

Forgiveness

2 weeks ago I was a mess. I was once again crying on my floor asking myself the same questions. "Why am I like this?" "What's wrong with me?" "Why can't I let this go?" "Why do I choose chaos over peace?" You know the typical bullshit. Without getting too deep into what happened I will just let yall know that I have challenges with friendships. Of course, This is relevant to my past. My need to please people is rooted in my lack of praise and attention in my home, leading to dysfunctional dynamics. I am always in search of safe havens where I can talk freely without being silenced. Recent unpacking had made me notice that my examples of friendship were equally dysfunctional. I have witnessed my own parents struggle with petty backbiting. Not really maintaining functional long lasting friendships.

Media and Music don't really help with TV shows profiting off of unhealthy communication among friends and family. Womxn compete against each other for monetary gain, and the male gaze is the inevitable norm. I have always been attracted to the peacemaker of the family or group. Go figure. So in my real life friendships, I like my friends, act out the script that has been written for us. Why don't we lead into friendships knowing who we are and what we will not accept. Things I am still learning. Balance leads to shedding of the old patterns.

I have been on this journey of exiling people out of my life that do not serve me positively. I processed my role and theirs in the conflict and know not to allow them back into the space that they were in before. Like you had full admission into the wonderfulness of Alex. You had a fantastic time, riding my rides, eating my juicy turkey legs, as well as, throwing your trash on my ground, writing white lives matter on all the poles, clogging all of my toilets, stealing from the stores, and cussing at my staff. I have no choice but to exit you off the premises, hang your picture up on the security wall, and ban you officially at all parks.

So why after all of these years, and all of this self work, am I shaking mad ready to draw another line that I know will be crossed. Why am I still upset about events in the past?

It is because my idea of "letting go" has always been suppression and avoidance. When people fuck me over, I get stuck in my own victimhood rewatching the footage on the security camera in the wonderful world of Alex main office. Watching you violate the space that I have opened up for you. That in turn has allowed the violators to continue to violate my peace. Determine how many boundaries are set up in order to feel safe. Forget sadness. I avoid that emotion. I relish myself in anger. Time allows for my mind to worry about something else while two invisible hands press real hard and smooth until it is developed into anxiety, insecurity, extra security, immediate poppin off and hand clapping. The emotions are pressed into a goo

that is manufactured into jars. I keep those on my shelf. I use the goo to gain control by reenacting what I wish I did when I felt my power stripped away. I call that concoction a grudge. That shelf is full of suppressed anger that I avoid working through. Sometimes it feels powerful

because I feel like I have control. But the more grudges you make the more it takes up space. That space could be used for growth and self development.

My mind was heavy that day. Looking at all of the grudges that I held. How much I depended on these jars to keep my victimhood alive. Even my wanting to take matters into my own hands, was the grudge nudging me to control my narrative and find power in making someone feel how I was feeling inside. But I learned the hard way that I can't control people. People have their own narratives and ideologies. People don't think the same things. So how does one gain control of the narrative and basically detox themselves from the bountiful grudges sitting on my shelf? Forgiveness

But I don't know how to do that shit. I just told y'all I lived an entire life of avoiding conflict. I thought forgiveness and letting go was amping my inner security system. So how does one forgive? The same search for examples of healthy friendships, I looked straight to my family to provide answers.

Based on memory, I started examining how my family forgave others. It wasn't enough. There weren't too many examples of forgiveness there. For the most part, we all deal with conflict the same way.

TV shows and movies have examples of people saying that they forgive the other person, but it is always sudden or to help climax the plot. The characters typically go back to their harmful ways, bringing up the past in arguments, or the movie ends and we never see how they worked through it. That is not forgiveness.

I even turned to the bible. There are tons of examples of real people going through real shit. But each passage is about forgiveness. It is about the feeling of relief one feels when you choose love over grudges. None talked about the process of forgiveness or how they got there.

There has to be an example of forgiveness out there that is right in my face. And there it was. Shiny, With condensation raining down the glass. None other than Lemonade, by Beyonce. The album is a great example of someone who was hurt by someone they loved and yet managed to work through that pain all in the name of love. Beyonce forgives Jay-Z. I wanted to know how.

I reached out to 3 of my friends to ask them for forgiveness. How everyone including Beyonce was able to forgive.

So what is forgiveness:

According to God forgiveness is the Ultimate act of love and self love. Love enough to see past the pain and self love to not hold on to the pain. Rachel Ibarra Smith is proud Mexican Indigenous cisgender woman belonging to the Chiricahua Apache and Tohono Oodham Nations. Rachel worked with me at Weave a local rape crisis, domestic violence, and sex trafficking agency here in Sacramento. Rachel's beauty is transcendent in her wisdom and passion she

has for humanity. Specifically communities that reflect her identities as well as black and non black POCs. She was the perfect person to explore forgiveness with. Much like God, Rachel highlighted that forgiveness is a sense of personal freedom. I wanted to know more about the personal sense of freedom. How does one know that they have achieved this actualization. Rachel stated : “[its when] hate and fear turn into compassion and courage. Compassion sure but courage was different. I think of advocacy when I think of courage. But Rachel says “you have the courage to forgive yourself because you didn’t know that the hatred (in my case) was holding you hostage. You also have the courage to be willing and open minded. It takes a lot of courage to be willing, open minded and understanding. Anger + Fear = hate. That’s how I saw it for myself.”

My next friend had similar ideas of forgiveness. Amanda Aledghi is a Mental Health Advocate through and through. She is a white cisgender womxn educated and certified in making the world a better place. Her creative approaches to self care and conversation of social justice and mental health have captivated not only the youth that she works for but myself. She is a person who makes sure to check her privilege twice at the door and amplifies voices that otherwise would be silenced. She is cool. The perfect person to poke at their brain.

Amanda explains “Forgiveness is incredibly personal in nature. It is both a process and an outcome. When we arrive at the outcome of forgiveness we may find that we have gained a stronger relationship with the self along the way.”

My last friend furthered this sentiment of personal growth. Sidney Caldwell is a black cisgender woman. I met Sidney a couple of months ago at my last job. We bonded over the “Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome” by Dr. Joy Degruy and just the overall navigation through white spaces. Sidney is also educated and certified. She says “ There’s a quote that states, ‘forgiveness is me giving up the right to hurt you for hurting me.’ I believe this truly embodies the definition of forgiveness and can give us an understanding of how to initiate the process.”

The process that’s what I was searching for. Beyonce went through the process. How did she start forgiveness? Well we have to discuss lemonade.

It might sound wild, but I was discussing Lemonade with a friend prior to all of this happening. I was explaining the deep and complex untangling Beyonce had to do for this Album. My friend said something that stuck with me since that discussion. “What does it say that Beyonce got back with Jay-Z after he cheated on her?” Still staring at the ceiling, I thought about that question, and then asked myself a new one. “Did Beyonce Forgive Jay-Z or did she give in to the abuse?” I also wondered with all of the power and acclaim Beyonce has on her own, why would she stay with someone who does not see or value her worth. It always comes back to love. On a Podcast called Dissect (a serialized dive into critically acclaimed albums), the hosts are dissecting Lemonade in its entirety. I binged each episode catching up to Love Drought. If you have not heard Beyonce’s Lemonade, please go listen to it on any platform that you listen to music.

Beyonce is at the point in her life and relationship where she is beginning to listen to her own intuition and find her voice and power. With this comes challenges, with part of her life that are insisting on remaining the same. That one being her husband and his lack of personal growth and infidelity. He cheated multiple times with multiple women. Each time believing in his freedom to maneuver his pain in search of instant gratification. Ultimately causing pain for his wife- Beyonce. Beyonce achieves this same power of instant gratification, by calling him out for the late nights, and building more barricades to alleviate the constant thinking (drinking, fucking whoever, working, smoking, buring his shit, etc.). She does everything including leaving their home, to erase the thoughts and ease her pain.

I wondered if one has to forget in order to forgive. Forget all of the trespasses? Is forgiveness forgetting? Amanda mentioned that “ the process of forgiveness can also remind us of our own sense of self worth, value in the world, how we allow others to treat us in relationships and how we can show up for others.”

I asked Rachel the same thing. Does one have to forget in order to forgive? I was met with an immediate text back simply saying in all caps “FUCK. NO.” She continued by saying “ You shall never forget. Because then I will forget where I came from. Remembering helps me to learn from the patterns that led to the original issue that made you hate in the first place. I hope that makes sense.”

Of Course it makes sense. Unhealthy patterns in any form can stunt growth in a person and in the relationship. The discovery of the unhealthy friendship pattern is what led me to this moment. Crying and asking myself the same questions once again.

Tired of running, Beyonce begins to look inward. She examines past relationships with her mother and generations before. Asking her mother questions about her past relationships. Praying for her mother validates the internal whirlwind that is going on inside. She realizes she is not alone. Her mother was hurt, her mother was hurt, and their sisters, aunts, friends. And all of their mothers were Black womxn all hurt by Black mxn. She began her quest to heal those wounds for the sake of her daughter. She lands in the same space staring at the ceiling. Wondering to herself why she cannot rid herself of the love she has for him? Why was it so hard to let go?

Rachel mentioned the same dissection into the past. “ Education about things helps me let go... Historical trauma and intergenerational trauma for Native Americans helped me to let go because once I was educated and understood, it allowed me to put those pieces together and take the responsibility off of me. Meaning I am not a bad person. I know these behaviors because my ancestors didn’t know better because they had to survive.”

Diving deeper into her past, Beyonce also had to explore her relationship with her father. Much like my father, Beyonce was raised with the notion to be strong, take care of the family, and literally suck in my tears. Fight over being peaceful if that means that family is now in danger. No

signs of weakness, by any means necessary. Much like Beyonce, I had to unlearn specific patterns that I internalized while my father raised me. Beyonce made the executive decision to choose weakness over wickedness.

Amanda says “ Once we come to terms with our feelings, we can choose to forgive and move on from that relationship. The process is riddled with sadness and anger, sometimes even guilt or second guessing our role in the scenario...”

It seems like forgiveness is sitting in the discomfort of digging through the past. Almost like else diving off the cliff into the truth of the past. It hurts reliving and revealing all of the actions that you and the person displayed.

I asked Sidney if it was necessary to forgive someone in order to find peace. She said “ Yes I think it is. Because otherwise, the offense will continue to take up space in your mind, no matter how much you push it back. And I also think that when you don’t forgive you’re more likely to use the offense as justification for behavior in the future.” Love Drought was the song in which she starts to wash away all of the pain from the old relationship in search for peace.

She began asking real questions that only Jay-Z could answer, accepting the response over time. It seems like the song is Beyonce's inner self working through the changing lens of their past relationship. She questions his honesty in the beginning because of his patterns of lying. She knows he’s trying as he answers all of her questions about her infidelity. This is the time where she is asking and listening for understanding. Why is it so hard for Jay-Z to accept love? But what sparked Beyonce to even be in the space to forgive her husband. Sidney says what sparks a person to forgive “ is recognizing the impact of the burden of grudge. Because the weight of carrying it may start to become too much.

It seems that the burden of holding on to the power of hurt was too much for Beyonce. She was drowned by thoughts of him with and without her middle finger in his face. Choosing to be the soldier that her father has made her into, can no longer fight this battle. Beyonce didn't give in, and she is not trying to avoid these patterns but trying to let them go.

So how does one let go? Beyonce and her husband, both chose weakness and vulnerability in Sandcastles and declared that they were going to work hard to maintain these new boundaries and move forward into freedom. They went to couples therapy, and worked to build new boundaries and communication. She demanded that he into her eyes while having sex, and to treat her better than the queen she is. Beyonce was able to free herself from the curse she and many black womxn face within themselves.

Rachel explains that the process of letting go is through Mindfulness meditation, and spiritual connection. For me mindfulness meditation cultivates this witness of who I actually am vs. who I think I am. It reveals patterns, healthy thoughts, solutions and super ugly thoughts which result in negative actions. To stay present while letting go for me is literally sitting through the discomfort. I tend to get anxious and want to get up and move, because I have nowhere for my

anxious energy to go. Feel it, cry about it - or however it is one moves through letting go. The goal is to not avoid."

Amanda furthers this by saying " Once we come to terms with our feelings, we can choose to forgive and let go allowing them back in or else, we can forgive and move on from that relationship.

Sidney's piece mentions that reconciliation is not necessary. " Just because you forgive someone does not mean that you have to accept that person back in your life as they were before. Chances are if what they did fundamentally changed the relationship, you probably won't want them back in the same capacity. That's perfectly okay, but just make sure you are doing it for the improvement of your own life and not to spite the individual."

I asked Rachel if it was necessary to tell the person of your process of forgiveness. In Alcoholic Anonymous groups, they have an entire step dedicated to accountability and forgiveness. According to jasonwhaler.com the first thing that came up on my google search says "**Step Eight of AA Alcoholics Anonymous** is the beginning of the process of making amends, **forgiving** others and possibly being **forgiven** by them, in addition to **forgiving** ourselves" Members go back and ask forgiveness to those that they have harmed. I always wondered if the person does not get forgiveness from the person, can they move past that 8th step. I was met with multiple answers. Either way, Rachel says " No not necessarily. I think it's appropriate IF (hard if) it doesn't harm that person." She opens up by sharing " I never told my step dad I forgave him for being useless. But that freedom was necessary for me to heal and also to work on codependent behaviors. He was an abusive alcoholic and would also shame me for being Mexican. I ended up having pity on him and praying for him because he was very sick."

There is that courage and compassion right there. The courage to face the past and open up and the compassion to see her step dad as a human being. Beyonce was able to do the same. Well she has always seen him. But understanding that the way he internalized his past is also why it was easy to fall into random pussy, and challenging for him to accept love.

Beyonce found her freedom by finding her power in her voice, and choosing to love herself enough to never sacrifice that in her relationship again.

I have so much more to learn in my exploration into forgiveness. But what I have learned is extra vital. Forgiveness is not a sudden act, but a process that deserves and demands all of its attention. Rachel explains forgiveness is a spiritual awakening. " You identify the problem and get into action. The mess is the beginning of letting go. Some call it "the hallway." When I started to do the work, the letting go happened without my permission. It is the sacred part of healing."

Crying and searching the corners of my mind to free myself of the hoarded grudges, was the beginning of my spiritual awakening. I left the incident telling myself to forgive. Not just people, but the patterns. I decided to choose self love in keeping my sanity. I looked at the shelf

differently. Claustrophobic with all that surrounded me. It's a daily task to unpack each grudge, and spill the contents down the drain. But I am willing to do it if it means room on my shelf for gaining a stronger voice, and inner peace.