins and become something wholly new? Is forgiveness something original or is it culturally derivative? Can forgiveness help us move ahead?

So long as our understanding of forgiveness fails to grasp how theology has manipulated the underlying psychology and biology of forgiveness, we will make no real progress in meeting the new millennium any differently than we have met the past ones. Can we derail the current cultural track and head out in a different direction?

To that end I will take a cursory look at what Rorty, Conquest, Del Banco, Awbrey, The Dalai Lama, and Taylor believe are the ills we must face in order for something dramatically different from what has happened in the past several hundred years to happen in the coming years. Then we will look at the nature of forgiveness before blending the two sections of this paper.

Rorty: The Withdrawal of the Left

Rorty speaks to liberals who have withdrawn from society. He divides them into the “reformist left,” Americans who, between 1900 and 1964, struggled within constitutional democracy to protect the weak from the strong, and the “new left,” who decided, around 1964, that it was not possible to work for social justice within the system.¹ He asserts that “Marxism,” which infected so many liberal thinkers, called us to a sense of purity which created frustration in building a new world.²

Money and privilege affects the way the left operates. The privileged gave support to changes which upheld dignity and worth for the oppressed. Those without privilege rebelled, “took the risks, suffered the beatings, made all the sacrifices, and sometimes were killed.” Writers gave popular appeal to those on the front line and those on the front line saved the writer’s words from solipsistic commentary, giving them the appeal of revolutionary rhetoric. What happened to the promise of this symbiotic relationship Rorty does not explain. Perhaps it was the fact that letters seldom stop the tear gas and police bludgeons. Rorty says that Left in academia has slid into the “politics of difference”³ where stigma, psycho social and sexual motives are more interesting than money.

The advent of easy information aided by technology, has led others to the culture of knowingness. It suffices to know a lot about what is happening now, without derivative concern for the lessons of the past or any visioning for the future. They have assumed the attitude that denunciation of wrong and ideological critique are weaknesses and hero worship is elitism, so they substitute stoic endurance for righteous indignation, and resentment for hope.⁴

Rorty wants the knowers and the romantic hoppers to crawl into bed together.⁵ Alas, ideology is a quite effective bundling board.

Conquest: Ideology, Etc.

There is no question but that Conquest has a Braudellian command of history. I wish I could make a Hemingwayesque comparison about his sentence structure or his ability to stay on one topic in a single sentence. Is he one of Rorty's knowers, needing more reflection?

There is a foundational assumption that ideology is a root of evil. I do not want to dwell on that portion of his book. Quoting Thomas Sowell, "the grand delusion of contemporary liberals [I would say of contemporary *étatistes*] is that they have both the right and the ability to move their fellow creatures around like blocks of wood - and that the end results will be no different than if people had voluntarily chosen the same actions."⁶ For much of this century, liberals, as if they were omniscient Gods and Goddesses, did move people and things about with abandon,. From the New Deal to the Great Society it has not worked. Small farms are still marginal, schools are still segregated, the poor are getting poorer, and the mentally ill still roam the streets at night. We did it to the mentally ill, several times, to native and black communities and their children. Today we do it to developing nations through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Currently the fastest growing *étatistes* is corporatism. We have been guilty of great prejudice and stereotyping of business. Instead of developing an appreciation for business and learning how to work with it, we have chosen to continue to deal with governments, now true puppets of corporations, and have marginalised our effectiveness as agents of social change. Liberals, stymied by their prejudices, have retreated to academia and knowing. Marxism, the old ally of liberalism,

has become a harsh ideology, abhorring anything liberal in the sense of open, growing, enlightened.

He says education has become the transmission of ideas dissembled from any real extension of knowledge, connection, and improvement of our judgment.⁷ Is this Rorty's knowing. While we believe in education, and our demographics back up our high level of education, there are precious few of us working at the local, state, or federal level to change the education system toward something that really extends knowledge and improves judgment, grows wisdom. The education of our ministers struggles to educate for expertise without growing what Wieman called an ever greater appreciative understanding of all areas of ministry. Discussants of tracks in ministry often sound more like mayors of walled medieval cities talking than of the Italian Enlightenment.

Conquest argues that these things happen because, and I agree, the hardness and narrowness of ideology have taken over with all its prejudice.. Consequently, we go at things with great fervour without noticing the lack of breadth in what we do, the lack of true liberal intellectual curiosity.

Del Banco: Reframing the Message

Andrew Delbanco does a wonderful job of reframing the work of many philosophers and literary figures to fit his argument. I am loath to touch some of the disagreements or observations about narrow interpretations of their work which he employs. There are good insights. His style incites both disagreement and "Ah, Ha's" based on quips and quotes rather a thorough study of the ideas held by the people he relies on to tell his story. If nothing else, the book is a good compendium of pithy quotes. The meat comes toward the end when he talks of reasons for hope.

He cites the fairness and decency of American people, without, however, noticing an accompanying blindness to the power of their role in the world and an insensitivity to those with less power here and abroad. He cites the “unslaked craving for transcendence” against which some cite the growth of voluntary associations as marking the resurgence of orthodoxy, giving people the opportunity to stake out their strongly held beliefs rather than seek a common ground.⁸

He quotes Christopher Lasch: “The capacity for loyalty is stretched too thin when it tries to attach itself to the hypothetical solidarity of the whole human race. It needs to attach itself to the specific people and places, not to an abstract ideal of universal human rights,” He points to a tension between the universal and the specific, a dilemma in an age of massive globalization. In the end, Delbanco offers a laze faire approach to the future, citing Emerson’s words, “All attempts to project and establish a cultus with new rites and forms, seem to me in vain. Faith makes us and not we it, and faith makes its own forms. . . . Let us do what we can to rekindle the smouldering nigh quenched fire on the altar.”⁹ Delbanco can think of no more noble pursuit as we await what will come. I have sympathy with the notion that faith forms us. The coming age will likely take its form from the faith we live out. There is, however, no attractive faith form which calls out to me if we are to be passively molded (or moulded) by its approach.

As a Unitarian Universalist, I believe in a faith that grapples with the present to change the directions toward which the past would seem to be pointing us, especially in areas of faith and something more concrete like universal human rights or wealth distribution patterns or destruction of healthy ecology. I would be naive to believe the Unitarian Universalist movement will be the most important shaper of the future. We can have an effect on the shape of the future if our rhetoric about universal rights and our indignant passion about incursions into the dignity of others is

replaced by in the trenches, hands on work amongst the common folk of the world, working shoulder to shoulder to make changes in the way people live - rich and poor alike. Without solidarity and hands on support from intellectuals, the poor will be beaten down again and again by vested power.

While I enjoyed Delbanco's analysis and free use of quotes to bolster his ramble through history, his laissez faire ending spoils the book leaving little hope. The sub title, "A Meditation on Hope," fails. His vision of "rekindling the smouldering nigh quenched fire on the altar" may be something more specific than waiting, but he does not say what it is. So where is the hope? A laissez faire approach undercuts his original statement about American people being fair and decent since both attributes require a sense of who you are, direction, and a willingness to be in the trenches with neighbours and others who are down and out.

Awbrey: Dragging Hope out of Melancholy

David Awbrey was editorial page editor for the *Wichita Eagle* for many years. He has recently written a book, *Finding Hope in the Age of Melancholy*, in which he writes about the malady of our age: "In more than two decades of journalism, I covered numerous stories tracing how fretful life has become for some Americans in the late twentieth century. Yet, because those stories centred on specific places and a limited number of individuals, I had no wide perspective on the pervasive changes hitting U.S. society. I saw people's lives fractured and their communities' hearts torn out by corporate and political actions made thousands of miles away, but the whole picture was disjointed; I noticed the same pieces, not the social mosaic."¹⁰ He quotes Cornel West in *Race Matters*, describing Americans as "rootless, dangling people," who suffer a "silent depression" because of the loss of industrial jobs and declining income.¹¹ Awbrey latches on to depression

(melancholy) as the problem facing us today citing David Karp's study that shows baby boomers in the States have a thousand percent greater chance of experiencing depression than their grandparents did, and Myrna Wiessman's study showing that depression runs ten times greater in Western nations than any other. While the studies methodologies are not reviewed, I want to assume that there is some way of factoring out the availability of counselling to baby boomers in the west. Availability of counselling in this age and in the West may create semblance.

Still, I have enough counselling experience to know that Awbrey reflects the negativism, the deadness, the flavourlessness, the shapeless and limp inner void people have described. As a journalist, Awbrey is good at telling his own story about depression and reinforcing it with the tales of people he has interviewed. His response to all of this is Kierkegaardian. In the face of anxiety turn to religion, in his case Christianity. While I do not disparage religion as a vehicle for restoring the pathways to the inner wells of healing and strength, it just rang too evangelical for me. While his book may sell in certain markets in the U.S., it would fall flat in Canada where there is just as much depression. More than 75% of Canadians are not associated in any way with a church.

I am also not convinced that following Emerson's dictum to "rekindle the smouldering nigh quenched fire" is the answer. Great fervour placed in something that helped to create the problem does not seem to be the way. It is a return to the ideology, perhaps rekindled and recreated, but not without the calcified biases, which caused the current crisis of spirit. If Conquest was right, the ideology is not the answer. Neither is the answer found in the common malady of knowing which Rorty singled out; to know a lot about what is happening now, without derivative concern for the lessons of the past or any visioning for the future gets us nowhere.

The Dalai Lama: Compassion, Only . . . Only . . . Only Compassion

I respect the Dalai Lama's voice for a peaceful world but find his books pedantic and uninspiring. It is my problem. I treat his Buddhist principles and discipline as a cafeteria to visit as I plow and forge and forage may way through life. There is a longing in my heart for the end he seeks, inner peace and a world at peace. I am not ready to embrace his call because I have agreed to be sucked in by our culture's competition and I enjoy it. I admit to its destructive side, and seek to avoid it and ameliorate it. I wonder, after making such a statement, if I have not fallen prey to the lack of discrimination in my own ethics that Lewis Lapham laments in a press which "draws no distinction between the . . . policies of the president's penis and the threat of nuclear annihilation."¹² Hmmm!

The Dalai Lama speaks of two problems which have faced humankind: 1) Religious diversity when its doctrinal, cultural and practical differences lead to conflict. He suggests that we isolate and name the factors which obstruct harmony through practical observation and logic. He sounds just like Wieman who would have encouraged an ever greater appreciative understanding so that more and more of what we encounter in this world confirms who we are rather than putting us off. The Dalai Lama says dialogue can overcome ignorance allowing us to see the transcendent similarities of different religions, e.g., a core of helping individuals to become good human beings. And, 2) Conflict caused by institutionalized economic and political factors. He suggests secularization and a decrease in the institutional power of religions as a beginning.

He explicitly cites claims to being the only "true religion" as a real problem because one can not claim a sole mediator to the real truth and equally appreciate another's chosen, but different, pathway to becoming a good person in this life. He argues that this is especially so when people convert from one religion to another, usually holding on to some disparaging thoughts, often

voicing them, about the religion they left behind in their journey. This was a difficulty for Unitarian Universalists when our people defined themselves in terms of what they were not, and give voice to their hurts in ways which disparaged other religions. The purpose of any religion, asserts the Dalai Lama is to facilitate love, patience, tolerance, humility, and forgiveness, in service of compassion.¹³ No faith will help us, he says, if we fail to use these in our own lives.

There is something about the writings of the Dalai Lama which makes me agree with Bart Simpson's comment about things that are obvious, "Daaaaa!" Then there is a huge caveat. I do not know how to exercise compassion to such a degree in a frightfully competitive world where there are many people who would take all you have, and do it in a nasty manner. While compassion is a goal under reasonable circumstances, it is too lofty and soft for unequivocal application. Had I the wealth and courtiers of the Dalai Lama, I might feel insulated enough from life at this end of this century to pronounce compassion as the path to develop.

Charles Taylor: Fragmentation's Remedy

Taylor tackles the oft named narcissism of our age with a process that reminds me of what Channing did to the word 'Unitarian' in his age. He took something often used in a negative way and turned it into something positive, the name Unitarian. Taylor looks at the negative and the positive sides of the urge toward self-fulfilment in our age. So far we have heard a lot about what is wrong, and no one agrees. The playing field is hopelessly fragmented. Taylor does not fix the field so much as regrass it. It is like being on the scrimmage line when a football play is executed versus being in the Goodyear blimp. Frankly, it is easier for me to see what is happening on the ground by viewing it from above. Taylor has a broad view which is often chastised by philosophical knowers. They like to be on the scrimmage line and will notice when the quarterback pops a button.

Taylor believes that choice determines who we are and also relativizes who we are. He uses the example of sexual orientation versus the choice to be homosexual as an example. The one is a given, the other a choice. If we choose to be homosexual, that is, it is not sexual orientation as used in common parlance to mean “it is just who I am,” we may have made an important choice for our lives, but as choice it becomes subjective and comes under attack as not the ‘true’ way of being which the heterosexual orientation takes on by comparison. What may be good for the individual may make the group suffer by opening up the softness of relativism in its claim to be a pre-existing horizon of existence.¹⁴

On the development of the individual, Taylor cites positive and negative sides to individual development: “I believe that in articulating this ideal over the last two centuries, Western culture has identified one of the important potentialities of human life. Like other facets of modern individualism - for instance, that which calls on us to work out our own opinions and beliefs for ourselves - authenticity points us towards a more self responsible form of life. It allows us to live a fuller and more differentiated life . . . more fully appropriated as our own.” There are dangers . . . the whole language of self-fulfilment and finding one’s own path is suspect and either nonsense or a vehicle to self indulgence. Here we find this view attacked by fundamentalists and conservatives who have found a narrow pathway which they believe supports the values which make for a good life, by hard core rationalists for whom such talk is vague and woolly, or secular humanists for whom it smacks of navel gazing and moral laxity in the face of nuclear and environmental threats to the world.¹⁵

He identifies the boosters and the knockers of self fulfilment indicating that we have to move beyond the polarization. He sees the polarization as fragmentation. Taylor notes that fragmentation

can rob us of the ability to form a common identity and goals as a people and carry them out. One must wonder if Unitarianism occasionally forgets about its core beliefs. The Pagans, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Humanists, religious and secular, are not Unitarian Universalism. They are manifestations of the diversity which can exist together because of Unitarian Universalism. With so many voluntary associations within the UUA, one must ask if their political posturing for resources and attempts to have their own staff person at the UUA tears away at the framework of our common identity, our goals and our ability to carry them out. Yet without the diversity, who are we?

Taylor argues that the remedy for fragmentation and the watering down of identity formation is passionate attachment to voluntary association and effective work at making your ideas the majority. It can be disheartening, but there is nothing like success in the political realm to bond people together over an issue.¹⁶ Taylor points the way: “What our situation seems to call for is a complex, many-levelled struggle, intellectual, spiritual, and political, in which the debates in the public arena interlink with those in a host of institutional settings, like hospitals and schools, where the issues of enframing technology are being lived through in concrete forms; and where these disputes in turn both feed and are fed by the various attempts to define in theoretical terms the place of technology and the demands of authenticity, and beyond that, the shape of human life in its relation to the cosmos.

But to engage effectively in the many-faceted debate, one has to see what is great in the culture of modernity, as well as what is shallow and dangerous. “As Pascal said about human beings, modernity is characterized by grandeur as well as by misère. Only a view that embraces both can

give us the undistorted insight into our era that we need to rise to its greatest challenge.”¹⁷

Forgiveness: Why Forgiveness, but first what is it?

While each critic of our time has a theory, few point to a way that can lead us from our times to something new. I believe forgiveness must be part of that bridge, indeed, without it we will founder on the rocks placed in the future by our past.

I was surprised by how complicated forgiveness is. I will share my journey in coming to a new understanding of forgiveness, then move on to why I believe forgiveness is the real key to moving on, no matter what our diagnosis of the past is.

While Webster’s dictionary defines Forgiveness as “Compassionate feelings which support the willingness to excuse a mistake, the willingness to absolve a wrong doer from recompense for her/his actions . . . While we will hear overtones of these words running through out religious definitions of forgiveness, there is little room for such thoughts in the scientific studies of forgiveness and its roots. Scientific definitions start with words like inferior parietal lobule of the brain, and the limbic system.

A prerequisites for forgiveness include a distinct sense of the self, the capacity for self reflection, the ability to turn classes of things into particular things (like individuals, in the case of people), and language. It is most likely that these traits were not active in human beings until the developments which produced Australopithicene Man. The Parietal Lobule of the brain (lower middle part of the brain at the back of the head), available for the first time in Australopithicene Man, has primitive ties to the limbic system, which controls emotions. In the laboratory, when the parietal lobule is put to sleep on the non-dominant side of the brain, a person becomes elated, feels good about her or himself.

When the dominant side is drugged and suppressed, a person becomes depressed and struggles with their sense of self. The result of such an experiment was to locate the physical source of the ego - in very basic and old parts of the brain. In both sedative scenarios, the limbic system, a very primitive portion of our body, served to moderate feelings, especially those of depression, maintaining some sense of self respect even in down times. The sense of self in human beings was not possible until the parietal lobule and the limbic system worked in tandem.

It is this sense of self, which allowed Australopithecus to feel their own individuality in a group, and to feel that they were better than others. Very basic feelings of hierarchy invaded human relationships. No longer was anyone just a working part of the whole tribe, each person was an individual with thoughts and feelings about the self. There were for the first time in human development, both a horizontal sense of being a part of the group, and a hierarchical sense of being distinct from the group and through self reflection, being better than some in the group.

It is interesting to note, that the development of such feelings and the ability to sense the self is likely the source of the wonderings about the world in the story of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. When they became self aware, they broke the covenant with their God.

The development of the capacity to sense ourselves as individuals and of the limbic system to elevate our feelings of sense of self, which we interpret as being good, is still evolving, from generation to generation. These very primitive parts of the human system help determine the nature of our societies and our culture.

While it is doubtful that the Catholic Church knew what it was doing in the middle ages, its adoption

of the hierarchical system of Rome as a way of controlling one's sense of well being in the world was brilliant. Tapping into the primitive systems of the brain and limbic system, convincing people that their best selves came after death in heaven, then controlling access to heaven gave them access to great material wealth which the Church still enjoys today. Most churches have tapped into that source of control and it is part of their power over people. It is interesting to note that Unitarians have never been able to tap into that source of power over people - and this may account for the reputation that Unitarians have earned for giving less of their material wealth to their churches than most other religious groups in North America. (That giving pattern is slowly changing.)

Once human beings became self aware, they could evaluate one another's behaviour. Comparisons, greater than, lesser than, and equal to, are formed on the parietal lobule of the brain. Comparisons are associated with feelings through a direct connection between the parietal lobe and the limbic system. Any event which makes an individual feel less than others is judged as an attack on the self, and very early in human development resulted in a desire for revenge. Revenge was no more than the attempt to restore a sense of positive self over others who had done something to lower your sense of self. It is a sophisticated but primitive response. From rudimentary attempts to regulate that primitive sense of self, the negative and positive valence of feelings, justice and even law have arisen to help maintain some sense of equality. Equality in practice is the most basic and primitive way of being together. The conscious sense of equality came well after Australopithecus Man. Philosophical concepts of equality developed much later, and hark back, interestingly, to the lack of ability to judge differences. It is as though a return to Eden is desired rather than a revenge based justice.

One might wonder today, with the prevailing ethos amongst so many people around the globe seeming to accept such wide disparities in the incomes of people, if the parietal lobule and the limbic

system are not on over time and masking the original and more primitive sense that equality. The potlatch of the indigenous West Coast Natives is an example of an attempt to restore equality in a positive way, as is the current attempt to pass a Seventh Generation Bill in Canadian Parliament and in legislative bodies around the globe.. The Seventh Generation Bill would forgive debt to developing and third world nations. Potlatch and something like a Seventh Generation Bill are the exception in human history.

Not too long ago in our history, revenge to restore equality was expected and still exists. If someone hurt you, you would seek revenge, hurt them back in a manner equal to their hurt to you, restoring a sense of equality and balance. This revenge is the basis of capital punishment and prisons seen as punishment rather than sources of rehabilitation.

The place of the self in balance with others came powerfully into play in the middle ages when the Lord of the Manor tried to claim the “right to first night” with the new wife of one of his serfs. This often led to blows - serfs trying to establish and preserve their sense of self on an equal footing with the Lord in this setting. When the serf killed the Lord of the manor, he, himself, would be put to death - but not in an easy way - in a way more degrading than the way the Lord had died. Thus the sense of elevation of the people of the Manor was preserved through revenge. It was not uncommon then, that another member of the serf’s family felt obliged to restore the balance by killing a member of the Lord’s Manor, and in return his life would be taken and a family feud was started that could carry on from generation to generation - Shakespeare wrote about the feeling and played it out to a powerful end in Romeo and Juliet. Revenge is both an equalizer and a source of imbalance.

The only act which could end such barbarism and foolishness was forgiveness. Nothing else in

human history has been able to moderate the parietal lobule and limbic system's sense of imbalance other than forgiveness. There is no direct linkage of causality that can be traced to how this twist of thinking took place - except that of self preservation. It is as though life itself reached out and placed this twist in thinking into the human equation. Forgiveness could put an end to the vengeful behaviour.

The sense of justice is primitively base in a revenge system of thinking, Lex Talonis, an eye for an eye. Law has its basis in trying to regulate and codify a sense of justice. It would seem that forgiveness and law, even justice, with their different roots can be at odds with each other.

The revenge system is primitive. It is based in strong feelings of the limbic system. Revenge is hard to address through the use of reason. The more recently developed portions of the left side of the brain and the limbic system, fought each other in battles over the executions of Stanley Falder and Carla Fay Tucker in Texas. In a great showdown, the "left brainers" carried their placards outside the prisons and the "limbics" injected poisons inside!

This imbalance drives the abortion debates. An unwanted pregnancy, a negative imbalance, an attack on our life, is addressed by killing the foetus. In this debate, it is the right to life people who left brained - forgive the foetus its sin. Do not kill it. Most Unitarians will not like the sound of that analysis. We have to watch our judgements about areas of the brain and their functions. Older is not worse and newer is not more advanced. They are simply different and each is required to make us what we are. There are simply areas of the brain which are at odds with each other in their attempts to help us get along in this world. No wonder life is so complicated.

Forgiveness, then is an attempt to restore equilibrium, to put an end to revenge behaviour. It is a way of being that many human groups have found attractive. Forgiveness was so alluring that it gained millions of converts to early Christianity as Christians turned the other cheek to their persecutors, especially, and powerfully, as they refused to fight gladiators in the coliseums of Rome.

Forgiveness is a powerful shift in human thinking and often at odds with emotions. It is a re-framing, reinterpreting of events which leads to a shift in the way that the limbic system places positive and negative values on events. Forgiveness takes an event which has been valued negatively, thus a devaluing of the self, and turns it into a positive. When we forgive we give up the idea that a physical restoration of balance is positive. Through the lens of forgiveness, we interpret physically violent ways of restoring balance between people as wrong. Self esteem based on forgiveness gives us a quite different behaviour pattern than self esteem based in the old parietal-limbic response.

This mental re-framing involves compassion (Ah, the Dalai lama had to get in here again!). We sense a bond between ourselves and the person who did wrong or we sense reasons for the behaviour. The alcoholic is ill, the person who grew up in poverty may be the victim of social forces, the man who was abused as child and who as an adult hit his wife can receive therapy, and the woman continually abused by a husband may murder her husband. Forgiveness is invading law where revenge once ruled supreme. Battered wife syndrome is an acceptable reason for murder.

There are practical struggles in this world resulting from this complicated process. The revenge system has been responsible for putting to death people later found to be innocent. Sometimes it has relied on torture to execute a person. The recent rulings by courts in Florida, that their use of the electric chair is cruel, has led the state to offer lethal injection as a means for capital punishment.

Forgiveness has its own dangers. Extended without limits, forgiveness leads to chaos in society. Horrible crimes can be committed and perpetrators never have to be responsible for their behaviour. Everyone's sense of safety can come under attack with abuses on both sides of the playing field.

Neuropsychology explains re-framing as a blocking of input to the areas of the brain which would have normally inferred a negative meaning from events, thus spurring a revenge response. Forgiveness from a deity is available to believers through faith. In a world which was left meaningless by existentialism and materialism, where the sense of self is under attack and relativized, forgiveness from a God/Goddess is attractive. At least there are always warm and loving arms in which we can be cradled, those of the gods and goddesses. Injury can happen, not only to individuals, but, to groups as well - thus we have class action law suits.

Revenge offers a limited number of ways one can address hurts. Forgiveness provides myriad understandings and re-framings to redress grievances. Forgiveness is not a narrow system. It goes well beyond offering the stereotyped act of wiping away the feelings of revenge, eventually reconciling and bringing the person who committed the wrongs back into the family. There are also revised understandings of the self in the person who was wronged. Rather than feel put down by wrongs, there can be elevation of the self to equal status by taking a higher ethical ground in solving the difficulty. Sanctimonious forgiveness where wronged individuals actually place themselves above the transgressor are a complex mix of reframing and the old parietal-limbic response.

Forgiveness is complicated. Studies show that forgiveness is more deeply felt for people who confess their misdeeds before anyone catches them - for instance - one might wonder how the feelings for President Clinton would have been had he told the nation of his infidelity before anyone had found

out about it. Forgiveness might have been there for him or even for Nixon!

Major Religions and Forgiveness

All major religions have writings on forgiveness. In Judaism, the most common words for forgiveness are mehillah and selihah, specifically they mean a wiping away transgressions, and reconciliation. In Judaism, there is a three fold process for forgiveness: 1) a pardon, where the violation stands on record in memory but there is no punishment or revenge; 2) forgiveness, where the record is wiped clean; and 3) reconciliation where the individual is brought back in to the family. Obviously, because of human feeling and thinking frameworks we have mentioned this morning, not all of these are always possible - and in some cases they are not desirable depending on the psychology of the victim.

In Christianity, the most common words denoting forgiveness are eleo, meaning to show mercy, and aphiemi, meaning to release or discharge or put away. In a throwback to the primitive feeling of the limbic system, the word splanchnizomai appears, literally meaning to spill out one's intestines - to have compassion. Forgiveness is a release from debt, injury or offense. It must be followed by contrition or repentance and love - or the covenant of forgiveness is not kept. The covenant requires that the act is part of a system with obligations on both sides.

In Islam, the concept of forgiveness taught by Allah, through his messenger Muhammad, is available in the Qu'ran where we find three different words: 1) 'afw, which means to pardon, to excuse a fault or offense, a waiver of punishment or even amnesty; 2) safhu which means to turn away from sin or misdeed, to ignore; and 3) ghafara which means to cover, to forgive, to remit. God is the ultimate power who forgives, he is Al-Ghafoor, the Forgiving One. It is a closing of accounts against God or

his creation. Offenses may be against a person, a group, against creation in any of myriad forms from animals to the environment, or God himself. Every offense is really an offense against God.

In Buddhism there are two aspects to forgiveness, the removal of the expectation of retribution and the renouncing of anger or resentment toward someone who has offended you. There is, in Buddhism a strong cognitive element which re-frames meanings. So neither of the elements of forgiveness can stand alone. As forgiveness, they stand together, the outward action and the inward attitudinal elements. Through compassion, one recognizes the suffering of the offender and takes pity on her/him, even though the action to relieve the suffering of the individual is sometimes undeserved. This is because the individual is not primary - release from suffering is primary.

In Hinduism, ksamata is the words used most frequently for forgiveness. It is often combined with kripa, prasada, daya, words for mercy, and karuna, which means compassion. Forgiveness nearly always involves compassion and mercy.

Each of the world's religions makes important space for the concept of forgiveness. How can it work for a Unitarian for whom process and knowledge are important, for whom instrumental values not terminal values are important - for whom process, the challenge, the seeking, the growing are important.

I must remember that forgiveness is really life's antidote to the very primitive revenge based system in the brain - but like that system it is primitive and based on the need for survival. It has various elements ranging from simple forbearance to reconciliation and uses as tools such pathways as mercy and compassion. Its tools are release, and discharge, repayment and ignoring. It is complicated,

terribly complicated, and the childhood stories about God's love and forgiveness that I got in a Christian Unitarian Church School do not serve me well s an adult. I do not believe that any God or Goddess would want us to focus on forgiveness from her or him, but rather on the reconciliation that is needed in this world. As a result, the process of forgiveness, which should end in reconciliation, is as varied as the number of human personalities and cultures. To understand forgiveness, and to know how to use it effectively requires that we know the person we are forgiving, or the person who forgives us - for in each case it is a system we enter and for it to work we have to be very clear about our side of the bargain and the person on the other side must be clear on what their part of the bargain is. Even that does not guarantee success.

As Unitarians, we must struggle with forgiveness for a life time. We dare not accept a set of directions for how it is to work because its forms are too diverse. It must be a part of our process way of being, and so we enter into active listening, dialogue and negotiating, we have to know ourselves ever better so that we see how we hurt others and what blocks we have internally to forgiveness. Above all we must, on the day that we lay our head to rest for the last time, look back, not in dejection that we failed to forgive so many times, but in joy that we struggled over a lifetime, so passionately, with forgiveness.

In Closing, Why Forgiveness . . .

There can be no real hope without forgiveness. While each of the critics of our century has chosen to name problems, and each has found a different way to frame the problems we face, only Taylor

took a high view of events and called for us to see both sides of issues, the deficits and the greatness, and the possibilities for both. Only Taylor overcame the more primitive responses which seek to elevate one response over another. He used the very process that forgiveness uses to look at a problem.

There is no real hope without forgiveness. That forgiveness first starts with ourselves. Without forgiving our own part in making this world such a hard place in which to live, we can not expect to move to new ground for building new foundations for we will operate out of old ways. At the start of the process, we do not need forgiveness of or from others. Eventually we will. The first level has to be to name our own wrongdoings and forgive them. This is not an old forgiveness where we simply restore a balance and go on in the same way. It is a forgiveness based in acceptance of new ways.

Forgiveness means that we name and avoid in the future what is wrong. The a naming process is difficult. There are many ways to frame our choices. Some reframing will embed blame of others, avoiding our own responsibility. Whatever our choices, confession and self forgiveness are the basics. Forgiveness form a deity or the life force, or the Great Spirit, may be important parts of the process for some, but can not be substituted for self forgiveness.

Dangers lurk. Forgiveness understood in old ways will not work, has not worked. Forgiveness can help heal each problem named by the critics of this last century. But the culture will not be healed unless we start with ourselves.

Just naming what is wrong with society and fashioning a response leaves little real hope. It would be more of the same old process mired in the past. Only a true break from the past can provide help.

The problems we face are systemic and dangerous. A change in the root of our thinking is required.

I know of no other way to achieve hope than by clearing away the treasury of our past and attempting something new. Tutu and Mandela did it in South Africa and it seems to have worked in most quarters.

My resistance to the Dalai Lama deserves a note. He is right. The process is hard and detailed and requires a complete re-organization of thinking and application of logic. It is so difficult that I have a hard time framing how to do it. My inertia is likely a product of the place in which I live, a place where we can't help but live often, a fur lined rut with fear about what lies above the berms at our sides. "So much to hope for, so much to forgive." Whitman was right.