

MAKING FRIENDS WITH CHANGE

Week #21 of an ongoing series on "Unity's Foundational Teachings"

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So how many people here have ever been upset or unhappy because something in your life changed that you didn't want to change? Anybody have change happen on you like that? How many people would say that you sometimes or often have a hard time dealing with change? Anybody?

So tonight the talk is entitled, "Making Friends with Change." Whether we realize it or not, we all have a relationship with change. I want you to think about your relationship with change by thinking about what is the biggest change you've had to adjust to in the last whatever number of years? And how do you usually handle change in an overall sense?

The question is: So do you feel ... How many people feel like you have a good healthy relationship with change? And how many people believe that you some relationship issues with change? [Laughs] That might need a little healing, a little improvement, and maybe even a little counseling.

You know, making friends with change is the title, because sometimes we feel like change -- or act like change -- is the enemy. Because we feel sometimes a change kind of messes things up, tosses things around, and creates obstacles and roadblocks to our peace and happiness, to our sense of joy and our sense of fulfillment.

You know, everybody wants a good relationship with change. We all say we want change. You know, communities say they want change; organizations say they want change; countries say they want change. But sometimes when the rubber hits the road, and change happens, we resist. We push it away. We complain. We do all kinds of things. We fight against change quite a bit. And we complain and whine about it so much that we sometimes say, "No, I would rather just have things stay the same way." You ever had a time where you were so overwhelmed with change, you thought, "Why can't it just go back to be the way it was?" I think we've all had moments like that.

How about this? If I could give you the power to control all the change in your life -- that you had the power to not have any change happen unless you approved it; unless you wanted it; and you would have control of exactly when it happened -- how many people would take that deal? Okay. [Laughs]

And so, you know, one thing I find surprising is that I am amazed that we have such a hard time with change when, from the time we were born, that we have experienced change after change after change. Our bodies change. Our families change. Our relationships change. Our jobs change. Our education level changes. Our tastes change. Our moods and attitudes, our direction and purpose of life change. I mean, everything in our lives change! Change is happening constantly, from the beginning of time. Change has always been going on: change has been; change is going on; and change will always go on. Life is change.

The book of Ecclesiastes reminds us: "*For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break down and a time to build up; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones; a time to gather stones.*"

I think you get the point! It goes on and on. And basically, what it's saying is that life changes! That everything changes! There are ebbs and flows, and change is just a natural part of the dynamics of life. I would say that change is the renewing principle of all life.

I mean, you'd think we'd have masters and PhDs in change because we experience so much of it. We don't even have a bachelor's in it! [Congregants laugh] So we're going to start simple by just trying to make friends with change. [Congregants laugh]

Yesterday, a song came on the radio. It was the song, "War." You know the song, "Why Can't We Be Friends?" So we're going to explore: Why can't we be friends with change? Here are four reasons that it becomes tough to be friends with change.

The first one is: we like things that are familiar, because it makes us feel safe and secure. When things are consistent and dependent, you know; when there's the same routine and we get accustomed to life, we feel like we're in this comfort zone, and we feel attached. We feel familiar. We were attached to people; we're attached to certain things; attached to a way of life, and that makes us feel secure and happy.

How many people ever heard or read the book, *Who Moved My Cheese? Anybody? Who Moved My Cheese*: a story about these little people, and their whole life is based around the cheese. Then, one day, the cheese is gone! And they're lost. They're confused. You know, they have no idea what to do because it's gone. Things have changed. And so change brings things we don't like, like uncertainty, the unknown, and things that are unfamiliar. So that's the first thing.

The second thing that makes dealing with change hard is that we don't like endings. And the truth is: every change is an ending of something. And when there's endings, it means that there is a loss. And where there's loss, there is grief and it usually brings feelings of sadness or loneliness, sometimes anger. There are all kinds of things that happen. And it's hard for us to say goodbye. It's hard for us to let go of even simple things.

The third one is that we lose control. I think everybody loves to be in control, some more than others! [Congregants laugh] But mostly everybody loves to be in control. And when change happens, it feels like we've lost control. And it feels like we've lost power. We used to be on top and knew everything and then, suddenly, we're not sure. Suddenly we don't feel very confident. In fact, suddenly we feel vulnerable. Suddenly we feel powerless and have no idea what to do. And this whole idea of losing control with change makes us begin to start defining change as bad and necessarily negative, because we feel so out of control. We feel disoriented with our lives.

And then the last one – and this one really is the big reason. Anybody want to guess the last reason it's hard to make friends with change? Okay; I'll tell you. I've got it written right here. [Congregants laugh] Here it is: The main reason we don't like making friends and we have a hard time with change is because it change means that we have to change. And that is the toughest thing for us. To have to adapt; to have to adjust; to have to look at life in a new way and begin to reconfigure our situations -- to redefine ourselves -- is tough and challenging stuff. And that's why we tend to resist change. Because sometimes we need to start over. Sometimes change means I've got to rebuild. Sometimes it means I've got to relearn. Sometimes it means I've got to rediscover and re-engineer who I am.

And so, we're going to look at three things we can do to help us become friends with change.

And the first one is: First, to become friends with **ACCEPTANCE.**

So I teach this "Aging With Intention" class because, really, aging is about a master's degree in change! There is change after change after change, big ones. And so here's a quote I use, and it is: "*The hardest thing about aging is accepting the fact that we're aging.*" And it sounds silly, but that's the hardest thing: is to accept that this is really happening.

In Alcoholics Anonymous' Big Book, page 417, it says this: *"Acceptance is the answer to all of my problems today. When I am disturbed, it is because I find that some person, place, thing or situation -- some fact of my life -- is unacceptable to me. And I can find no peace until I find acceptance that that person, place or thing or situation is being exactly the way it is supposed to be in this moment. Nothing -- absolutely nothing -- happens in God's world by mistake. Until I accept my alcoholism ..."* or whatever change we're challenged with, *"I cannot stay sober unless I accept life completely on life's terms. I cannot be happy. I need to concentrate, not so much on what needs to be changed in the world, as to what needs to be changed in me and my attitude."*

To me, very simply, acceptance is about making peace with what has happened; making peace with what is; making peace with the past.

And it sounds simple and obvious and easy, but instead of making peace with it, we tend to fight against it. We tend to complain about it. *"That shouldn't have happened. That was wrong. That was unfair. That isn't right."* And we tend to keep clinging to the past. You know, clinging to what we think should have happened. And that causes us a lot of suffering.

There's nothing that can bring us more pain in the world than fighting against what is. Somebody said fighting against what is like trying to teach a cat how to bark. [Congregation titters] It's just not going to happen! And yet, we keep trying! We keep trying in some way by resisting and fighting against change. You know, trying to change something we absolutely can't.

You know what? Acceptance creates a sense of peace. It releases us from the suffering of trying to force against something that has already happened. And it frees that energy so we could actually focus on prayer; on being still; on affirming the good; of utilizing our energy to figure out what would be our next best step. What would be the next thing for me to do in this situation.

The truth is: there can never be peace unless there is acceptance. There cannot be growth and healing and transformation without acceptance.

You know, I really believe that there are two spiritual principles that I think that are powerful and valuable -- hugely valuable -- but they don't get as much "press" or fame because they don't sound strong. And they are acceptance and surrender. Think about them. Acceptance and surrender sounds soft and passive; sounds like you're giving up; you're giving in. But they are the two of the most liberating spiritual practices there are: to surrender and to find acceptance. It isn't giving up. It isn't settling, it is giving way to something greater and better by letting go and trusting that there is something greater to come behind it.

Acceptance gives us the peace with a level of faith and awareness that this situation will get better, but I need to let go. I need to release it. I need to trust that Spirit has some greater plan, possibility or purpose.

And a couple other things I think that help with acceptance is realizing that change is natural. It's natural and normal. And being disoriented and uncomfortable in change is also natural and normal. Do you know the brain: it creates certain neural pathways. And when they're done over and over and over again, they're kind of automatic. So when there's change, the brain has to try and reconfigure the new context with the old framework ... and it disorients the brain! But eventually, the brain tends to begin to adjust and adapt to it as we come up with greater levels of acceptance.

And so, an important thing with acceptance is to accept that it's going to be tough; accept it's going to disorient us a bit; accept it's going to take some time; and be gentle on ourselves. Be compassionate with ourselves, because it doesn't come quick. It takes time. But it all begins with making friends with acceptance.

The second way for us, and the step for us making friends with change, is to make friends with our **FEELINGS**.

Again, as I've mentioned, change is loss. And with loss, there is sadness; there is hurt; there is loneliness; there is anger. I mean, I knew somebody who was angry at her husband for dying and leaving her alone. And you could say rational, irrational. No! That's her feeling! And that feeling needs to be honored, no matter whether we think it's rational or irrational, or nice or not nice. It's our feelings and our emotions! And they need to be processed. You know, they need to be released.

And sometimes, we don't like admitting our feelings. And particularly men: we don't like to admit that we feel weak; we feel vulnerable. You know: that we feel sad, or we feel powerless, or we feel lonely. Sometimes we don't like going there. But if we truly want to heal ... We'd rather say to ourselves, "No, I'm good. I'm good. I've got this. I'm an adult. I can handle my emotions." We say all these little things. And it's like diminishing the emotion: "Eh, that's not that important." But it's hugely important! Because we'll talk a little bit about the consequences of burying those emotions, because it's not good.

Sometimes we get so overly focused, I believe, in New Thought that: "*Be positive; be positive!*" When it comes to our emotions and feelings, you know what I think is more powerful than being positive? It's being present. To be present to ourselves when we feel sad, when we feel hurt, or we feel wounded. Be present to ourselves. Be honest with ourselves to acknowledge what it is that is really going on with us. And getting to the place of just saying something like, "*I'm feeling sad right now, and I feel vulnerable. It's just a feeling, but it's my feeling. And it's important for me to acknowledge my feelings.*"

And that is an important and valuable thing for us to do: is to be vulnerable and honest with ourselves about what we're really feeling and allowing ourselves to feel it. That is more likely to help it be liberated through us in a healthy way than stuffing it.

The second thing I think is important with feelings is that: if you need to talk to a therapist. I love talking about my stuff and getting it out there! Do you know in seminary they actually told us, "*Get a therapist whether you think you need it or not!*" And they said, "*If you're going to put yourself in a position of serving and ministering to people who are hurting and going through their stuff, you'd better be processing your own stuff.*"

And so, for the last 25 years, I have had therapists, you know. And I have a new one that I just saw once this year; I want to go back to. But that's a huge and important thing: process your stuff. We think we just want something to happen: "*Oh, just move on from it.*" "*Oh, just get over it.*" But the truth is: we need to look at it. We need to process and allow it to move through to be liberated from us and not stuck in our subconscious, undermining us.

And then the one I've been using is journaling. Anybody ever heard of *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron? Anybody heard that? And they have "the morning pages." You've got to write three pages every single morning. My brother, Brian, has been coming down to visit me for 13 years, twice a year. And he started 13 years ago writing morning pages every day, and hasn't missed a day of that journaling in 13 years! Is that crazy? That's amazing! I'm inspired! I don't do that ... I never will do that ...
[Congregants laugh]

But what I do -- I like what I do, and what works for me -- is, when I feel bothered, I journal about it. I do not journal every day. I journal when I feel like something's in my head and overwhelming me, or it's stuck, and my chest is feeling heavy. And I find every time I write it -- as irrational as some of the stuff is that I write out -- it is amazing! Within minutes, I feel a release. I feel unburdened. I feel free. It's suddenly this thing that was all in my head. And I put it on paper, and somehow there's some distance.

And I have better perspective and awareness. And I feel a level of peace. And that processing for me really makes a huge difference. I believe it makes a difference for all of us.

Now, we all have different ways of grieving. We all have different ways that work for us, of kind of unburdening and releasing. And find the way that works for you. But the one thing: do it. Don't think ... don't just brush your feelings away. They're hugely important! And how we process them can free and liberate us so we can be a greater channel to do other great things in life.

Otherwise, as Eckhart Tolle says, we will develop a pain body. He said everybody has a pain body. That is a body of unresolved, unprocessed hurt and stuff that's in there all the time. And what happens is that, something will happen. Like let's say -- I'm going to give a silly example -- like: your plant died. And then you start crying like crazy and thinking, "*I have no idea why am I reacting like this? It was just a plant!*" And you're upset. And why? Because it triggered some of that unresolved stuff in the past.

And I always believe it is never too late to process pain. It is never too late to forgive ourselves. It's never too late to forgive other people. It is never too late to liberate ourselves from things that we have stuffed and buried for years and for decades. Feel the feelings. Make friends with our feelings. Allow ourselves to feel it, and it'll move through us and liberate us to handle change in greater ways; to handle life in greater ways.

And the final one is to make friends with learning to **ADAPT**. Here's what Charles Darwin said. Charles Darwin said, "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, not the most intelligent that survives; it is the one that is the most adaptable to change." It is the one that, in change, is willing to learn; that is willing to adjust. That is willing to see things from a different perspective. That is willing to find new ways of behaving; new ways of relating to life. It is the one who is willing to take what they have and build something greater from it. It is the one that's willing to improve themselves and become a better individual. It is the one who doesn't want to just survive, but the one who wants to thrive. Those are the ones that succeed.

Sometimes we think it's wealth and education and money. No! It is the one that is willing to do the work. The one that is willing to change and learn and grow. You know, our brains, as I mentioned, adapt. They have an incredible capacity to learn. They're very malleable. But we need to have the drive and the desire to learn and to change.

Georgiana Tree West said this. She said, "*If you ever have to go through hell, make it pay you.*" [Laughs with congregants] If you're going to have to go through it, get something from it! Get wisdom; get strength; get determination; get hope. You know, there's all kinds of things! Get something good: insight, power. Whatever it is, get something from the changes and challenges in life.

So, I want you to think of an area that you're struggling in where something has changed. And my questions for you to ask yourself are: What do I need to learn or what can I learn from this situation? Or what do I need to see that I'm not seeing? What do I need to understand that I'm not understanding? What do I need to change to help me move through and gain something good from this change? What do I need to let go? How can I make the most of this and better myself as a human being?

I truly believe that change absolutely makes us better. Change helps us grow. Change expands us in great and wonderful ways. The great Les Brown once said, "*When my life was shaking at my foundations, I went to God, only to find out that God was doing the shaking.*" [Laughs with congregants]

And sometimes I think God – or our souls – bring change and challenge to wake us up to our potential, to our power that we sometimes aren't using. That we're asleep at the switch sometimes. It is not there to just ruin our life; it is there to wake us up. It is there to help us grow and expand and transform. But

we need to not resist the change; not hate the change; not complain about the change ... but to utilize the change to lift us in great and amazing ways.

So this 50-year-old guy -- overweight, out of shape -- has a heart attack. He's on the operating table, and he and God are over it, just kind of watching his body on the table, and he says, "God, Is this the end of my time?"

And God says, "Nah, you've got like 30 years left." And the guy's name is Mo Green. He says, "Mo, just relax. You've got 30 years left. Enjoy your life."

So Mo Green then gets out of the hospital and he's determined he's going to get in good shape. So, he's lifting weights; he's losing weight; running on the treadmill. Three months later, he's walking down ... He's really, really transformed himself. He's walking down the street, and he sees his friend and says, "Hey, Bob."

And Bob looks at him and he says, "Mo Green? That's you? Boy, you look ... you have changed! You look fantastic; that's amazing!"

And he tells him the whole story of how he did it. But that really motivated him to work out more. So he's getting more ripped, more in shape, and he's starting to dress more fashionably. He's got a new haircut, some funky glasses. Women are looking at him on the street for the first time in his life. And he sees a woman that he used to like who never really paid any attention. And he says, "Hey, Mary."

And Mary looks at him and says, "Mo Green? That's you? You look fantastic! You look so handsome! It's like you're a new man!"

So they started dating. They were together every single night for seven days. And after the seven days, the next morning he's leaving her house. And he gets hit by a bus. And then he's at the Pearly Gates. And he's ticked off. And he said, "God, what is this? You told me I had 30 years, and you killed me with a bus?"

God looks at him and he says, "Mo Green?????" [Laughs with congregants]

So, without change, there wouldn't be a level of evolution and unfoldment. Our souls wouldn't grow and expand in amazing ways. You know what Thich Nat Hahn said about change? He said, *"Change means everything is imper"* What's that word I'm looking for? Impermanent. He said the change means everything is impermanent. It doesn't last. So that means that change makes everything possible. So because everything changes, it means everything is possible!

Back to my question: How many people would take that deal I said earlier in the talk? I agree. Nobody! Because how it is is great, but we just need to work through that process.

And so, I really believe that change is a life principle. It is a huge and valuable principle of growth and spiritual unfoldment when we look at it in the right perspective. And the right perspective is to make friends with acceptance; make friends with our feelings; and make friends with learning how to adapt. Because that's how we make friends with change.

God bless you all.