

UNLIMITED FORGIVENESS & UNIVERSAL BENEVOLENCE

Week #3 of a 5-Week Series Based on the Robert Brumet Book, "Living Originally"

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Hello, and welcome again! We are halfway through this series called "Living Originally." It's based on a book by Robert Brumet. And he introduces us to 10 spiritual practices that can help us live our most heart-centered and authentic life.

Rev. Richard Maraj kicked this off a couple weeks ago. He was basically giving us the background: the foundation of this. And that's when we discovered that living originally -- it doesn't necessarily mean living uniquely. A lot of times when we think "originally," we think unique. But, in this case, it's really about being connected to your origin. It's about staying open-hearted. It's about making sure you stay true to what your heart sees versus what you see. It means to live consciously from that ever-present origin of life that's within you: the Source of all that is.

And Robert Brumet defines living originally as: *"to live from the center of one's being; to live from inside out, from center, to circumference."* And it reminded me of one of my favorite Rev. Eric Butterworth quotes. He wrote -- in "The Flow of Life" -- he says, *"If the center of God is everywhere, it must be where I am."* [Repeats:] If the center of God is everywhere, it must be where I am. And so, that gets us to living originally -- living from our origin: right here, center out.

But, of course, as we go through life, we have survival techniques we tend to pick up, because there's challenges along the way. So, we tend to pick up these unhelpful or unhealthy survival behaviors or beliefs about ourselves as well, as of course, about other people. So, these 10 spiritual practices are really about remembering our original divine nature: our origin. And so, he gives us these 10 practices so that we can move past these survival techniques that we've picked up -- or behaviors we've picked up -- and, instead, realize we've got 10 other practices that we can implore here.

So one is ... Or from last week, actually, Rev. Jimmie Scott covered "Radical Self-Awareness" and "Deep Self-Acceptance." And so, now you're all experts this week, right? On accepting yourselves and being aware? Just nod your heads yes. [Congregants laugh] "Yes, Stacy."

And so, tonight I'm covering "Unlimited Forgiveness" and "Universal Benevolence."

So, let's jump in with **FORGIVENESS**. It's a topic we talk about a lot. And, of course, we can forgive ourselves; we can forgive others. But it's usually pretty difficult. And that's why we tend to look at this topic a lot, because forgiving ourselves, forgiving other people ... we tend to get really caught up in -- for our own selves -- we tend to get caught up in shame; in guilt; in condemnation; in telling ourselves that we're bad; we're not worthy.

And it's interesting, because Robert Brumet points out that, when we are doing this to ourselves, it means we're actually hurting ourselves twice: once for the condemnation and then being the target of our own condemnation. So, we're hurting ourselves twice when we can't forgive our own selves.

And we're not talking about -- when it comes to forgiveness, just to be really clear -- we're not talking about condoning the actions of another person, or even ourselves. But what we are saying -- what I am saying tonight -- is that it's about letting go of the underlying pain. It's about letting go of the underlying pain and allowing ourselves to heal.

And, just like with grief, forgiveness has steps. And so, Robert Brumet says there's seven steps towards forgiveness. The first, of course, is that we **see that there's a need for forgiveness**. Now that goes back

to our self-awareness, right? We have to be aware. And then we have to accept that there's a need for forgiveness.

So, we know we need forgiveness when we have a desire for revenge; or harsh criticism; or we're avoiding the other person; or even we feel like we get some joy out of seeing someone who's having a difficult time. That's when we know. When we start to notice we're looking at another person or ourselves as bad, wrong harsh criticism That's when we have to realize, *"Okay. That's the first sign that forgiveness is needed. Forgiveness is needed here."*

And then the second step would **be to be willing to forgive**. So now you're aware that, *"Oops, I'm having these feelings; I'm having these thoughts; I'm aware I probably need to employ some forgiveness here."* And so, the second step would be to be willing to forgive. Again, forgiveness is really about taking that emotional load off of ourselves -- not the other person ... unless it's towards our own selves. And then it's about, again, taking the emotional load off of ourselves twice: for the forgiveness part and the forgiveness part.

And then the third step in that forgiveness process, he says, is to **ask for guidance from your Higher Power**. Because, see, our ego doesn't want to forgive. Our ego really just wants to stay stuck in *the "It was wrong" or "I'm angry."* And so, we move away from ego, and we get quiet and we get in touch with our original authentic soul part of us -- that inner true self; our soul self.

And that's when we say, *"Okay, what is mine to do? What is mine to do here? How can I step forward in forgiveness? What small step can I take?"*

And then the fourth step, he says, in this forgiveness process is to **give up the condemnation**. He says this is actually what starts -- what truly starts -- the forgiveness process. This is the key: is to give up the condemnation. Because there's usually this inner lobbyist who says that we shouldn't let go of the resentment; we shouldn't let go of the hurt. But, again, that's our ego, or our or need to be right, or need to justify.

But it really isn't about whether the other person or yourself deserves to be forgiven. It's about healing yourself. So that action might not have been okay, but we do give ourselves permission to heal. It's about allowing yourself -- giving yourself -- the permission to heal.

And then the fifth step, he says, is to **face and feel the underlying pain**. Now, we don't want to keep reliving it and getting ourselves all riled up all over again and again and again, because that's not helpful. But it is helpful to look at it; to feel it. And we can do that in healthy ways. We can do that by journaling; by going for a walk, for being in nature; for dancing; for talking to a minister; talking to a therapist. There's many ways we can process our feelings through it.

And may be it's small pieces at a time, and that's okay. We can do small pieces at a time! But the longer we push down all the feelings around that situation that we're trying to forgive, we don't want to forgive ... The longer we push down the anger, the at the shame, the guilt, it just keeps living within you. It just keeps living within you. So, it's about releasing it. And again, we can take the steam off -- do it a little bit at a time. It doesn't have to be one big explosion of emotions. But we do need to really look at the feelings around it; process them.

And then, he says, step six in that forgiveness process is to know the truth: **know that you're part of a larger Presence and Power** of the universe. That you're tied to the Allness, that Oneness. Again, that if God is all of this, and I'm here, and you're here, and you're here, and you're here ... and we're overlapping. And so, we're all a part of that Oneness; that Allness. We're connected to that Power, that Presence. So knowing the truth that there's something greater -- that you're part of something greater. You're an expression: a divine expression of something greater.

And the best way that we can do this and remind ourselves of this is through meditation. So, this is why our meditation practice is so important. It helps remind us of who we truly are and why we really are here.

And then step seven is really just to **repeat the first six steps**. So step seven is: now repeat #1 through #6! [Congregants laugh] And do it as often as needed. And be patient with yourself. Be gentle with yourself. It takes as long as it takes.

I had a situation about a year-and-a half ago or so. And every time I thought about this person, this little something inside of me – [growls:] “Grrrrr. Grrrrr.” And that’s when I knew forgiveness -- forgiveness needs to happen here. And maybe not all at one time, but what little bit of forgiveness can I extend right now?

And it didn’t have to be in front of that person; it can just be a little bit. Eventually -- actually even this last summer, beginning of the summer – it happened. The forgiveness happened. And wow! What a blessing to myself! Because you know what? Now I have a whole lot more room for energy that I’d rather have than the “Grrrrr.” Now I’ve got the, “Ah!” Right? We free up the room; we free up the space! Because forgiveness is about us.

So, when you notice yourself being judgmental, being critical, having that charge, gossiping, wanting to get even with ... that’s when we say, “*Forgiveness is needed here.*” And we sit in prayer and meditation. We write; we journal; we scream in a pillow. We dance around the room. We shake our bodies. Lots of therapists now are actually encouraging us to shake our whole bodies, because it actually helps shake our nervous system back to calm. So, you might look ridiculous, but it’s going to help! Move the energy of those big emotions out.

So Rev. Michael Beckwith from the Agape Church in Los Angeles -- New Thought speaker and author – he says these are the words he uses for forgiveness. When he has someone he needs to forgive, he imagines them in front of him and he says these words. He says, “*I forgive you and set you free. Your actions no longer have power over me. I acknowledge that you are doing the best you can and I honor you in your process of unfoldment. You are free and I am free. All is well between us. Peace is the order of the day.*”

For my own forgiveness practice, I say something very similar. And it started in 2016 with a doctor when I was going through my own health journey. And I had to do this, again, forgiveness towards myself for following through and my intuition said, “*Don’t do that medical procedure.*” And I did it anyway. I had to forgive myself around that. For the doctor, when I said, “*I don’t think I should do this,*” and I even brought journals -- because I have a master’s degree in public health, right? -- all these medical journals why I shouldn’t do this. And he said, “Yes” anyway ... Put me a year behind in my health challenge that I was already having.

So, there was a lot of forgiveness that had to happen. And so, I started this similar practice where I would just see this doctor. And now I just see the person in front of me. And I place them in this pure light of the universe: pure light of God. And I just look in their eyes and I say, “*I know you’re operating with the skills, the experience, the wisdom you had in that moment to do the best that you felt like you were doing. And I forgive you. I bless you. I energetically release you from me.*” And then I just imagine myself cutting that energetic cord between us or swiping it clean. And just watching that person gently float in this bubble up and away. And let the universe take care of it. Let God take care of it.

And that other part of forgiveness then starts to come with asking ourselves some self-awareness questions. So, if I’m holding onto the pain of a situation and I’m judging -- meaning I’m refusing to forgive

another person, including myself -- then asking, *"What am I refusing to see within me?"* Or, *"What pain am I trying to avoid?"*

So, in that situation with this person from about a year ago or so, I started to realize that what I was really struggling with was the fact that, because we had so many mutual friends and I wanted to stay in integrity, I didn't tell any of them my story. I didn't tell them my part of the story. Only my husband, my best friend, my therapist knew the story. I didn't want to tell everyone else the story.

But then I started feeling like, *"Well, gosh; they don't know my part of the story. They only know her part of the story."* And I was getting upset that they didn't know my part of the story. And I realized that was part of what was keeping me back from the forgiveness -- was getting so wrapped up in that feeling of, again, that revenge or vengeance or, *"It's not fair"*-ness.

And I finally had to remind myself that I can't control what other people think of me. Actually, you just got to be a minister to really know that. [Congregants laugh] I can't control what other people think of me. Rev./ Richard Merage spoke into this in his series, "Let Them," right? With Mel Robbins -- that whole thought of "Let Them." So let them think what they're going to think of you. Let them be what they're going to be. Because I realized that my true friends will know the core of who I am.

So. I just had a look at: *"What am I refusing to see within me or myself?"* Or, *"What pain am I avoiding that's keeping me back from moving forward in this forgiveness process?"*

Unity co-founder Charles Fillmore said this. He said, *"There's a mental treatment guaranteed to cure every ill that flesh is heir to. Sit for a half hour every night and mentally forgive everyone against whom you have any ill will or antipathy."*

[Repeats] Sit for a half hour every night and mentally forgive anyone whom you have any ill will against. Because the body keeps the score. That's even the name of a book! But the body keeps the score, because what we don't forgive -- it festers inside of us. It manifests in the body. So really forgiveness is for ourselves.

Here's from the Book of Luke, Chapter 6, Verse 37. It says, *"Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven."* Because, see, what I'm hearing in that is going back to: we're all connected. What I do to myself or for myself, I can do for another or to another. So, if I'm not judging myself, then I'm probably not judging other people. If I can forgive myself, I can more easily forgive other people.

And that then leads us to extending **UNIVERSAL BENEVOLENCE**, the next chapter within this series. Universal benevolence is when we extend this goodwill, kindness -- or as the Buddhists say: loving kindness -- to others and to ourselves. This practice is all about keeping our heart open as much as possible.

We're so rough on ourselves, aren't we? And lately, we're so rough on each other! Keep your heart open. It's not easy. There's a lot of times lately, I'm driving home and I'm thinking, *"Wow, I think I left that person a little bit outside of my heart. How can I open my heart back up? How can I open my heart back up again?"* because I don't want to live with a closed heart! I know you don't want to live with a closed heart.

So it's not easy, but we're here to love. We're here to grow and transform spiritually. We're here to be the expressions of that living, loving Presence. That's what we're here to do and be: to be love on earth. So, remember to keep our heart open.

And so universal benevolence -- extending kindness -- again, it doesn't mean that we just let people walk right over us. It does mean that we set appropriate boundaries. Because the lack of self-care or burnout

or letting people take advantage of us: those aren't spiritual practices. Burnout, lack of self-care, letting people take advantage of us -- walk over our boundaries -- are not spiritual practices. So, we integrate wisdom and discernment with love and kindness. We take care of ourselves to be sure that we have the physical, the emotional, mental, spiritual rest and boundaries that make us whole.

And Robert Brumet says that this practice of universal benevolence is made up of three intentions: appreciation, kindness, and generosity.

So, appreciation softens our heart; kindness opens the heart; and then generosity gives expression to that open heart. So, put another way: appreciation leads to kindness, and generosity is a natural outgrowth of that kindness.

And Robert Brumet reminds us, again, that it's very important to extend appreciation and kindness and generosity to ourselves in both attitude and deed. Anyone have a hard time extending kindness to yourself? Okay, me and one other person. Okay. [Congregants laugh] We'll form a support group. [Congregants laugh]

We have a hard time extending kindness to ourselves. And yet, how can we extend it to another? And, remember: our world is experienced from within out. Our outside world and life experience is a reflection of what's going on in the inside world. From the origin; the center.

So, there's an activity in the book that I'd like us to do. If you just take a moment, I want you to think about something that you value or appreciate about yourself. What is something you value or appreciate about yourself? And just take a moment to sit in gratitude towards you.

Maybe place a smile on your face and your heart. And now say quietly to yourself: *"May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I be safe. May I be prosperous. May I be loved."*

And think of a gift that you can offer yourself. Maybe it's a day of rest. Maybe it's saying, *"Yep, I can say 'no' to something I think I should say 'yes' to ... but I'll say 'no.'"* Maybe it's forgiveness. But just think of something that you can offer yourself: a gift of kindness.

And now take a breath. Because now I want you to extend that appreciation for another person. So, think of a quality that's important to you in your life. And now think of someone who you can attach to that quality. So, what's a quality that you value and who is someone in your life you can attach to that quality?

And now imagine this person in front of you, and just looking them in the eyes, and just saying, *"Thank you for being in my life."* And taking a moment. Just silently right now, extending and telling them -- imagining them in front of you -- and telling them what you appreciate about them. Bring their smiling face into your heart as you thank them.

And now quietly say to them, *"May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you be safe. May you be prosperous. May you be loved."*

And then think of something -- maybe a thank you note, a text of appreciation, a coffee date, time together -- that you can extend to them. And make that intention -- that promise -- to yourself and to that person.

Robert Brumet writes this in the book. He says *"Appreciation, kindness and generosity arise naturally from the recognition that we are all expressions of the ever-present Origin and that we are all interconnected."*

We're all interconnected! It reminds me of that word -- Namaste -- in Hindi which means *"Bowing to you"* or, *"The divine child in me bows to the divine child in you."* Or sometimes we hear that translated as, *"The light in me recognizes and honors the light in you."*

To be able to bow to the divinity in one another and extend my light to your light. See, we don't have to agree with another person's beliefs or their behavior; it simply means we're willing to open our hearts to all human beings who come into our life. To open our hearts to all human beings who come into our life.

See, ultimately, forgiveness and extending benevolence are transformational practices for ourselves. It's about our own spiritual growth. So be kind to your own heart through forgiveness, appreciation, generosity. And be kind to others through forgiveness, appreciation and generosity.

So I asked AI for a spiritual joke. [Congregants laugh] I said, *"Give me a spiritual joke or pun on forgiveness."*

Here's what it came up with, everyone: Why did the wave forgive the shore? Because love always comes back around.

Not funny, but really true, right? [Congregants laugh] Really lovely!

Because it's through forgiving -- it's through extending forgiveness and kindness to ourselves and others -- that, ultimately, love comes back and washes over us.

So, this week, as your soul work, everyone, remember that you are the living presence of the Divine on earth. Forgive to release the past. And fill yourself with love. And extend loving kindness to others, and especially to yourself.

And with that, I will say thank you for doing your spiritual work. Namaste. I bow to each of you.