

## ASK THE MINISTER

Rev. Stacy Macris Ros

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Yeah! Well, Merry Christmas! I'll just start you off, right? Merry Christmas, everyone! We're here!

Today is "Ask the Minister." You had submitted five questions for me, so we'll be covering those. There's a lot to cover; there's a lot to get through. So, originally, I was going to put a joke here at the top of my talk ... just, you know, in honor of Rev. Richard Maraj. But we won't have time ... So I'll just say either ... [Congregants laugh] Oh you guys are already ahead of me on this one! I was going to say either I'm sorry or you're welcome! [Congregants laugh] But given the applause that already started, we'll go with you're welcome; okay.

So, let's dive right in! The first question was: **PLEASE EXPLAIN THE ESSENCE OF UNITY TEACHINGS IN A NUTSHELL.** This is a great question, right? Because, a lot of times, you've been coming to Unity, and then your friends ... you know, you've been telling your friends, "*Oh, I've got this great church: Unity!*" And they say, "*What's that all about?*" And you say, "*Errrrr ... I don't know.*"

Or you've been coming for 20 years -- 10 years, 20 years, 30 years -- and it's good for us all to kind of get back to the basics, right? Just review: What is it that we're all about? What does Unity teach?

So, we're going to start with the definition of Unity from Unity headquarters itself. This is the definition that all of us who are licensed Unity teachers or ordained ministers: we have to memorize this. So, it's on this screen. There's a lot of words on that screen, so I'll read it. So definition of Unity:

*Unity is a positive, practical approach to Christianity based on the teachings of Jesus and the power of prayer. Unity honors the universal truths in all religions and respects each individual's right to choose their own spiritual path.*

You're welcome to take a picture of that, if you'd like, and then show it to your friends the next time they ask, right?

But really Unity started with Myrtle Fillmore, who was born ... they always called her very sickly. Probably tuberculosis; we're not sure. It's the 1800s. But she was very sick and weak her entire life. And then, at the age of about 41, she heard a talk by Dr. E.B. Weeks. And he said, "*You are a child of God; therefore, you do not inherit illness.*" And she took that to heart, and that became her affirmation, and it became her prayer work.

And so, for two years, she would sit in the silence in meditation, and she would ask her body for forgiveness: "*I'm sorry for everything I've said against you.*" And then she would go from her head down to her toes, and she would bless each part. She would see it healthy and whole. She would see every cell coming to life and renewing itself. And then, within two years -- after a lifetime of being sick -- she healed herself.

Now, I love this story also because a lot of times we get sick or have a health challenge and we think, "*Well, I've been praying every day for a week; why am I not well?!?*" [Congregants laugh] Right? But here was two hours every day for two years -- is what it took.

And so that's really ... it's that power of prayer. And this is what we take with us into Unity. Charles Fillmore, her husband, defined prayer this way; he said, "*Prayer is the most highly accelerated Mind Action known.*" The most highly accelerated Mind Action known ... meaning our words with our strong feelings create our life; create our own world.

And so, in Unity, we pray from a little differently than traditional Christianity. We pray from a consciousness of Oneness. Not to a God or a being or an entity outside of ourselves, but from a consciousness of being connected to and a part of the whole.

We pray with the thought, *"God is love, so I am love, and therefore I express love in the world."* Or you could even say, *"I claim Divine Love as my true nature."* That is my prayer.

Here's from Myrtle Fillmore herself from her book, *Healing Letters*. She said, *"Prayers aren't sent out at all. Where would we send our prayers? We should direct them to our minds and hearts and affairs. Prayer is an exercise to change our thought habits and our living habits, that we may step up a new and better activity."* Prayer, then, is to change our hearts and minds so that omnipresent good may fill our minds and hearts and manifest in our lives.

And so, there's a different understanding of God. Again, not as a being or entity outside of ourselves, but Charles Fillmore said, *"God is not a person but Principle."* (Capital P.) Myrtle Fillmore said, *"God is love, is healing, is wholeness; God is Spirit."* And then Rev. Eric Butterworth, one of my favorite Unity ministers and author of many books -- he used to be the minister in New York City -- he says, *"God is presence; God is Allness."*

Some other words for God that you might hear in Unity would be Infinite Spirit or Love, Divine Love -- that's one of my favorites. Or Eternal Loving Presence or Life Energy.

**So, there's a lot of different ways to describe that which is God so that we don't move it outside of ourselves ... but realizing that we are part of it and connected to the whole.**

We also have five Unity principles; five basic teachings. So, the great granddaughter of the Fillmores, Connie Fillmore, was asked to summarize Unity's teachings for a *Daily Word* magazine article in 1989 for their 100th anniversary. And so, she offered these principles of guidance for staying in tune with our own divine nature.

So, the first principle is this one: **God is everywhere and always present in every circumstance. This divine energy underlies and animates all of existence** ... meaning that Love and Wisdom underlies and animates all of existence. Sometimes that's harder to find than other times! But it's that idea to keep looking for it; to keep seeing the good in every circumstance.

The second Unity principle is: **Human beings are innately good because they are connected to and an expression of Spirit.** In other words, you are an expression of that God Presence. So, just like the beautiful cactus you have here in Arizona; just like the mountains, the animals, the flowers, the trees; you, too, are an expression of the Divine.

Number three: **Our thoughts have creative power to influence events and determine our experiences.** Again, our thoughts and words -- with that strong emotion -- create our experiences. So, I like to give the example: two people go on vacation; it rains. One person comes back and says, *"Well, that was a terrible vacation; it rained the whole time."* And the other person comes back and says, *"What a beautiful vacation! I could listen to the rain. I could sit and read my book. I could take a nap."* Same experience, and yet two very different experiences based on the thoughts, right? What was created there?

Our fourth principle says: **Prayer and meditation connect and align us to our own spiritual nature within God.** So sometimes we need reminding, and so, you see that in our Sunday services or Wednesday services -- and even in our YFM: our youth ministry classrooms -- that reminder to go back to prayer and meditation as the reminder of our own divine nature. To get reconnected and to remember again who we really are.

And then number five. I'm going to say it's my favorite, because: **It's not enough to know the spiritual teachings.** It's great to sit here and listen, and to recite back to me all of it if you'd like, but are you applying it? Are you walking your talk? Are you doing the work? Because **you can sit here and listen all you want, but the key is to apply it; to be it; to go out and do it.**

So that's the five Unity principles. Charles Fillmore also created 12 spiritual powers or attributes. We're going to be doing a deep dive into those in the new year. Richard Maraj will be covering the 12 spiritual powers in a six-week series, so we'll be talking about that more in the new year. But those are also part of our teachings.

So, in a nutshell -- five minutes later! We are it. **We are Divine Presence. It is around us and within us, and it is around and within everything and everyone. It is all. It's the Allness. It's the Oneness.**

As Eric Butterworth wrote, *"God is in us, not like a raisin in a bun, but like the ocean in a wave."* Again, the wave contains everything the ocean contains; it's not the entire ocean, but it contains everything the ocean contains. So, we cannot leave God. We cannot be separate from God or Presence, because we are Presence. We are Presence, we are Spirit, we are God expressing as us. Isn't that beautiful?

And I needed to end this section with this, because Charles Fillmore also said, *"I reserve the right to change my mind."* [Congregants laugh] So in today's lingo, we would say we're allowed to have a growth mindset. We're allowed to have our spirituality, our spiritual maturity, our spiritual growth continue to change over time as our consciousness grows; as our consciousness changes; as we remember more and more our true nature, our divinity.

So I will also hand that over to you, everybody. You have the right to change your mind.

Number two. Question number two: **WHY DOES GOD ALLOW TERRIBLE THINGS TO HAPPEN?** And there was another similar question that came in: **WHY ARE THERE INEQUITIES IN THE WORLD?** And that's similar to this question isn't it? Kind of falls under this umbrella of why does God allow terrible things to happen?

But what this question is assuming -- based on, remember what I just was talking about how Unity views God -- is that God is a being outside of ourselves. That God is this entity that's, like, playing in a game with our lives or on the chess board, or betting on this football game, right? So that's not what we're talking about here.

So, if we return to new teachings, God is not a human-like being. So, God does not allow terrible things to happen. because God is the Love and Wisdom that underlies all of existence. People -- in forgetting our spiritual nature; our divine goodness -- we can create terrible things.

So, I oftentimes give the example of a lamp. If you have a lamp, it shines brightly. But if you were to put a big heavy blanket over it, you can't see the light as brightly, can you? But the light is still there. Even though the darkness may be blocking that light, the light is still there.

And that is the truth: that, unfortunately, they've forgotten -- sometimes we have forgotten -- who we really are, which is an extension of that loving, wise Presence of the Universe.

Here's what it says in Exodus; my favorite Bible quote. Verse 3 ... or Chapter 3, Verse 14:

*"But when Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' What shall I say to them?'*

*So, God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' Thus, you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"*

Meaning ... God is = I AM. I AM = God is. What are you putting behind your I AM? Because that's what you're calling God!

There was a great podcast special with Oprah and Joel Osteen. You know, he has a big mega-church in Texas and lots of books, right? And they were talking about **the power of I AM**. This was a few years ago. And Joel Osteen said, "*We must mind what we place behind our I AM.*" Because he said, "*Whatever follows your I AM is going to come looking for you.*" He said, "*If you say, 'I'm so tired.' 'I'm so fat.' 'I'm so poor.' If that's what you put out there in the world, that is what's going to lead you to where you are now.*" He said, "*When you speak that out, you're setting the tone for your life.*"

And so, it's the same thing. If we're going to focus on the terrible things that are happening, then what you're doing is you're keeping yourself in that fear frequency. And that's the tone you're going to set for your life. Your life, Joel Osteen says, is how you see it. You are a creative, energetic being. So be with the frequency -- with the energy -- that you want to see and experience in the world. You get to create it!

And I'm not asking you to put your head in the sand and say, "*Nothing bad is happening; I'm just going to sit here and say my affirmations.*" What I'm saying is: see it, but don't let it disturb your peace. What I'm saying is: see it and let it move you into spiritual action from a peaceful place; from a loving place. Look it in the eye, but be firm in who and what you are, and the creative energy that you can put into the world and make a difference around.

So, you can keep saying, "*Oh the bad on the world ... and these folks and those folks,*" and that is what you will see and feel and experience. And it's that vibration that you keep alive; it's that energy you keep alive. So, the longer you sit in that and marinate in it, the more you're adding to that in the world. Because worry is as much a prayer as hope is. Remember: prayer is the most highly accelerated Mind Action known.

Eric Butterworth also wrote, "*Your life is lived from within out. The things that happen around you, or to you, can have little bearing on your physical well-being. What counts are the things that happen in you.*"

And there's a great Eastern philosophical saying; it's here on this side. It says, "*You may not be able to keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building nests in your hair.*" [Congregants laugh] See, because when we are consciously in the flow of life, following what we put behind our I AM; when we're focused on finding the Good (with a capital G), then the birds flying over our head don't bother us.

**So, claim your divine self. Focus on the Good.**

It's like what Mr. Rogers said: Look for the helpers, right? When there's a crisis, look for the helpers! They'll come rushing forward! But you're not a victim to an outer God. **You are the I AM. So be the good -- be the God -- in the world. Because that's your true identity.**

Let's just take a breath. I know; that's a lot of responsibility, too.

Question three: **WHY IS FORGIVENESS SO DIFFICULT? DO YOU HAVE ANY TOOLS TO HELP WITH FORGIVENESS?** Now, my very first Sunday here -- at the end of February -- I spoke about forgiveness as part of the "Spiritual Quest" series that we were doing at the time. And yet, here we are in December and I'm still struggling -- even myself! -- struggling a little bit with forgiveness. And I think part of it, too, is that, when we can't forgive right away, we kind of beat ourselves up and we think, "*Oh, I'm not very spiritual. I can't do this.*" Right? And so here I am to say that's not true. You're not a spiritual failure. It's okay to have a hard time with it.

Because for my own self and experience, **sometimes forgiveness can come quick and easy. But most of the time, it's a process.** Most of the time, it comes in stages. So, there's times that we say, "*Oh, I can't*

*forgive*" and then just a little bit of us opens up. And there's other times that we think, *"I've forgiven; all is good!"* And then something happens -- we hear or see something -- and then, Boom! That pain is back again. Right? And we think, *"Oh I've got more forgiveness work to do."*

So, it's a process. And what I've learned more and more -- and I would say maybe the difference between February and now, December is -- what I'm really learning over the last month, in particular, is that **we must incorporate self-compassion**. We need to incorporate self-compassion more.

And so, one process that I've been really working with lately, it's by Tara Brock. She's a Buddhist meditation teacher and psychologist. And she has what she calls the "RAIN" technique. And so, here's what RAIN stands for: it's **R**ecognize; **A**llow; **I**nvestigate; and **N**urture.

So, when these feelings of struggling with forgiveness come up, the first thing to do is to recognize: to recognize what's going on. And it can just be a mental whisper to yourself. Anger, frustration, sadness ... whatever it is. But just noting what you're experiencing.

And then the second one is A: allow. Allow the experience just to be there. Create the pause. This is hard for us in Unity, because we want to skip right over to the positive, right? But the pause is really important, because the pause is where we can open ourselves up to the receptivity; to the possibility of healing to happen. So allowing the experience to just be there.

I investigate ... not with a critical voice, but to investigate with interest and care. To investigate with curiosity. *"Huh. What wants my attention right now?"* Or, *"Where am I feeling this?"* Or, *"What stories am I telling myself that I'm believing?"* And most importantly, *"What do I need? What do I need right now?"*

Because that goes right into the N, which is nurture. So, to nurture ourselves with self-compassion: maybe putting your hand on your heart; or maybe holding yourself and crying; or maybe imagining what you would say to a friend in the same situation. Or even bringing to mind a spiritual being or angel and what wisdom would they share with you?

And then, just taking a few minutes to breathe and be in that moment. Because in that breathing in that moment, that's where the awakening and opening the heart begins to happen. That's where the healing of the heart begins to happen. And you could even say to yourself, *"You know, I'm opening myself to healing. I'm opening myself to healing."*

But it comes back to: How can I hold myself with more kindness, more grace, and more compassion around forgiveness? I might not forgive the first time; I might not even forgive the first 50 times. But I keep returning back to my heart, listening to that part of me that wants to be heard, and then inviting my heart to be open just a little bit more than even a minute ago. Because whatever someone else has done, or what I have done, absolutely it doesn't make it right, but you can't do it over. And so, you don't want to keep yourself energetically chained to it or to them.

There's a great book called *The Anatomy of Peace*. It's a great book! I'm going to do a class, I think, next year on it. It's called *The Anatomy of Peace*. The main premise is that, **to have peace in our lives, we have to have a heart of peace. And a heart of peace means keeping your heart open and remembering your connection to our fellow humans.** Seeing them and their fears and their needs as real as our own needs and fears versus a heart at war, where -- amongst other things -- you're trying to change the person.

So often, when we're upset with someone -- when we're having a hard time forgiving them -- we may say we want peace or we want forgiveness, but really what we want is the other person to change. [Congregants laugh] Not me!

And yet, spiritual writer Xavier Dagba wrote this. He said, *"There comes a point where you have to release the need to have your pain acknowledged by people who caused it. That's not what closure looks like, especially when those who cause the pain are committed to denying it."* But it is an opportunity to turn within and heal yourself knowing that that other person won't do it for you.

And if the forgiveness is about forgiving yourself, then it's about turning yourself in and, as spiritual coach Syanna Wand said, *"You hold yourself tenderly and you say, 'I would have done that differently and, at the time, I couldn't.'" I would have done that differently and, at the time, I couldn't.*

**But when it comes to forgiveness, something in us something in us must change first. So, forgiveness is about releasing the emotional and mental ties that bind us to the other person; letting go of the resentment so that we can open our hearts up to the present moment.** So we can keep being depressed and angry and wonder, *"Why me?"* or we can say, *"Here it is; it's just this. How can I nurture myself more and grow through this experience?"* That's how we can proceed in our forgiveness.

Okay; number four, everyone: **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ACCEPTANCE AND SURRENDERING? ARE THEY THE SAME? DOES ONE NEED TO GO BEFORE THE OTHER?** So, when it comes to acceptance and surrendering, the first step is acceptance, because that's acknowledging the situation: *"It's just this."* And then the surrendering can come. Because the surrendering is about surrendering my control. It's surrendering how I think it should be and opening myself up to receiving.

See, accepting is more a cognitive action, where surrendering is more of an emotional action. Acceptance is saying, *"This is the reality before me"* and then surrender releases the resistance to what's before me.

This doesn't mean allowing terrible situations to be okay; we're not saying they're okay. But, instead, it's about acknowledging, *"This is what's here."* And it's the first step of letting go and releasing control. It's really about choosing peace over resistance: *"Do I want to keep resisting or do I want peace?"*

And the surrendering doesn't mean giving up. But it means handing over control: stopping the story that we're telling ourselves; releasing resistance to whatever is before you; and opening up to "what is." Accepting the present moment and surrendering to "what is."

It goes back to the RAIN technique, right? So, the first letter -- R -- was recognizing, which is really about acknowledging and accepting. And then A: allowing it to be; surrendering to what is.

So, if you have a health challenge ... When I had my health challenge, you know, I could sit there and get myself all tied up and like, *"This is not fair! I don't like this! What am I going to do about this?"* And then, finally, it was just accepting: *"This is just what it is."* Or, *"This is just where I am today."* And the surrendering is, *"I might not have all the answers right now, but I'm going to open myself up to receiving the highest and best ideas for myself and my healing."*

I wasn't giving up, but I also decided I wasn't going to let it consume me anymore. I wasn't going to work against it.

So, I think Eckhart Tolle, the author: he summarizes it really well. Here it is on this slide. He says, *"Bring acceptance into your non-acceptance. Bring surrender into your non-surrender. And then see what happens."* That's powerful, isn't it? Yeah! Bring your acceptance into your non-acceptance. Bring surrender into your non-surrender. And see what happens.

Number five, our last question here: **WHAT IS UNITY'S TAKE ON THE SECOND COMING?** Now, I grew up in Unity, so when I saw this question, I thought, *"What was the Second Coming, already?"* [Congregants laugh] *"I don't ... Someone remind me."*

Because, again, if we go back to: How does Unity look at the Bible? We look at it metaphysically, meaning beyond the literal, from an esoteric spiritual point of view. We look at spirituality and the Bible itself, actually, as how it relates to our own spiritual evolution and maturity.

So, there was a great article that I ended up reading by Unity Minister Jim Lewis. And he says, "*Mystically, the Second Coming does not refer to the literal return of Jesus, but to the coming revelation of the Christ consciousness of each individual.*" It is something that happens in us on an individual basis, not something that is happening in history or "out there."

So, my translation of that is that, in Unity, we look at the Second Coming as the waking up to our own divinity. It's an inner change, not an outer change. But, of course, as you know, the inner change will effect an outer change in our lives, won't it? How many of you have been changed since you've been coming to Unity? Right! So that inner change causes the outer change in what we actually see and experience in the world.

So, the Second Coming really is referring to that time when it dawns on us that our spiritual essence is who we really are: that we are the expression, again, of that Presence of God! That we are a wave in the ocean containing everything that the ocean contains! That we are Infinite Presence.

So, in the Second Coming, we realize more of our spiritual potential and our unlimited capacity for good that is within us and within everyone. We start to realize that we are all equal in the inner potential for divine goodness. So, in Unity, the Second Coming is really about us remembering and returning home to the Divine I AM within.

And so that reminded me of a Hindu legend. And I know some of you have heard this before, but it is really worth repeating. The Hindu legend goes this way. It says:

*There was a time when all people were gods, but they abused their divinity. So, Brahma, the chief god, decided to take it away and hide it. But then where to hide it became the big question. So, the lesser gods were called in to help consider this question. And they said, "Well, how about if we bury it deep in the earth?"*

*And Brahma said, "No, because they'll dig deep and they'll find it."*

*So, then the lesser gods said, "Well, we'll sink their divinity into the deepest ocean."*

*And Brahma said, "No, because they'll learn to dive into the deepest waters and then they'll find their divinity."*

*So, then the lesser gods said, "Well, we'll take it to the highest mountain. Certainly they won't find it there!"*

*And Brahma said, "No, for they will eventually climb to the highest mountain and take it up again."*

*So the lesser gods gave up.*

That's why they're lesser gods, right? [Congregants laugh]

*They said, "Well, we don't know where to hide it then, because it seems there's no place on earth or in the sea that humans will not eventually reach and find it."*

*And so, Brahma said, "Here's what we'll do with humankind's divinity. We will hide it deep down within themselves, for they will never think to look for it there."*

*And ever since, the legend continues, humans have been going up and down the earth -- climbing, digging, diving, exploring, searching -- for something that is already within them.*

It is within you!

So I want to end with this reminder for you: to remember and return home to the Divine I AM that is within you. If we are to summarize today's Sunday talk, it is this: remember and return home to the Divine I AM within you that you are. That is how we go out and we be the good in the world, everyone.

So thank you for joining me on this first "Ask the Minister!"

Blessings, everyone!

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