

5784 YK Sermon 9.25.23 Resent Review Release

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Meditation time.

Let your hands rest comfortably in your lap, feet planted firmly on the ground. Perhaps shift your gaze to your hands, inward. Take a gentle breath.

Last night we talked about forgiveness, about seeking forgiveness from others, apologizing.

But what about others who have wronged you? Who have not sought your forgiveness,

Resentments you feel

Gnawing, niggling, insinuating through the folds of your psyche.

Jack Kornfield, a co-founder of two meditation centers, created a forgiveness meditation. He instructs:

Let yourself feel all the barriers you have erected and the emotions that you have carried because you have not forgiven – not forgiven yourself, not forgiven others. Let yourself feel the pain of keeping your heart closed.

There are many ways we have been harmed by others, abused or abandoned, knowingly or unknowingly, in thought, word, or deed. Let yourself picture and remember these many ways. Feel the sorrow you have carried from this past and sense that you can release this burden of pain by extending forgiveness when your heart is ready.

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STORYTIME 1: Summer, 2023, Culver City, California.

I am a spiritual counselor for addicts

Trying to recover

The past two summers, in Clinical Pastoral Education internships

At a trauma hospital, at a psychiatric hospital,

I have been trained to say a person with a “substance use disorder”

To not let the disease define the person,

But here, at Beit T’Shuvah,

Yeah, no, we’re addicts they tell me

Recovering addicts, but

Addicts, alcoholics.

For some it is their first time in a rehab facility

Others their 35th

But they all have come here because they are broken

And they so dearly want to be whole.

The program is inspired by AA, and residents are instructed to attend meetings

Find a sponsor

Work through their steps

Tina is here for her second time,

Five years sober, wary of a relapse

When she found a legal substance that beckoned

Like her narcotic of choice

She came to rehab to prevent herself going down a painfully familiar path.

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Meditation time: Now say to yourself: I now remember the many ways others have hurt or harmed me, wounded me, out of fear, pain, confusion and anger. I have carried this pain in my heart too long. To the extent that I am ready, I offer them forgiveness. To those who have caused me harm, I offer my forgiveness, I forgive you.

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STORYTIME 2: Yom Kippur, Fairbanks, Alaska, 2022, 5783

I am the guest rabbi for the High Holy Days here,
Or Hatzafon, Light of the North
I have just finished leading Yizkor
A memorial service honoring those lost and loved
The last service before a break in the day
Congregants are starting to disperse
When a man enters the sanctuary
Carrying a backpack and covered with tattoos and wearing a beanie and
not looking like other Jews in the room.
I walk to where he has just sat down
Welcome, I say,
I'm the rabbi, I say, we've just finished Yizkor
I ask, have you lost someone?
He says, My sister
He says, She just died
He says, We're burying her next week
And bends forward, hands covering his eyes.
I'm so sorry I say,
I pull a chair over and sit opposite him
Noticing his edginess
Noticing him
All the ink
FEAR etched over the fingers of one hand
Barbed wire scrolling on the fingers of the other
A feather curling down one arm
A dragon encircling the other, amidst flowers and trees and people and names
The dirt under fingernails longish and smooth and unbitten
I say my name and ask his
He has the name of a poet
I ask, How old was your sister?
She was 37, he says
A heart attack, he says
She had received a transplant a few years ago, and it just swelled up
He saw the signs, but he didn't say anything,
And he was mad at her, for something stupid,
And had left angry,
And that was the last time he saw her,
Honing resentment like a hari-kari sword.

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STORYTIME 3

Martin arrives at Beit T'Shuvah two days after spending a decade in prison
Paroled for good behavior
Locked up for driving under the influence
And injuring a family of six, who fortunately for them
And for Martin, all lived.
He maintained his heroin addiction the first five years incarcerated
and then, at his lowest and loneliest
In the hole
Connected with God
With not being the person he was becoming
With finding his humanity
And stopped using, started college,
Set goals
It took seven years for remorse to surface instead of resentment
He came to rehab in the interest of sustaining his sobriety
as he transitioned into a world that hadn't existed when he entered prison.

The poet man holds his sister in his heart
He says, she was
Like a mother to me, so much older
She saved my life once, he says
We were living in the village
I was 10 years old and I woke up and the room was filled with smoke
I couldn't see
And I hid under the covers, pulled up over me
And she looked out her window down the street
And saw all the smoke,
And she came into the house and pulled me out
And the smoke was so thick, I could only see her face when it was right in mine
He holds up a hand to show how close
Her eyes were red
He says, from the smoke
But I was angry when I left her last week
And then she died
That's the second time this happened to me
He says.
My cousin
He was like a brother, just two years older
But we got in a fight and I left mad
And then he died.

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Martin says, "I'm working on Step 4 with my sponsor."

I'm on Step 4, Tina tells me.

In the Big Book, the AA bible, there are 12 steps to recovery. Step 4 is an accounting of resentments.

Tina explains:

Analyze your reaction to the resentment, try to find the source. It may be something small -- a friend who bums cigarettes when you know they have the funds to buy their own -- or big, the father who beat you, the mother who stood by and watched. Yourself for being an addict, an alcoholic, for needing to recover. Reactions can range from annoyance to fury.

This is Martin's fourth round with the steps; his resentment list now tops off at 15;

He confesses, The first time I made it I had 80 resentments; Tina had 60 and is down to 12.

An online explanation of Step 4 elaborates:

"The myth of the "justified" resentment. It is likely that on occasion we will feel that we are on the receiving end of an injustice so great that we are entitled to feel resentful. ... we are always entitled to feel resentful about anything we like, just or unjust, but it never does us any good.

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(POET)

I ask the visitor, What would you say to her, to them?

To the ones who died before you resolved your anger?

I don't know he says, I don't know

I just wish I had more time

To have the good times

To just be with them

He leans back, back, lying down across the chairs next to him

Then sitting up again,

And I wonder what he's taken that brings on the half closed eyes

And the tap tap tapping feet

That still does not stop the grief.

I say

We just finished Yizkor to honor the dead

What brought you here? I ask

I was walking by, he says

I had never been in a Jew church before

I laugh, "Jew church" and he says

I didn't mean... Just, I hoped you were just beginning

I said, today is Yom Kippur

Our holiest day, when we think back on how we've been

How we've treated people

Each other

God.

We are closing soon but you can come back at 4 for the next service

And I stand and he says

Can you talk now?

I look at my watch
I sit back down.
What was your sister like?
I don't know he says
I miss her
I used to play with her kids
They were like my age. She was...
I miss her
I just wish I had more time
I turn and see congregants lingering by the entrance
The office manager and shul president
Who have waited for me
Unsure about a stranger in our midst
I turn and
He is lying down on the seats completely, eyes closed.
The building is closing, I say, you can come back later.
Can I offer you a blessing?
And he says yes, rises to sit, turns, bows his head,
I'm a believer, he says
And bends again, head in hands
What would you like me to pray for
Strength, he says, not looking up
Strength and peace
And I offer him that,
prayer for strength, prayer to hold space for his grief for his sister
For his cousin.

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Martin has a dad
Who died before reading the letter Marin sent from prison
Expressing his anger
Expressing his love
Expressing his hope for a more connected future
Tina hates that she needs to do step work to be normal
Resents that part of herself that needed heroin
To feel whole
But, they each say, facing the difficulties, seeing the sources for the pain
Opening eyes and hearts
lightens, just for a moment, and maybe for longer
The pain of the hurt we feel.

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*MEDITATION time: Imagine forgiving, imagine letting go
Embracing the step 4 prayers*

Because there are prayers every step of the way

There is God, every step of the way

Felt or not but always there regardless

“Please God help me to show this person the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend.” {p63}

“Please God remove my fear and direct my attention to what You would have me be.”

Forgiveness cannot be forced; it cannot be artificial. Simply continue the practice and let the words and images work gradually, in their own way. In time you can make the forgiveness meditation a regular part of your life, letting go of the past and opening your heart to each new moment with a wise loving kindness.

Imagine, for a moment, what it might be like to let go, to release the hurt, like a mist rising, rising evaporating, becoming one with the sky.

**** (POET)**

And we rise and the visitor asks,

As we walk through the vestibule

Do you have anything I can eat?

It's Yom Kippur I think, a fast day,

We don't eat!

And then reality kicks in

Feed the hungry, the prophet said.

He is not fasting, and I say yes, yes, would you like an apple?

Would you like some bread?

And I ply him with cookies and bread and cheese and apples; he declines cucumbers

And he spreads butter on the bread, crumbs spilling on the counter.

And he takes a napkin

And wipes the crumbs off the counter onto his hand and deposits them in the trash.

And we walk to the vestibule by the front door,

Where the two congregants wait

And I say again

We're open again at 4

And he leaves and I wish him strength for his sister

And they leave

And I look out the kitchen window

And everyone is gone.

And I thank God for the opportunity to offer this stranger

Nourishment.

Take a deep breath and release.

May you be inscribed in the book of life.

May you have a year filled with laughter and light