

In Place of a Curse

At the next vacancy for God, if I am elected,
I shall forgive last the delicately wounded
who, having been slugged no harder than anyone else,
never got up again, neither to fight back,
nor to finger their jaws in painful admiration.

They who are wholly broken, and they in whom
mercy is understanding, I shall embrace at once
and lead to pillows in heaven. But they who are
the meek by trade, baiting the best of their betters
with the extortions of a mock-helplessness

I shall take last to love, and never wholly.
Let them all into Heaven--I abolish Hell--
but let it be read over them as they enter:
"Beware the calculations of the meek, who gambled nothing,
gave nothing, and could never receive enough."

John Ciardi

Some say, to understand is to forgive.
Say instead, forgive if you would understand.
Until we forgive, we are defending ourselves
against the possibility of understanding.
Once we forgive we may be ready to understand,
And that is the posture of grace.

from Home
Marilynne Robinson (adapted)

Jonah 3:5-10 and 4:1-4

The people of Nineveh believed God's word. They ordered a public fast and put on sackcloth, high and low alike. When the news (of Jonah's prophecy) reached the king of Nineveh he rose from his throne, stripped off his robes of state, put on sackcloth and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: 'This is the decree of the king and his nobles. No man or beast, herd or flock, is to taste food, to graze or to drink water. You are to clothe yourselves in sackcloth and call on God with all your might. Abandon your wicked ways and your habitual violence. God may then repent and turn away from anger. Then we might not perish. God saw what they did, how they abandoned their wicked ways and God repented and did not bring upon them the disaster God had threatened.

Jonah was furious. He prayed to the Lord: 'This, O Lord is what I feared would happen. This is why I tried to escape to Tarshish; I knew that thou art 'as god gracious and

compassionate, long-suffering and ever-constant and that you are always willing to repent of the disaster.' And now Lord, take my life: I should be better off dead than alive. 'Are you so angry?' said the Lord.

from Deepak Chopra:

...The question posed is whether forgiveness can be so difficult that it stretches religious faith too far. Yes, of course. The most devout Jews are not expected, required, rewarded, or pressured to forgive the Holocaust. Such forgiveness would be the same as saintliness. Human nature is vulnerable.

Without a shift in consciousness, it's impossible to clear the psychological slate and forgive deep hurts just because you aspire to be moral. The imprints made on the psyche by violence and humiliation, guilt and shame, prejudice and lack of love, are as real as wounds to the body. The psyche possesses some healing mechanisms that work- the passage of time, forgetfulness, the will to forgive, a strong sense of self, and love...

"The essence of forgiveness is transcendent...", not something to be called upon out of a desire to forgive.

"The Angels and the Furies"

May Sarton

(1)

Have you not wounded yourself
And battered those you love
By sudden motions of evil
...rage in the blood
When the soul, *premier danseur*,
Springs toward a murderous fall?
The furies possess you.

(2)

Have you not surprised yourself
Sometimes by sudden motions
Or intimations of goodness,
When the soul, *premier danseur*,
Perfectly poised,
Could shower blessings
With a graceful turn of the head?
The angels are there.

(3)

The angels, the furies
Are never far away
While we dance, they dance,
Trying to keep a balance,

To be perfectly human
(not perfect, never perfect,
never an end to growth and peril),
Able to bless and forgive
Ourselves.
This is what is asked of us.

(4)

It is light that matters,
The light of understanding.
Who has ever reached it
Who has not met the furies again and again?
Who has reached it without
Those sudden acts of grace?