

**Wisdom Circle - Forgiveness and Reconciliation  
September 2014**

**PREPARATION**

**Words of Wisdom**

"To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you."  
- *Louis B. Smedes*

"Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it."  
- *Mark Twain*

"Always forgive your enemies - nothing annoys them so much."  
- *Oscar Wilde*

"I went around saying for a long time that I am not one of those... who is heavily into forgiveness. But, they say we are not punished for the sin, but by the sin, and I began to feel punished by my unwillingness to forgive. By the time I decided to become one of those who is heavily into forgiveness, it was like trying to become a marathon runner in middle age; everything inside me either recoiled, as from a hot flame, or laughed a little too hysterically. I tried to will myself into forgiving people who had harmed me directly or indirectly over the years—four former Presidents, three relatives, two old boyfriends, and one teacher in a pear tree—it was 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' meets *Taxi Driver*. But in the end I could only pretend I had. I decided I was starting off with my sights aimed too high. As C.S. Lewis says in *Mere Christianity*, "If we really want to learn forgiveness, perhaps we had better start with something easier than the Gestapo."

- *Anne Lamott*

## **Spiritual Exercise – Observing Our Feelings Around Forgiveness**

For our exercise in forgiveness, let's start with something easier than the Gestapo. Think of someone who has harmed you—not in a devastating or traumatic way, but nevertheless someone you maintain resentful or angry feelings towards. It could be a colleague, an acquaintance, or even a stranger who treated you poorly or unfairly.

When you have some time, sit down with a pen and paper. Think about how this person harmed you. Observe how you feel? Do you feel resentment? Anger? Sadness? How do these emotions feel in your body? Do you feel tight? Frozen? Anxious? Write down what you observe.

Consider the idea of forgiving that person. Do you feel resistance? What thoughts emerge? Write down what you observe about your feelings. Consider what would need to happen for you to be able to forgive that person. An apology? A better understanding of their reasons? Compensation for harm?

Imagine you are meeting that person and they ask you for forgiveness. As an experiment, imagine that you say to them, "I forgive you." You might even say these words aloud, or write them on your paper. As you say the words, what do you feel? How does your body feel? Write down what you observe.

Come to the Wisdom Circle gathering prepared to reflect on your observations of how forgiveness feels for you.

### **Questions for Reflection**

- What does it feel like to forgive? What does it feel like to hold a grudge?
- Are some things unforgivable?
- What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?
- Are there people with whom you wish you could be reconciled? What is preventing reconciliation?

## **Wisdom Circle – Forgiveness & Reconciliation Session Plan**

*This session plan is a suggested guide, not a rigid set of rules. You may adjust this plan as you feel is appropriate in your group.*

### **Gathering & Welcome (~5 min)**

### **Information & Questions about Wisdom Circles (~10 min)**

*Because there are new people joining the Wisdom Circles this month, take some time to explain what Wisdom Circles are, and the format for how they will meet. Answer questions about what to expect.*

### **Chalice Lighting (~2 min)**

*Optional Reading:*

*Wild Geese, by Mary Oliver*

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain are moving across the landscapes, over the prairies and the deep trees, the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

### **Check-In (20-30 minutes)**

*As you feel comfortable, take 2-3 minutes to share one thing that is lifting your spirits, and one thing that is weighing you down. This is a time for sharing, but not for discussion.*

### **Covenanting (10-20 minutes)**

*If this is a new group, take this time to create a covenant. If it is a returning group, use this time to renew and update your existing covenant. Explain what a covenant is for and allow for discussion.*

From the UUA: “‘Covenant’ is Latin for ‘come together’ and means a ‘solemn agreement’ or ‘promise from the heart’ regarding a course of action between parties....Covenants are a deep, abiding promise between equals to partner with each other and that which is bigger than ourselves to work for a just and loving world.”

## **Discussion (60 minutes)**

### *Introduce Topic*

- What does it feel like to forgive? What does it feel like to hold a grudge?
- Are some things unforgivable?
- What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?
- Are there people with whom you wish you could be reconciled? What is preventing reconciliation?

### *Silent Reflection (~2 minutes)*

### *First Responses (Share in the order you feel moved)*

*Cross-Conversation (Ask questions that invite deeper reflection; Speak from personal experience, and use "I statements"; Avoid explaining or judging)*

### *Final Thoughts (Share in the order you feel moved)*

## **Gratitude (5-10 minutes)**

*Share 1-2 things that have been meaningful to you from this session.*

## **Closing**

*Optional Song: "Return Again" (#1011 in Teal Hymnal)*

Return again  
Return again  
Return to the home of your soul

Return again  
Return again  
Return to the home of your soul

Return to who you are  
Return to what you are  
Return to where you are  
Born and reborn again

Return to who you are  
Return to what you are  
Return to where you are  
Born and reborn again

Return again  
Return again  
Return to the home of your soul