

## Grudges

Well, it's the time of year again when in a fit of optimism many of us make great promises to ourselves about what we are going to do in the New Year that we usually abandon about the second week in January. Let's be honest now. How many of you kept to the diet?

How many of you actually kept going to the gym to exercise into February of last year? How many of you kept New Year's resolutions in 2016?

Well, it's 2017 and this year some of you are determined it's going to be different. Some of you may have made a couple of New Year's resolutions that I know you will be able to keep for the whole of 2017.

So, this morning I want to talk to you about some resolutions, some commitments which I guarantee will make a radical difference in my life and your life if you follow through on them.

In fact, what I want to do is to offer to you a way of starting the New Year which could significantly change your life.

Here is what I want to suggest to you: if you will make two commitments this year I guarantee you that the start of 2017 could become one of the most significant years in your life. I want to challenge you to make 2 new commitments for this New Year. Here they are:

### **1: COMMIT YOURSELF TO FORGET YOUR FAILURES**

There are two days of the year you can do nothing about—Yesterday and tomorrow. You can't change yesterday but you can sure ruin your today by worrying about tomorrow. I don't know of any more relevant and practical advice for us at the start of 2017.

There is a Zen saying: Let go or be dragged. Some may prefer to let go and let God. Either way, we must learn to let go.

All of us have failed in some way in our lives over the last year. We see in our celebrity culture the failures of many athletes and entertainers in their public and private lives. Now, we most likely will not see our so called failures recorded for history on TV or in the newspapers but they are recorded in our hearts and minds. For many of us our failures are painful memories. Maybe for you it is a memory of how you failed in a relationship.

You made the wrong decisions, said and did the wrong things and the relationship ended. Some of you who are parents probably know that you failed your children in some way, many of us are aware that we have failed our parents and it's more than likely that many of us know that most of all we have failed ourselves in some ways. We must not allow ourselves to be bogged down by our past failures. Mistakes are our greatest teachers. Sometimes it's a blessing when things don't go our way. Being stuck in the past, dwelling on our past, living in the past, stops us from moving forward into the future that awaits us. I think that the start of this New Year is a good time for you to

rise to that challenge. To say to yourself I am going to let go of the mistakes I made in my past. I am going to stop torturing myself about what I did or didn't do. This New Year is a good time to stop being chained to your past failures. Stop going through your life branding yourself as a failure.

**Secondly**, I want you to commit yourself to giving up your grudges. What is a grudge? A grudge is a deep ongoing resentment that we cultivate in our hearts against someone else. A grudge is an unforgiving spirit that leads to unforgiving attitudes and unforgiving actions. Now I know you know what I am talking about. Harboring a grudge is about nursing a dislike for someone.

What you need to know is that grudges are dangerous because they are destructive. Grudges destroy marriages. Grudges ruin friendships. Grudges split churches. Let's be honest enough to admit that one of the scandals of churches are the grudges that we hold against one another.

Today if you know you are holding a grudge against someone, I say, give it up. I want to remind you that grudges are not just destructive they are also self-destructive. When you hold a grudge against someone you will hurt yourself as much and perhaps more than you will hurt the person you are holding it against.

Make no mistake about it, if you keep harboring a grudge then it will eventually destroy you, if not physically, certainly emotionally and spiritually. It will make you a bitter and twisted person. We have to learn to forgive. What is forgiveness? Forgiveness is learning to accept the apology you never got. Forgiveness is the scent the rose leaves on the heel that crushes it. Forgiveness is crucial to living life for it allows us to move on. Now remember, forgiveness and letting go are sometimes more of a process than an event. It can and certainly does take time. The Buddha teaches that holding on to anger and resentment is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. Unforgiving people always end up in prison: prisons of anger guilt and depression. One of the most significant things that you can do to mark the New Year is not to have a toast, but to admit your past errors in relationships and humbly seek forgiveness from the one you have hurt. Will you rise to that challenge and make a commitment to restore your broken relationships in this New Year? Listen to this story; During the constant "generation gap" quarrels with his parents, young Michael cried, "I want excitement, adventure, money, and beautiful women. I'll never find it here at home, so I'm leaving. I can't stay here anymore. I'll die if I remain here. I've got to live my life, not yours Dad. Don't try and stop me!" With that, he headed toward the door. His father rose and followed close behind. "Didn't you hear what I said? I don't want you to try and stop me." "Who's trying to stop you?" replied his father. "If you wait a minute, I'll go with you."

Do you have a quick temper that you constantly give into? Do you possess a caustic tongue that lashes out at others; a mouth that constantly assassinates other people's characters or wounds their feelings? Are you manipulating or passive aggressive? Do you even know?

Have you learned to live with that critical judgmental attitude you know is wrong? Do you possess an unforgiving spirit that leads to unforgiving attitudes and unforgiving actions. Now I know you know what I am talking about.

No it isn't easy, but it's necessary. I had to learn to forgive the person who shot my brother and killed him. They never caught the person who did it. I had to learn to move on with my life and channel that anger into something constructive. He would have wanted me to do that. In the Gospel story of Matthew 5:24, the teacher Jesus says that before you go to the temple and leave your sacrifice or gift at the altar, go and reconcile with your brother or sister before you come to offer your gift. In other words come to the altar with a clean heart and intentions.

Again the teaching of the Buddha, who says that holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned. Listen to this story:

Wife and daughter are driving and laughing together when another car careens into their lane and mother and daughter are killed instantly. The other driver is thoroughly drunk in celebration of the birth of his first child.

At home, in trauma and desolation, the bereaved husband, after some days becomes aware of the one person who is suffering more than he is.

He drives to the young man's house, knocks on the door and confronts the surprised man. He speaks two quiet sentences. "Do not be afraid. I have come to forgive you."

Pain is part of life. I don't know, but maybe Nietzsche was right when he said that he doubted whether or not pain improves us, but he said he did know that pain deepened us.

Life is not always fair and there are times when we are taken advantage of. Sometimes we do all of the right things and we still wind up losing.

We may act with good intentions toward others and those intentions go unappreciated or misinterpreted.

When we hold grudges, when we do not or cannot forgive, when we are challenged not to retaliate against those who have hurt us, we are doing our inner work, our psychological work, our spiritual work. We are freeing ourselves. Socrates wrote that it is better to suffer an injustice than to commit one. This is because the body and mind may be damaged by injustice from others, but it is our own inner life or spirit that is damaged by revenge and holding grudges.

In an evolved society, the society we all wish to live in, a society animated by spiritual consciousness, the desire for retribution is replaced with the desire for restoration. We want to reconcile, not excommunicate. Sadly, we do not live in this type of world as yet. If someone treats us unfairly in our personal life, the challenge is to make sure something changes in our relationship—not to make sure the person is punished for in reality, the punishment comes in the consequences of their actions. The former plan comes from a wish for healing. The latter comes from the tendency of the bruised ego to hurt back.

Imagine the mature spiritual consciousness that produced the following poem by Shantideva, an eight century Indian Buddhist teacher:

*May those whose hell it is to hate and hurt be turned into lovers bringing flowers.*

Instead of saying that those who hate and hurt belong in hell, he notices with compassion that it must feel like hell to hate and hurt others instead. Instead of revenge and holding a grudge he prays for their transformation.

At the same time, a few thousand miles west, the eighth century Hebrew prophets were encouraging social justice for the widow and the poor.

Are you willing to make these 2 commitments for 2017?

Will you commit yourself to forget your failures?

Will you commit yourself to give up your grudges and restore your relationships?

All of us need closure at some point in our lives. All great events cast a shadow before them and so many of us can get caught up in the shadow. How? We move on to something new without closure. We jump into something new without understanding the old. We think we can start a new relationship when we are still angry about the old one. We think we can find new, better paying employment when we are still upset about how we were treated at the old place of employment. You cannot move forward into something bigger, better, or brighter than what you had until you clear your feelings about what the old situation was, what you learned and what you are taking with you. Without closure, without letting go of your grudges, well... you know what I'm saying. Until today, you may have felt compelled to move on without forgiveness, forethought, or closure. Just be still a moment and give yourself some down time. Breathe. Breathe again. Breathe yet again.

This New Year will really be something to celebrate if you'll make forgiveness the heart of having the courage right here today. To forgive yourself and forget the past; to forgive others who have hurt you and forgive whatever grievances you have: To ask for forgiveness from those you have hurt and as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. I know this is not easy work to do. I've got a list I need to tend to. I'm going to do it too, because one of the most time consuming things is to have an enemy. Let us end with this prayer:

*Spirit of Life, who's demands cannot be answered, and who's answers cannot be demanded, forgive us our illusions, especially the illusion of separation from each other and creation. Teach us to learn and accept our true relationship with you and each other, where no illusions can ever enter.*

*May I be fair in all my dealings and generous in all my giving's, and may I ask for fairness from others but not demand it or punish them if they fail to show it to me.*

May it always be so...Happy New Year to You All.