



The Nature of Forgiveness and Compassion

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There is a hunger for unity among the world's religious and spiritual leaders. People are awakening to the higher, spiritual values of life. They are recognizing that the survival of humanity depends upon recognizing that we are all one family.

The tragedies of the twentieth century must not be repeated in the twenty-first century. We have made strides forward in realizing that no one wins when there is war. No one wins when there is violence. No one wins when there is hatred. The legacy of our forefathers must not become the legacy of our children. What gift do we wish to give our children and grandchildren? Do we wish to leave them a world of violence and war? Or do we wish for them a world of peace, love, and unity? The choice is ours to make.

If we wish their world to be better than what we have seen in the past, then we must be willing to teach them love and peace. They will not learn it if we carry our past hatreds and prejudices. They look at us as models. If we are filled with hatred, they will adopt that in their lives. If we wish them to live in a peaceful world, we must put down our weapons that we carry in our minds and hearts.

Attaining peace is not easy. The hardest is the first step, and that is forgiveness. We must learn to forgive our enemies. We must develop compassion for those who have hurt us. What our enemies have done may not be of their own doing, but of how they were trained by their parents and grandparents. We need to recognize that even our enemies have been victims. We have all been victims of the discord of our ancestors. It is time to put a stop to it. Revenge must be replaced by forgiveness.

The children of the world have seen enough violence. They have lost enough family members. It is time to take a hard look at ourselves. It is time for us to develop the maturity and wisdom to say, "Enough violence. Let us use our energy to build a peaceful world."

How can we take those steps? How can we cleanse ourselves of anger? I offer a solution that has worked through the ages. Compassion, forgiveness, and peace can be ours through spirituality and meditation.

What is spirituality, and what is meditation? How can we make them a part of our lives to build a peaceful future? Spirituality is the recognition that our true self is our soul. It is recognizing that our soul is one with God. It is realizing that we are not merely our body and mind, but a soul that inhabits the body. We may think of ourselves as a body bearing a name such as Mary or John or Maria or Mario or that we are a citizen of Colombia, Mexico, France, or India, or that we are one religion or another. Spirituality is the recognition that behind these outer names and labels we are souls, a part of one Creator. As such, we are members of one family. When we develop this vision, we no longer see through the eyes of prejudice and discrimination. We break down the barriers that separate one human being from another. We feel like we are connected at the level of soul. When we experience our unity and connectedness, we start caring about each other. We help and serve each other. The hungry cries of our neighbor's children cause us as much pain as the cries of our own children. We see the homeless man on the street as our homeless grandfather, and we help him. Our vision broadens, and we have compassion for all human beings.

How can we develop this noble vision? We do so when we awaken spiritually. Meditation is a method that opens our spiritual sight to wash away hatred and replace it with peace. By sitting in stillness, we can get in touch with our soul. We find that we are more than this body. We discover that our spiritual essence is love, peace, and bliss. When we identify with our soul, we realize our oneness with God.

How many yearn for a divine vision of God? For many, finding God is a dream that hardly seems possible, but people through the ages have seen God and have merged with God. How did they do it? They used one technique. We may

call that technique inversion, concentration, or meditation. They sat in stillness and directed their attention within.

Great saints and mystics came with the message of unity. They taught love for our fellow beings and love for God. Look at the basic message of the founders of religions and we will find the message of love. They attained that realization by developing themselves spiritually.

We too can develop our spiritual side. By learning meditation, we can contact God. As God bathes us in bliss, we are cleansed of the years of hatred and prejudices. God instills the qualities of forgiveness and compassion. The Lord holds our hands as we take steps toward reconciliation.

Meditation is taught as a science that we can practice no matter what our religion, belief, or culture. It is a process of closing our eyes, focusing our attention within, and coming in contact with the inner Light of God. As we become absorbed in the inner Light, our soul rises above body-consciousness. We find spiritual realms within. These inner realms are filled with Light, beauty, and happiness.

In the last few decades doctors unveiled a finding that is now widely accepted. People who had clinically died, but were revived by modern medicine, reported journeying into a world of light. Due to an accident or illness, their heart and breathing stopped. During the time before they were revived, each had an experience of his or her soul rising out of the body. Those who had been clinically dead for several minutes experienced entering a region of Light and Music beyond this world.

They spoke of looking down at their body lying on the ground or on the operating table as medical practitioners worked on them. They saw and heard what was being said in the room. Some drifted through walls to see their relatives waiting outside. Sometimes they floated to other rooms and saw and heard what their friends and relatives were saying. Some traveled to see relatives living at a distance and saw the clothes that they were wearing and what they were saying. Later, when they described what they had seen and heard, the relatives confirmed that what they observed and the conversations they heard were true.

After some time, the people went through a dark tunnel and emerged into a world of light, brighter than they had ever seen on earth. Many were greeted by a being of light who embraced them with more love and bliss than they ever felt on earth. The being of light was brilliant, yet it was a light that was not scorching.

Many described how the being of light took them on a life review in which they saw in a flash everything that happened to them in life—accompanied by instantaneous knowledge of the effects that their thoughts, words, and deeds had on others. They witnessed all the good and bad they had done in their lifetime. In this three-dimensional review the souls simultaneously saw their actions and felt the effect their actions had on others. They felt the pain they caused others and the joy they brought into the lives of others. Thus, if they did good deeds, they felt the happiness that others felt. If they hurt someone, they felt the pain the others felt. The being of light was filled with compassion. No matter how many bad deeds the person had done, the being of light gave love to the soul. The soul experienced this unconditional love despite its failings and weaknesses. Whereas the being of light is but a messenger of God, imagine how much love and compassion God has for us despite our sins and failings. If we wish God to forgive our failings and faults, then we too must learn to forgive others who have hurt us. Through forgiveness, we can build a peaceful world.

During the life review, those who had near-death experiences realized that love was the most important thing on earth. They were measured in the Beyond not by material gains or name and fame but by how much they loved their fellow beings. Many were so bathed in the love that embraced them in the Light beyond that they did not want to return to life. However, since their time on earth was not over, they had to return. At the moment they reentered their body, their heart and breathing started to function, and they returned to life. These experiences report similar happenings. A Gallup poll taken in 1982 revealed that eight million people had a near-death experience, and a 1992 poll taken later increased the numbers to thirteen million.

Skeptics wanting to confirm whether those reporting near-death experiences were sound of mind administered personality tests and examined their psychological make-ups. They found that the people tested were psychologically healthy. Many who experienced NDE's had previously been skeptics, but as the near-death experiences were more real than life on earth, those having NDE's knew that there is life beyond. They knew there is no death. They knew that they had communicated with regions beyond and a being of light.

These people had this communication through the trauma of a near-death experience. There are other ways that do not rely on a medical emergency to know that there is a region beyond. We need not have a near-death experience to witness the Light and hear the Celestial Music of God. We can have this experience through meditation on the inner Light and Sound.

Meditation is easy, because we do not need any difficult postures. For those who would like to try to meditate for a few minutes, the technique involves sitting in a pose most comfortable, one in which you can sit the longest without moving. Any movement keeps the attention on the body. No part of your body should be touching anyone, since if someone moves, it will disturb the other. Then we close our eyes very gently, in a relaxed way, as we do when we go to sleep. Our attention should be fully alert. We should not put any strain on our eyes or try to look up. Our eyes should be focused into the field of darkness about eight to ten inches in front of us on the horizontal plane. With closed eyes we should gaze into the middle of whatever is in front of us. That which sees the darkness is the inner eye. We should sit lovingly and calmly to see what comes up. It is as if we were watching a movie screen and waiting to see what appears on it.

The first thing that happens while gazing is that thoughts distract us. The tendency of the mind is to generate thoughts. Thoughts keep our attention from seeing what is in front of us. If thoughts come up, we may forget to keep the gaze in front of us. Thoughts arise because the mind is like mercury. It cannot stay still. The mind is thinking of being in Colombia in one moment, England in another, and India the next. We may think of the past or the future. To gaze

successfully, the mind must be still. To keep our mind engaged so that it does not distract us, disciples who are initiated by a spiritual Master are given the names of God to repeat to keep the mind still and occupied. For those who want an idea of how meditation works, they can try an introductory method, called *Jyoti* Meditation, in which you can repeat any Name of God with which you feel comfortable. The Name should be repeated mentally and slowly, not aloud. Do not pay any attention to the Name, but let it go on automatically. As the Name is repeated, continue gazing in front of you. Meditation brings peace and calm. Those initiated by a perfect Master experience flashes of Light or Lights of any color. They may see white, yellow, orange, red, green, blue, purple, violet, or golden Light. They may experience an inner vista of sky, stars, a big star, a moon, or a sun. They will transcend through higher realms until ultimately the soul reaches the highest spiritual realm, Sach Khand, where the soul merges back in the Creator.

In these troubled times, if we meditate and find a place of calm daily, we will be able to face the challenges of life. We will not only be peaceful ourselves, but we will radiate peace to all those with whom we come in contact. Peace begins with us. No one has ever been effective in trying to make others change and be peaceful. We can only change ourselves. By changing ourselves, we can become examples and have an effect on those who meet us. By seeing our example, others will be inspired to find out what has made our lives calm and peaceful. Then we can share with them that meditation has helped to transform us. By transforming ourselves, we can transform others, including our family, community, society, and eventually the whole world.

In this state of love, we develop the qualities of forgiveness and compassion. Christ advised us that if an enemy slaps us on one cheek, to turn the other cheek. Buddha taught peacefulness. When an enemy approached him in anger, instead of fighting back, Buddha said, "This gift of anger you have brought, I do not accept." Thus, Buddha put an end to what could have escalated into an argument. Let us not accept and react to the anger of others. Let us stay centered in a place of peace within. If others who are angry see that we remain calm, they will be left with their own anger.

Let us concentrate on our spiritual nature. Let us contact the Light and Sound of God within. As we experience the inner bliss of God, let us convert that into compassion and forgiveness for those who hurt us, and let us build harmonious relationships. In this way, we will be building a safe world for our children, posterity, and ourselves.



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