

Many of our ilk, that is, smart, well-educated, liberal religionist---and those who define themselves as non-religionist---reject the Adam and Eve story and the idea of original sin. I include myself in that group. It seems strange that God would set up rules to deny his children knowledge of good and evil. And while it's easier to believe, after some wrestling with myself, I've come to reject the notion that it's always the woman's fault.

While I'm not comfortable with the notion of original sin that passes on through every generation, perhaps we shouldn't be so quick to throw the whole story to the curb. There is an alternative, less literal, more liberal interpretation of the story. I take the story to say that human beings are inherently flawed, or broken.

As you may have noticed, we human beings are not perfect creatures. Each and every one of us has physical and/or personality deficits; we all make mistakes. We humans, we cheat, we lie, we kill and steal. Some more than others. Not all of us are engaged in activities that run counter to the Ten Commandments or even secular law. But if not yet, each of us is capable of all these things.

There is another form of brokenness common to us humans, common to humanity. We all can be self denigrating. Either because we've accepted someone else's "negative" evaluation of us or, because we have chosen to believe a thought, or an idea of how we are "supposed" to be. We compare ourselves to others or to a mental concept of what's "appropriate" or "right" or ideal.

Because we all have physical, psychological, and emotional maladies and are all subject to self-denigration, we are in need of redemption, forgiveness, if we are to have any life worth living. We need to be able to be saved and resurrected from our negative beliefs about ourselves.

I think its fair to say, that we as humans, generally believe in redemption, forgiveness, a second chance...because we know we all make mistakes and are not perfect. Often we are much more generous, much quicker to forgive others than we are to forgive ourselves.

I suspect it has something, maybe everything, to do with acceptance. I am much more likely to accept that you are not perfect than I am to accept my own imperfections. There is this thing called pride that often blinds us to our own imperfections and gets in the way of admitting/acknowledging them when we do see them.

There is also an identifiable segment of the human race that demands forgiveness, or a second, third and fourth chance...while being largely unwilling to grant the same to others. This is an egotistical or arrogant orientation to the world. Such people might be thought of as having a deficit of humility.

Being overly generous with forgiveness to others while neglecting the self, is not a formula for well-being. Neither is being quick to forgive oneself and slow to forgive others. There is a certain balance that is needed if we are to be healthy and whole; to live a healthy and whole life.

Acceptance and forgiveness are often essential component parts of the healing process. It is good for us to have these reference points — acceptance and forgiveness-- as we go about living our lives. It's important because we are all broken or wounded and in need of healing.

There are so many ways and so many times in our lives that we become wounded. We carry any number of these wounds with us through much of our lives. Others may grab us at any time and without warning. We are all regularly in need of healing or becoming more whole.

Sometimes we can identify the source of our wounding. Sometimes we don't recognize the nature of our wounds or even that we have been wounded. Sometimes we know but find it easier to not notice, to not think about it, to tell ourselves that it's in the past or it happens to everyone. Being very busy is a very good way to not notice.

Some of us were wounded during our early years. Maybe we were weaned too soon or not held enough. Maybe we felt abandoned or insufficiently loved. Maybe we were regularly the brunt of family jokes. Maybe we were abused.

Some of us didn't hear well or needed glasses during our early school years and were made to feel badly about ourselves. Some of us just never seemed to fit in with the other kids or be "like" the other kids. We didn't feel accepted or appreciated for who we were.

The ways in which we can be wounded can make a never-ending list. Each and every one of us could help to create that list. The list might include being too short or too tall; flat-chested or overly developed; too skinny or too fat; too black or not black enough; too shy, too slow, or uncoordinated; not smart enough; not pretty enough, not likeable enough. Maybe we lived on the wrong side of the tracks.

As years go on, maybe we come to understand that a parent is an alcoholic or untrustworthy. Perhaps our parents divorced, maybe we flunked out of school or were fired. Maybe we experienced unrequited love, infidelity or got divorced. Maybe a parent or sibling was ill or died. Perhaps it is us who becomes debilitated, has a stroke, a heart attack or is diagnosed with cancer or some other disease. The list can go on and on, with greater or lesser specificity.

There are so many ways we can become wounded and be in need of healing. So what do we do when "fate kicks you in the head" as a friend once asked? How do we live with these wounds?

In truth, some amount of crying often helps. Kaleel, a woman I learned a great deal from once said, "don't interrupt someone when they are crying, tears are a connection to the soul". Yet, all things in moderation is still a good admonition.

I've long respected the Twelve Step process associated with Alcoholics Anonymous. It offers a credible roadmap to healing, to becoming more whole. It is a template, a model, for change. In my interpretation, it begins with a focus on humility.

Humility, —not the auh shucks kind -- genuine humility allows us, requires in fact, that we take our guard down. It humanizes us. It requires that we acknowledge that we are not in charge, we are not in control of outcomes. Humility lays the groundwork for acceptance.

Acceptance moves us closer to being real. Acceptance is a way of engaging truth, what is real. It requires that we engage the “what is” rather than what we might prefer. Acceptance requires that we make a choice. We choose not to focus on what’s right, wrong, appropriate, good or bad, but rather on “what is”. Acceptance requires that we move away from judgment, blame, evaluation.

Acceptance is not a one-shot deal. It requires that we make the choice to deal with “what is”, over and over again. Acceptance is not the same as “like “ or “approve of”. In fact, the hardest work can be to accept that which is ugly, painful or unwanted. Acceptance is simply to engage that which is.

It is not unusual that confession is closely associated with humility. It’s a form of acceptance. If we can say our truth out loud, it makes it more real, it gives our truth more substance. Confession brings our truth into the world, it’s no longer hidden behind our pride. Catholics are on to something by formalizing a process of confession. They seem to understand the value of confession.

When we confess, we increase the potential of forgiveness. I don’t know if confession is a prerequisite for forgiveness, but acceptance surely is. Accepting the truth of what is, lays the groundwork, but does not ensure forgiveness. Forgiveness is an elaborate process that I’m not sure anyone can fully delineate.

Somewhere embedded in forgiveness is an ability, a willingness to forgive self. If we can forgive ourselves for being human, for feeling pain and anguish, if we can forgive ourselves for feeling lonely, hurt or wounded, we might come to a place of being able to forgive others. Getting to a place of forgiveness can take time, it’s a process.

These are all steps on the road to healing. And healing is a route to wholeness. Wholeness is not about perfection, it is not about unblemished, it is not even about well-functioning. Wholeness is a by-product. It is a by-product of a genuine acceptance of “what is”, what’s real.

We can be whole and be poor or unemployed. We can be whole and be in pain. We can be whole and have only one leg or breast cancer or be on our deathbed. Wholeness is ultimately about accepting the truth of what is and living life as it is.

I don’t know if one can ever be “fully whole” in our lifetime, or in human form. But there are degrees of wholeness. One can become more whole with time, effort and consistency. Perhaps our objective in life is simply to become more whole. Maybe that’s our collective purpose in life---to become more and more of who we already are.

One manifestation of wholeness is the willingness and the ability to give with no need of reward. A manifestation of wholeness is the willingness and ability to love without bargain.

So often, we want to be liked, approved of, thought well of for what we give. We want to be seen as a good person, a generous person, some form of a superior personality when we give to others. In plain language, we often want something in return for our giving.

Likewise with love. All too often our love has hooks embedded in it. While we may not know it, or think it or even believe it, often we treat love as a bargaining tool. “I will love you if” ....you love me, if you take care of me, if you make me happy, if you share my values, or, or, or.

When we can love without bargaining, when we can give without needing a reward in return, we can know we are on the path of wholeness. When we can love ourselves with our imperfections, with our frailties, our disappointments...with our wounds, then we know we are on the road of wholeness. When we can love ourselves without contingencies we have become more whole.

When we act with an awareness that how we live, what we do and how we do it, has an impact on our perception of ourselves; when we act with an awareness that what we do and how we do it has an impact on the world around us---even if we can't see it, we are on the road to wholeness.

Humility, acceptance, confession, and forgiveness are all touchstones on the road to wholeness. They each provide fodder and an opportunity for spiritual development. And without spiritual development, how will we come to know who we truly are? How can we move beyond what we believe, the "how is should be"?

Without a developed relationship with our spiritual core, what do we use as a reference point for wholeness?

How will you know, if you are coming closer or drifting further away from your wholeness? It's not an easy question to answer... but the answer could save your life.