

JUDGE NOT!

April 26, 2020

Rev. Richard Maraj

Rev. Richard Maraj: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center's virtual Sunday service! We just want to thank you for joining us; thanks for all your support! We have a lot of different ways that we're supporting you, so if you haven't checked out one of our classes on Zoom, check it out! And we have all sorts of wonderful meditations and postings on Facebook to serve and support you in the greatest way possible.

Today we have a fabulous service featuring Rusty Ferracane singing a wonderful song; I know that you will enjoy it immensely! But let us begin by quieting our minds and preparing ourselves for a time of prayer and meditation.

MEDITATION

Rev. Lori Fleming: I invite you to close your outer eyes as we prepare for a time of prayer and meditation, taking a deep, cleansing breath and release it slowly. Calm your mind and open your heart as we move into that quiet place within: into the stillness of our soul. Into that place where we are one with God, who is our Source. In this time of transition, we seem a little upset; we seem like we don't know what to do. And when that happens, we can go within to commune with the Divine, and become more peaceful. We know, God, that you are right here, right now: in our hearts, in our minds, and in our souls. And in every cell of our body, illuminating our cells with your Divine light. Lifting us up into a higher consciousness of health and wholeness.

In this time – when we don't quite seem to know where we are, what we're doing – in prayer and meditation, we come back to Source. And from this calm, quiet place, we're able to weather the storms of life. From this calm, quiet place, we feel your love, oh God, in us, and as us, and through us, lifting us up, preparing us for what's next, knowing that God is good all the time. And that soon a door will open, and there'll be a new beginning filled with health and wholeness. Filled with peace and love and joy. Filled with abundance. Because Jesus taught us that we live in the kingdom of God, and that everything we ask for is ours.

And so we ask for healing for the world, oh God; not just from this pandemic, but from all of the things that need to be healed. So that hate is turned to love. So that everyone has enough to eat. And so that we all come together in the realization that each and every one of us is part of the whole: a unique and unrepeatable expression of the Divine.

And so, God, as we move into the silence, we feel our wholeness. We feel our oneness with you. And we feel your deep and abiding unconditional love.

SILENCE

Sweet Spirit, we come in gratitude for all of the blessings in our lives. We know that we're in a time of learning some amazing lessons that help us to be more loving people. Thank you, God, for all of it! Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! And it is so. Amen.

SONG:

Rusty Ferracane: 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' (accompanied by Craig Bohmler on piano)

When all the world is a hopeless jumble
And the raindrops tumble all around
Heaven opens a magic lane
When all the clouds darken up the skyway
There's a rainbow highway to be found
Leading from your window pane
To a place behind the sun, just a step beyond the rain

Somewhere over the rainbow way up high
There's a land that I heard of once in a lullaby
Somewhere over the rainbow, skies are blue
And the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true

Someday day I'll wish upon a star
And wake up where the clouds are far behind me
Where troubles melt like lemon drops
Away above the chimney tops, that's where you'll find me

Someday I'll wish upon a star
And wake up where the clouds are far behind m
Where troubles melt like lemon drops
Away above the chimney tops, that's where you'll find me

Somewhere over the rainbow, bluebirds fly
Birds fly over the rainbow why, then oh why can't I?
If happy little bluebirds fly beyond the rainbow
Why, oh why can't I?

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Maraj: [Applauds] Thanks, Craig! Thanks, Rusty! You guys do such a fabulous job, and we really appreciate that! Good stuff!

'Morning again, everyone! And so about 30 years ago, I read a fabulous science fiction comedy trilogy series called *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Anybody read that? And I really enjoyed that; it was a lot of fun! And in one of the books, it shared a story that really captured my attention all those years ago. And this week, in preparing the talk, it popped into my head as a good example to introduce today's message.

And so it's a story about a woman who is waiting for a flight in a VIP lounge at the airport. And, because she had a long layover, she decided to buy a book and a package of cookies. So she got all settled in her seat, and then got every placed. And she's reading. And then a guy comes and sits next to her, and he has a magazine, and he opens it and starts reading. And then she reaches for the pack of cookies, opens it and takes one out. And then she notices immediately the man takes the package and reaches for a cookie. And she's absolutely stunned and appalled that he would just take one of her cookies without asking! And she didn't want to be mean or rude, and she just let it pass.

So a few minutes later, she takes another cookie and then, immediately, he takes a cookie. And, in fact, this time he looks at her and just smiles. And she is just seething! She is so angry! But she doesn't want

to make a scene, so she just glares at the guy in a mean and upset way. This happens another two times, and when it comes to the last cookie, he reaches and grabs it, breaks it in two, leaves a piece for her, and eats the last one. Well, she got so upset, she pops up in a huff, grabs all her stuff, and then heads on to the plane. And as she's settling on the plane – she's getting her book and looking for her glasses in her bag – and what does she see but her pack of cookies.

And I love that story, because here's this woman judging this man, thinking that he'd stolen her cookies. Thinking how mean and insensitive it was. She was projecting all kinds of judgments about what kind of jerk he is – how could he do this?!? – when that judgment was clearly wrong. In fact, he was being nice to her and letting her share his cookies!

So today we're talking about judging people. Have you ever judged someone as being not nice or not kind, or not a good person, later to find out that you misjudged them? And they were really different than what you thought? Or have you ever had anyone judge you for something you said or did – or they thought about you – which you knew was not true?

Judging can be very harsh and a very painful experience in all of our lives. Every single one of us judges in one way or the other. We judge people on how they look. We judge people on how much money they have, or how much education they have, the kind of job they have. We know people for their political views. We judge people for their religious beliefs. We judge people for holding values or doing things that we don't agree or aren't in alignment with how/what we would think.

And the thing that is really troubling is that, sometimes, these judgments are extremely harsh. They're very cruel. And we say things like, *"Oh, he is such an idiot."* *"She is such a hot mess."* We say like, *"I can't believe that anybody with any brains would literally believe in that philosophy or do something like that that's so outrageous or crazy."*

It is amazing how much we judge! And we don't even think we judge that much. Or we often think we don't judge as much as other people judge. I saw this quote, and it says: *"I am grateful that I am not as judgmental as those censorious, self-righteous, ignorant people that are all around me!"* Anybody ever thought something like that?

I saw another one, and it said, *"If you're not judging others and complaining on a regular basis, then you're not using the Internet properly!"* **[Laughs]** You know, today's message on judging others actually springs forth from a number of our congregants who have seen – who have made comments – about feeling judged: judged for their opinions; judged for their ideas; judged for their philosophies. Because it's very critical to be put down – to be insulted – for whatever it is we think. And we do this to others, as well.

Judging and evaluating things is just a part of life. It's an important part of life. Evaluating what's good for us and not good. What's appropriate or not appropriate. What's better or not. And it's really a matter of being discerning in the choices we make and the decisions and the preferences we have. There's nothing wrong with that; that is actually important! But I make the differentiation about judging others when it comes to the anger and the condemnation... You know, the personal attacks and the name calling that we do. And there's a toxic energy behind it. Because there's a difference between discerning – and making a choice and making a preference – and judging, because it's about the energy of anger, of hatred and disgust that go behind it. Because it's really significant.

You know, one of the things we need to ask ourselves is: why do we judge? Why do we judge?!? And I think there are a few reasons.

The first one, I think, is because we want to understand and make sense of why things happen and why people do certain things in life. We all want to understand. Sometimes when there aren't enough facts, we start making stuff up... and all because the idea: we want to kind of make sense of it.

The second thing is that we have an idea of what is just and what is right and what the appropriate way for life to be. And when something happens or is said that's outside of what we think is the best and appropriate, we can get very angry about it and think it's wrong, think it's important we speak out against it. And if the intensity behind it that can be pretty harmful.

And then the third one is: sometimes we judge others because it makes us feel good. We like being self-righteous! We like thinking we're right! We know better! We all engage it in that level. And sometimes it makes us feel more validated or more superior. And that's why we engage in this thing called judging.

But the reality is: judging – at the level and intensity that I'm talking about – is harmful in many, many, on many levels. The Bible warns over and over and over again to not judge. And it's not judge because it is harmful. It is toxic. It hurts us. It hurts our relationships; it hurts our families, our communities, our society and our world by judging the way we judge.

Listen to a couple of Scriptures. This is from the Book of James. It says, *"Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks evil against the Law, and judges the Law. But if you judge the Law, you are not a doer of the Law, but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, and he is able to save and destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?"*

And one more from Romans. It says, *"Therefore, you have no excuse, O man, for every one of you who judges. For passing judgment on another will condemn yourself."*

And so, to me, the biggest harm in us judging others is that it actually creates a sense of separation. That we literally think, *"How dare you do that?!? I would never do that!"* And it creates an idea that they are so different and distant and unlike me. It actually creates a sense of distance and separation in relationships, among communities, among religions when there is harshness and judgment.

And I also think part of that judgment creates a distance and separation from our true nature! Because we are created in the image and likeness of God, and God is love! And we act in ways that aren't loving. That aren't compassionate. That aren't caring. In fact, the more we judge, the more we disconnect ourselves from Spirit. So separation, to me, is the greatest harm that we create when we judge others. It disconnects us from us; it disconnects from God; and disconnects us from other people.

Hate harms. Criticism and condemnation harms by creating distance and disconnect. And then we never feel safe. We never trust. We never feel intimacy and closeness. Because condemning and judging truly, truly harms and diminishes us.

You know, the three things I think that judging does: one, it dims our own light. We can't shine as bright in terms of joy and peace when we are judging. Another one: it lowers our positive energy. It lowers our energy when we judge. And the third thing: I think it keeps us trapped and stuck in negativity. We are always in a cycle of negativity when we judge.

So the question is: what do we do to do what the Bible says, which is judge not? How do we handle these situations that we have to evaluate and discern and make good choices, but not cross that line of judging where it becomes toxic, critical and unhealthy?

The first thing I think we need to do is to set an intention to not be judgmental. Listen to the words from the Book of Romans. It says, *"Do not attach each other. Don't speak destructive things about others. Try to be a good example so that others don't copy your bad behavior."*

Over and over in the Scriptures, it says, *"Judge not. Judge not. Judge not. Judge not."* And often, *"Judge not, lest ye be judged."* And so, what it's saying is: As we judge, we are actually condemning ourselves and hurting and harming ourselves. And what's saying here is to hold an intention of being a good example. To choose not to judge and harm, but to actually hold a good example so that we send positive

energy out into the world. You know, it says don't judge by appearances, but judge by right Judgments. By righteous Judgment, it is talking about the right use of our spiritual discernment.

And so, to me, it is being a good example of being a positive example and using spiritual discernment to analyze and study and decide what we need to decide. One of the things, when it says, "Don't judge"... It says, "Don't judge the speck in your brother's eye, but check the speck in your own eye first." And what that's really saying is to have an intention to make sure we're showing up in the clearest way possible. That if we're a clear channel – if we're a good example; if we're examining ourselves first instead of pointing our fingers at others – then we have a greater likelihood to bring more peace into our lives and bring more peace into our relationships and our world.

So it's saying: set an intention to not judge. Set an intention to be a good example. And set an intention to get rid of the speck in our own eye so we can see things from a spiritual perspective. So we can look at things and see the good in it. See the positive. To see the ability for it to be healed or transformed or improved in some way.

So what kind of intention would we set for the kind of example that we want to show up and be? And be known and seen by people? I bet no one – in their top 100 of the kind of example we want to be – would want to have people say, "You know, he is so Judgment! He is so critical and condemning, you've got to admire that!" Nobody wants that! Every one of us wants to be an example of someone that's positive, someone that's uplifting, someone who brings people together and creates harmony and positive energy in the greatest way.

So having an intention to not judge, an intention to be a good example, and to see things spiritually... I think one of the simplest ways to start is to speak more positively and to be careful with our words. The Old Testament says, "Words can tear down or words can build up." And judging is using words to condemn, criticize and put others down, and often uses insults. Uses energy of hate; of anger and bitterness.

I remember years ago, when I used to get – having an experience on a highway of getting cut off – I'd get cut off, and I'd say something about the driver. No need to express the exact words, but you could imagine. **[Chuckles]** They were kind of spiritual, but not as spiritual as I could have been. **[Chuckles]** And so, whatever I used to say, I started saying – I got in this habit of, when it happened – I'd say, "God bless you and have a good day." So whenever it happened **[pantomimes driving]**, "God bless you and have a good day." At first it was a little mechanical, and then it kind of made me chuckle. But, over time, that energy – of me judging their character, judging how they drive, their safety, being a jerk... all kinds of things – really began to dissipate by just changing the words. I changed the words, and it changed the energy. And, literally, "God bless you and have a good day."

And we could do that in so many different ways! If somebody triggers you about an opinion that they share that you really don't like, you could say, "You know, I really don't agree with that opinion, but I know that person's a child of God, and they deserve to be happy." You know, someone triggers you, you could say, "You know, that person is a teacher for me spiritually, and I know I'm going to eventually learn that lesson." Or, "This situation that I can't stand – I think is wrong – this thing will transform into something good." Just changing our words – when we have an intention and just begin to change our words – even if it's mechanical at the beginning, eventually will take some of that toxic energy of judgment and condemnation away, and actually make it more neutral and peaceful. And then, actually, it becomes more positive.

And so, to me, an intention about not judging is really an intention of being more in alignment with our true nature. Letting our words – you know, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord" – means: let my words and thoughts and actions be in alignment with my nature, which is love. Which is joy. Which is peace. Which is kindness. Which is compassion.

So the first thing for us to “judge not,” is to hold an intention to not judge. An intention to be a good example, and to see things spiritually. And one of the key ways is to use our words in a more positive way, even when we get triggered and want to judge.

The second thing to do is to use the power of observation, of being an observer, and just noticing when we get triggered. You know, most people think that the first sin was not listening to God and eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. I think the result of that – the actual very first sin – was judgment. Because remember when Adam and Eve were hiding from God because they were ashamed that they were naked? I’m thinking, *“Where’d that Judgment come from?”* It is when we don’t listen to God, and we’re not connected to God, we will judge things. Because there was nothing wrong with being naked, but they made up a judgment that it was wrong and bad to be seen naked.

And so, one of the things I’ve come to realize is that the human mind, by its very nature, will judge. Snap judgments pop up all day, all the time! It kind of reminds me of, when we meditate, how our mind wander. Everybody’s mind wanders when we meditate. And what do we do? We just let it wander, observe it, let it drift. But we don’t let it stop us from going deeper into meditation and feeling connected spiritually. We just are aware of it – it happens to everybody – we observe it; we don’t push it; we don’t judge it. It happens, and then we go a little deeper.

Well, the same in the course of our live, judgments are going to pop up! They are a part of life! And you know what the greatest way to combat judgment? Just observing it. Just noticing, *“That Facebook post triggers me!”* And just be aware of it. Just be aware of the things that get us upset. And notice it; even notice what that energy feels like in us. But by being the observer of it, we distance the quick reaction. We just pay attention to it. And eventually – just like any thoughts when you meditate – if you just notice it, it will eventually just slide away.

And so mindfulness – and just being aware and observing – actually reduces the impact and the reactions of judging, criticism and condemnation. Listen to what the Indian writer Krishnamurti said. He said, *“The ability to observe without evaluating is the highest form of intelligence.”* To just notice life. We don’t have to slap on definitions and labels on everything. Just notice. Just notice and pay attention. And that, literally, will begin to dissipate the level of control on what’s going on with us.

And so the next time – and I keep using Facebook things that trigger us, because it’s kind of out for us now – and when we do, maybe the first thing to do is just take a breath. Just breathe in: one. Breathe in: two. Breathe in: three. Breathe in: four. And/or just notice, and say, *“This post is triggering me. That perspective and mindset is triggering me. I feel some anger. I feel some upset.”* And just be aware of it! And it will begin to loosen our grip.

Now, we could go in and say, *“I wonder why this is bothering me?”* But the more we get into the details, the more we start having an argument even with ourselves. But just being aware of it really will begin to dissipate it. Because one of the nice things is that awareness begins to help us liberate ourselves from all the things that are holding us back. The more unaware we are, actually the more strapped we are. But just observing and being aware will begin to release those judgments, and stop us from having such quick snap judgments.

And the final thing I want to talk about is the power of love. The power of compassion. To me, nothing heals, nothing transforms, nothing brings down walls and barriers – and transforms and makes us feel a sense of connectedness rather than separateness – than love.

Love is the thing we all want more than anything else in this world. No matter how hard or difficult thing we’re going through, to know that you’re loved – to have someone to love and to experience love – makes everything easier and better. To feel alone, to feel not loved, not heard, not cared for is the most painful of all human experiences, I believe. Because we are created in the image and likeness of love.

That is our nature! And when we act in ways outside of our nature, we do feel disconnected from God, from love, from peace and joy.

And the thing about it is: love and compassion for others – because we don't know everybody's story. We don't know what hurt they're going through. And so we need to extend and give them the benefit of the doubt, and know that they're hurting, and they just need some love. And the best thing we can do for them is to have love and compassion for them. And also have love and compassion for ourselves! We're all going to mess up, and beating ourselves up isn't the best way. But it's to have love and compassion for ourselves.

One of the things is that judgment is harsh; it's cold. It closes off our hearts, and it creates pain and harm... Where love actually opens our hearts. It heals. It transforms. And it creates connectedness and togetherness.

You know, the Buddhist philosophy believes that the absolute number one key to happiness is having compassion for others. Having compassion for all living things, without exception. And I love a quote by the Dalai Lama; it says, *"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want yourself to be happy, practice compassion."* For compassion is a desire for the welfare and well-being of all living things, without exception.

We often say – and I see people finishing notes – putting *"Namaste! Namaste! Namaste!"* And it's beautiful! It generally means that the divinity in me acknowledges the divinity in you. The Spirit of God in me acknowledges the Spirit of God in you. So what we need to do is actually put that into practice, particularly when we get triggered. So, again, something triggers us – somebody says something – that we need to literally go to that *"Namaste"* place and say, *"The Spirit of God in me acknowledges the Spirit of God in you."*

Think of somebody that really triggers you: that you really disagree with their philosophy or how they live life or how they speak to people. And even that person: we need to acknowledge the divinity in them. Acknowledge the God in them. Acknowledge that they deserve love as much as we do, or anyone does. That we all deserve love. The fact is: we are created in love. And that's when we are mostly in our nature. And anything other than that takes us out of our nature.

I was in a workshop once, and the leader of it said, *"So I want you to go to your heart and ask yourself right now: is your heart open?"* And I thought, *"Of course!"* But when I checked in, it wasn't! And she made us, in that workshop, take a deep breath, go to our heart, and just open our hearts. Open our hearts to feel God's love. Open our hearts to express our own love for ourselves. And open hearts to just send love – not just to our loved ones – but to everyone in the world. And I'll tell you, it was amazing how lighter and brighter and more peaceful that I became in that moment.

Somebody once said, *"Your heart is like an umbrella; it tends to work better when it's open!"* And so one of the things we need to do is to realize that we are in love: that we are created in love, we're here for love, and we need to express more love. That we can say, *"Namaste – The Spirit of God in me acknowledges the Spirit of God in you"* – and give the benefit of the doubt to that person. We don't know what their story is, so let's have compassion for them, that they are doing their best. And let's always make sure that our hearts are open: feeling God's love, loving ourselves and expressing our love to others.

Judging, to me, is one of the most harmful things we can do to ourselves, our relationships, our community and our world. And I get it! Nobody is ever going to agree with everyone. But we can come to a place of understanding and acceptance of one another, and stop being as toxic in our thoughts to one another. We don't have to agree; we can choose to think different things without judging.

And so, if we want to let our light shine – we want to be a good example, we want to feel more love in the world – the first thing to start is to set an intention to judge not.

God bless you all!

OFFERING

Rev. Lori Fleming: It's that time in our service for our gifts and our tithes and our offerings. We're so grateful to all of you who've been sending checks by mail; who've been paying on line. Thank you, thank you, thank you so much for supporting us in this time when we can't be together because of the pandemic. You are such an amazing congregation; we just appreciate your support so much!

Our offering blessing is: *"Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I have, all that I give and all that I receive."* Would you say that with me, please? *"Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I have, all that I give and all that I receive."*

And so, Mother/Father God, we are so grateful for the blessing of this offering. We know that tithing is a spiritual practice that brings us closer to God, and that each gift is blessed, heaped up, pressed down and overflowing, for that is the Law. And so it is. Thank you, God, for the offering. We are grateful! Amen.

CLOSING

Rev. Lori Fleming: So thanks for joining us today! We're so glad we could be with you through the benefits of cyberspace. We're all learning some new ways to be together! We miss you; we love you; we bless you; and we can't wait until we get to physically be with you again. Namaste!

Copyright 2020 Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center/Rev. Richard Maraj