

LET GO OF LIMITING THOUGHTS

Week #2 of a 4-Week Series, "The Power of Letting Go"

Jan. 24, 2021

Rev. Richard Maraj

Rev. Richard Maraj: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center Sunday virtual worship celebration! I'm Rev. Richard Maraj; so happy that you are joining us! I've got a great service today, but just want to share a few announcements.

We have got sign ups starting for our "Circles of Joy," which is our series leading into Lent. It's a great way – and they're all by Zoom – it's a great way to connect and get to know people in the community and do some sharing on some wonderful spiritual topics.

Also, on Feb. 2nd and the 9th, I will be teaching a class on the practice of letting go and releasing. Right now I'm doing that series on these Sundays, but we're going to have a class to be able to process and do these practices a little bit deeper: to get a deeper sense of release in our lives.

Also, if you'd like to learn a little bit more about how to communicate with animals – and the roles that they play on our spiritual path – Jeanette St. Germain will be teaching a class this Wednesday by Zoom.

All these things you can find out more about and sign up for on the website.

Right now, Rev. Lori is going to lead us in a time of prayer and meditation. And to prepare us for that experience, we will listen to the choir as they sing "Surely the Presence."

MEDITATION

Rev. Lori Fleming: I invite you to join me in a time of prayer and meditation. As we close our outer eyes, and take in a deep, cleansing breath. As we release it slowly. And take in another mindful breath and, as we let it go, release any busy-ness we've had so far today. Just gently give it to God. Any problems, any concerns: just release them into Spirit. For God knows what to do with them.

As we move our awareness into the center of our being, we feel a deep, upwelling of gratitude for this amazing day that we've been given. A brand new clean slate to create the lives we want to live, exactly the way we want to live them. This new day is filled with endless possibilities for new ways of being and new ways of doing. Brand new ways that lift us up out of the old into the new.

As we let go of the old, gently release it. Feel the presence of Spirit within, guiding us. Leading us into the greater good that we are about to receive now. Because God is good all the time! God is our Source, and all good comes from God.

In this sacred, silent moment, we feel the presence of Spirit within us. We let our light shine, knowing that we are an unrepeatable expression of the living God right here, right now. That each and every one of us has been created in sacred worth, here for a great and important work that only we can do. And when we go into the silence, and we listen with our divine, spiritual ears, Holy Spirit gently whispers into our consciousness: guiding us, encouraging us, pointing out that next one step that brings us closer to our good.

And so we take just a few moments to move more deeply into the silence: into that presence of Spirit within.

SILENCE

Sweet Spirit, we come in gratitude for this time away. For the silence within us: that sacred, quiet place that brings us closer to you, O, God. We're so grateful for all of our blessings: for all the good that you bring into our lives today and every day. And for this we say thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! And it is so. Amen.

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Maraj: Thank you, Rev. Lori! That was a wonderful meditation; really appreciate it!

As usual, we're going to start with a couple of jokes! And here we go!

How does an asteroid get clean? With a meteor shower!

So did you hear about the wisecracking gardener? He was a real "smarty-plants"!

Did you know that relationships are kind of like algebra? Ever look at your "X" and wonder "Y"?

What do you get when you cross a red cloud with a blue cloud? *[Sings:] "Purple rain; purple rain!"*
[Laughs] Can't sing, but that was a joke!

And, finally, what does Matthew McConaughey's GPS say? *"Turn-right, turn-right, turn-right!"*
[Simulates "rim shot" drum roll]

Okay! So let's begin!

We're continuing a series – new year series. And so my question for you today is: Have you ever felt stuck? Have you ever felt that your life was not improving? Or getting better the way you'd hoped? I mean, have you felt like your life was just a constant struggle, and you didn't know how to have a breakthrough and make it better?

You know, every single one of us wants to have a better life, particularly at this time of the year. We get all excited about overhauling our lives, having resolutions, spending more time with our family ... you know, doing more reading. All these things we want to improve! But studies show that, when we set resolutions and start out with actions in the new year, by one month later only 10% are still pursuing. And by the end of the year, only three to five percent have actually accomplished their goals.

You know, I truly believe if we're serious this year about improving our lives – about changing for the better – there is something we need to start with. And that is, by asking ourselves some key questions. And that is: What do I need to let go?

You know, we're so focused on wanting to move ahead, I think we need to stop and say: What is it that I'm still holding on to that it's time for me to release? What in my past is it time for me to free myself from? What old wounds or regrets or pain am I still carrying around with me? What is it that I need to let go?

As powerful and amazing of human beings and spiritual beings as we are, told that we are created in the image and likeness of God – told that we are the light of the world; told that we can do all things through Christ, who strengthens us – we develop practices and habits that are really not helpful or healthy for us. And the worst that we do is: we get the practice of holding on to things that aren't good for us.

We hold on to all kinds of stuff! We can be packrats and hoarders of physical, material possessions. But the worst things we hold on to are the messages and the negative thoughts and the untruths about who we really are. The most painful things – and hurtful things – we hold on to are the beliefs generally around the idea that *"I'm not good enough."* Or that *"I'm not lovable."* That *"I'll never make something of myself."* That *"I'll never find the level of success I am looking for and trying to seek."* We live out of that limited mindset that we're not enough!

In 2005, the National Science Foundation published an article summarizing research on human thoughts daily. And it said that we all think thoughts between a range of 12,000 thoughts and 6,000 thoughts a day. And 80% of the thoughts that we think are negative! And 95% of the thoughts that we think are the exact thoughts that we thought the day before!

We habitually think negative thoughts and repeat them over and over and over again. And if we are serious about changing our lives – healing, empowering and transforming ourselves – the key is that we need to learn how to let go.

The Apostle Paul said, *“I die daily.”* And that meant that, on a daily basis, he let go of the resentments. He let go of the regrets and the mistakes and the frustrations to have a clean start to live each day fully present and the most engaged that he could.

Today we are in the second of our four-week series on *“The Power of Letting Go,”* on a book by John Purkiss. And it’s about how to let go of everything that is holding back from living our lives to the fullest.

Last week we looked at the three important practices of letting go. The first one is mindfulness and being present. And that is by just... Because we’re so often in the future or the past, following our breath with mindfulness helps bring us back to the present and the here and now. Just simply breathing in and breathing out... Just following our breath in and out... Just noticing our belly expand as we breath in... Notice our belly as it contract as we breath out... Just following our breath in and out. As simple as that sounds, pulls us away from the past or future, and brings us right into the present moment.

Eckhart Tolle wrote a book called, *The Power of Now.* That being in the present moment is as powerful as we could be. As aware as we can be. It is the way that we use our resources and the power of our mind in the most effective way possible.

So mindfulness is the first practice of letting go of the past and future to be right in the here and now: our most powerful place.

The second practice of letting go is observing our own thoughts. You know, our minds wander when we meditate; we all know that! It’s wander to say, *“Hey, I forgot to call the plumber”* or, *“I need to pick up some food”* or, *“I can’t believe that usher was so rude to me yesterday!”* And when we just step back and observe these thoughts – without getting hooked or consumed or falling into the drama – we actually become more conscious, more aware and more free to handle and to use our minds and our responses in a much more effective way.

And the third one is to identify with our true nature. That, when we are breathing in and out, to remember to just say the truth of who we are, which is *“I AM. I AM. I AM.”* We are amazingly powerful spiritual beings, but sometimes we just identify ourselves by our names, by our jobs, by our incomes. You know, by our political affiliation. But the truth is: we are so much more than that! We are amazing spiritual beings. And as we meditate, and use the mantra of *“I AM”* – even repeating it 20, 30 times: *“I AM. I AM. I AM,”* -- and breathing it in and out, it actually connects us with the truth of who we really are. And we can live and respond from that higher spiritual place.

The reason I mention these three, because these are the three foundational principles of letting go. We’re going to use them today, and they’re to be used in all the classes and all the practices that we do. Because they truly help us let go and be fully present in the here and now.

Today we’re going to look at how to let go of thoughts that keep us stuck. So we already realize that repetitive, negative thoughts are what keep us limited and stuck, and prevent us from having new ideas and new possibilities. And hearing new information. And having new inspiration. And having new direction in our lives.

Do you know somebody – or have you ever had a time in your life – where you heard someone tell a story, and you’d heard them tell that story about how somebody did ‘em wrong? Maybe a story about how their boss was unfair to them? Or how their “ex” did this? Or some former friend did that? And what happens is: we tend to tell some of these stories over and over and over again. Sometimes to everyone; sometimes to anyone. I mean, have you ever just told someone, *“That dirty so-and-so; you remember the time he did this!”*? And we always get the past triggered, and we always jump on it to keep wanting to tell that story over and over again.

And one of the important ways of letting go of thoughts from the past is to stop talking about it now.

We keep repeating and regurgitating, and wondering why we feel hurt or taken advantage of, and it's because we keep it alive! So the first thing – if you want your life to change and not have limiting thoughts guide your life and to have new thoughts – is to stop talking about the old stories. Stop us telling it. That when you catch yourself, go back to your breath [*breathes in deeply*]. Feel yourself breathe in and out, and bring your mind back to the present. Because it will help break those old, habitual thought patterns of just thinking back in the past. And your mind will wander again and again, but you've just got to keep bringing it back. But number one commitment is: think of some stories that you keep saying over and over again, and just stop telling them.

The second thing is to let go of the stories that we all make up. Every one of us makes up stories. Some of them are positive; some of them are negative. But we're going to focus on the negative ones, because those are the ones that tend to hold us back. And especially the negative stories that we tell about ourselves.

And here are some ideas of the things that we say. Like, *"I am so unlucky in love and relationships."* *"Nothing ever works out for me."* *"If it wasn't for my dysfunctional family, I would be a lot further in my life."* *"I just don't seem to fit in anywhere in my life."* *"I can never get what I want."* *"I used to be successful, but I'm not anymore."* *"People are always taking advantage of my kindness."* *"No one really cares about me."* *"People are just out for themselves."* *"I'm not really good with money at all, and I just can't seem to get my life together."*

So those are some examples of negative stories and negative images we have of ourselves. The question is: what negative story do you tell about yourself? I want you to think right now of one negative thing that you say about yourself or believe about yourself. And what we need to do – to help release it – is to ask ourselves four questions about it.

So think about whatever that negative story you have about yourself that you always say or believe. And the first thing is to ask: What is the underlying belief of that story? The second is: What is the payoff for me telling that story? Number three is: What is the cost to me of telling that story? And the fourth is: What are the benefits if I were to let go of that story?

So let's do an example. We'll do the first one on that list, which is, *"I'm not lucky in love"* or, *"I'm not lucky in relationships."* So what is the underlying belief? Well, it could be that I'm not lovable. Or believe I'm not good enough. Or maybe we believe that all men and women are just bad. Or that I'm just not good at it; I just don't have what it takes to be good in a relationship.

The second question would be: What is the payoff to me of telling that story? And it could be that people feel sorry for me. It could be that I'm free to do whatever I want since I'm single. Or it could be I don't have to risk my heart. Or it could be that I don't have to remember any anniversary. That's a payoff!

The third one is: What is the cost of telling that story? And the cost is: maybe feeling alone. Not having a companion; not having a relationship. And not knowing the fullness of the dimension of life being a couple. Being together. Or maybe the cost is that it keeps me closed off.

And then the fourth one is: What are the benefits of letting go? So the benefits of letting go of that story that I'm not luck in love or not good in relationships are: it would help open my heart to love. Or open my heart to greater honesty and intimacy. And connection. And sharing. And happiness and fulfillment.

You know, we all have stories. And particularly the negative ones that we think and live our lives out of absolutely keep us stuck. But one of the power of letting go is the first step of just being aware. Just being aware of the stories we tell. Just being aware of the impact and the benefits and the costs that they have are absolutely hugely liberating. And that any time – even with our stories -- that we find our minds telling ourselves that, the best thing to do is just to come back to your breath. [*Breathes in*

deeply] Come back to your breath because, again, what it does: it stops that pattern. There's a neural pattern that triggers these thoughts and beliefs, and just pausing and focusing on our breath for a bit actually breaks it. And, over time, it will begin to have it release and become a smaller and smaller influence in our lives.

Another important thing for us to let go is to let go of our judgements. We, as human beings, judge! We judge everything! We judge anything! We judge ourselves; we judge others. We judge what we like; we judge what we dislike. There are all kinds of things that we judge!

We even judge the weather! We have this belief that it should be sunny all the time... or at least sunny when I think it should be sunny! And when it starts to rain, we judge the weather, saying, *"That rain is bad! That is bad weather!"* And the truth is: rain isn't bad! It's just raining! But we judge it by saying it is bad. It is bad weather.

And what happens is that, when we judge it that it's bad, we feel bad, and we actually suffer from our own judging. Now, I'm giving you a kind of silly little example, but that's judging weather. Well, could you imagine how much more pain we create for ourselves when we judge people in our lives? When we judge colleagues? We judge family members? We judge politicians? When we are judging events, we were judging 2020! We judged that! *"That was a horrible year! That was the worst year ever!"* Well, it was just a year! But we added all kinds of judgements to it. That's not to say that what happened wasn't easy. But we add so much more stress and tension and pain by actually just judging it to be what it is.

So I ask you: Who do you judge? What are the things that you are judging harshly? The things that are causing you upset and tension and conflict by labeling certain things that happen or don't happen? Or certain things that you like or don't like?

One of the important things here – and back to one of our key principles – is just observe how you judge. Just observe how you label – without judging yourself. Just kind of notice, *"Oh! I notice I really judge this harshly or judge that person harshly."* Just being aware of it opens a space to release that energy. Helps us be more aware, and helps us be able to make more positive responses. And once we observe and are just aware of our judgments, we can actually find a place just to accept it. To not say it's "bad" rain – that rain is bad! – but to accept: it's raining. And then...

There's this wonderful story about this farmer. And that one of his horses ran away, and his neighbor said, *"Oh, that was bad. Bad! You lost your horse!"* And the farmer said, *"Yeah; perhaps."* Then the next day, the horse comes back with six wild horses. And then the neighbor said, *"Wow! That's good! That's good!"* The farmer said, *"Well; perhaps."* And then the day after, the son was trying to break one of the new horses, and he fell off and broke his ankle. The neighbor said, *"Man, that's bad! That is bad!"* The farmer said, *"Perhaps."* And then the next day the army came to recruit, and to serve, and to find young men to fight. And because the son's foot was broken, he didn't get chosen. And the neighbor said, *"Wow! That was good! That was good!"* And the farmer said, *"Yeah; perhaps."*

We have this belief that life should always happen this way and that way. And this is good and that's bad. And this is wrong and that's right. And the fact is, we... And it comes from this need to know everything and this need to control and this need to be right. So my question for you is: What if we were to let go our need to know everything? What if we could let go of our need to always be in control of everything? What if we could let go of our need for everything to always go our way? Could you imagine how much calmer, how much more peaceful, how much more present, how much more open, and how more open we would be to solutions and ideas and how to handle situations even better?

To me, that is a powerful thing. To just observe your judgement; just find acceptance. And when we get to that place, we can begin to just flow with life a little bit more. And not only will we not judge the things that are happening now, we can actually begin to appreciate what's happening now. I mean, could you imagine just appreciating everything in the here and now? Like, appreciate how good it feels for the air to go in our nostrils and out through our mouth? To feel how appreciative and wonderful it is

for us to breathe so freely? Or to be able to observe our thoughts? Can you imagine if we were to be able to appreciate the food just right when we are eating it? Or appreciate the temperature in the room where you are right at this very moment?

You know, that's one of the powerful things: to just appreciate now. Being here now, and it takes an even deeper level of joy to just appreciate what's happening now. Not trying to control it or push it away, but just being aware and appreciating the good of our lives right here and now.

You know, every single one of us wants our lives to be successful and wants it to be better. But I think we don't always want to put in the work that is needed to make life as fulfilling and joyful. These practices of letting go aren't easy. Our mind is going to wander. Observing is not easy. Bringing ourselves back to the breath is not easy. But these things pay off in a much bigger way that liberate us and help us be more engaged, more alive, and more fulfilled in the life that we're living.

Self-awareness – tuning in to who we are and what's going on with ourselves, and being honest with ourselves – is hard spiritual work. You know, we're always looking for the easy way out, but it takes work! But our lives can – we have the tools – and our lives can succeed in greater ways.

You know, Tom Brady and LeBron James are considered the "GOATS": the greatest of all time in both of their sports, arguably. And the one thing I really appreciate about both of them: they work on their health and their body and their skills harder than anyone. They have been playing their sports almost 20 years – and I think Brady's a little over 20 years – and the reason is: they do the work when no one's looking. They do the simple, day-to-day tasks – those simple disciplines; those healthy choices; and wise choices – and it pays off for them in huge and wonderful results.

We have all kinds of great spiritual tools, and none greater than the power of letting go... Than the power of being mindful... Than the power of observing our thoughts... Than the power of aligning/identifying ourselves with our "I AM." Our lives can really be transformed in amazing ways, if we are willing to do the work.

Here's your homework for this week! Number one: stop talking about the past. Stop telling those stories. You don't live there anymore, so you don't need to keep telling about what so-and-so said, or what so-and-so did. Number two is: pick one negative story, and go through the four questions, which are: What are the underlying beliefs? What are my payoffs for telling that story? What are the costs to me of telling that story? And what are the benefits if I were to let it go? And the final one is: replace judging and forcing and thinking that things have to be a certain way by just observing your judgements, first, then finding a way to just accept that it is what it is. And then get to a place that you can appreciate what is going on right here and now. And any time your mind wanders – that's normal! – just always catch yourself and bring it back by going back to your breath, and bringing yourself into the here and now.

You can truly improve your life this year exactly the way that you want. Your life can get better and better and better. This year could be a break-through year for all of us. The question is: Are you willing to practice the practice of letting go?

God bless you!

SOLO

Rusty Ferracane sings "I Can See Clearly Now"

I can see clearly now the rain is gone
I can see all obstacles in my way
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind
It's gonna be a bright, bright, sunshiny day
It's gonna be a bright, bright, sunshiny day

I can make it now the pain is gone
All of my bad feelings have disappeared
Here is the rainbow I've been praying for
It's gonna be a bright, bright, sunshiny day
Look all around, there's nothing but blue skies
Look straight ahead, there's nothing but blue skies
I can see clearly now the rain is gone
I can see all obstacles in my way
Oh, gone are the dark clouds that had me blind
Oh, it's gonna be a bright, bright, sunshiny day
Yeah, it's gonna be a bright, bright, sunshiny day
Oh, it's gonna be a bright, bright, sunshiny day

OFFERING

Rev. Lori Fleming: It's that time in our service to give of our gifts and our tithes and our offerings. We are so grateful to those of you who have sent in checks, who have contributed online; you're keeping everything we need going here at Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center. Thank you so much for your generosity!

Our offering blessing is: *"Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I have, all that I give, and all that I receive."* And so we say thank you, Mother/Father God, for these gifts and these tithes and these offerings. We know they are given in love, they are received in love, and that they move through this ministry with the energy of divine love out into the world as good. And that each giver is blessed – heaped up, pressed down and overflowing – for that is the Law. And so it is. Thank you, God! Amen.

CLOSING

Rev. Lori Fleming: Well, we're grateful you were able to watch us online on our service. We hope that you've been uplifted in some really beautiful and amazing ways. And as you go through your week, just remember that God is good all the time.

And now will you join me in listening to the choir sing the Peace Song?

Choir sings Peace Song:

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me!
Let there be peace on earth
The peace that was meant to be!

With God as Creator
Family all are we!

Let us walk with each other
In perfect harmony!

Let peace begin with me;
Let this be the moment now!
With every breath I take
Let this be my joyous vow:
To take each moment and live each moment
In peace eternally!

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me!

Rev. Lori Fleming: And will join me in affirming our Prayer for Protection?

The light of God surrounds us;
The love of God enfolds us;
The power of God protects us;
The presence of God watches over us.
Wherever we are, God is. And all is well!

Have a blessed week!

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