

Fatherhood and Forgiveness

by

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When you accept the role of being a father, you enter into a classroom for instruction. Ironically, the word "father" in some languages is used interchangeably with the word "teacher" (for example, "Rabbi" in the Hebrew language.) The irony is because there is probably no role that enforces greater learning on the part of the father than that of serving as an active teacher/ father in the lives of ones a child. Of course, there are the lessons from information as you learn how to do what needs to be done to insure the growth, security, protection, health and well-being of your children. In addition there are psychological lessons as you are forced to mature as a man forged by the necessities of caring for your children. As a partner with their mother in the nurturance and care of your children you learn patience, discipline selflessness, dependability. There is no way to talk a newborn out of the agonizing cries and demands to achieve comfort with no sensitivity to the hour of the day or your responsibilities on the following morning. Your needs must be made secondary until the youngster is comforted. This helpless little being needs you as a part of the parenting team and you can't walk away and hide simply because you are sleepy or you are tired. You are now in a boot camp that is uncompromising and is forcing the development of emotional muscles of endurance that you never knew that you had. Lessons of responsibility and dependability that you may have forfeited before meeting your young off-spring are now inescapable following your enrollment in the academy of fatherhood.

Though the intellectual and emotional lessons learned as a father are impressive, the spiritual lessons are even more remarkable. From the moment of the birth of your child, you experience a peek at the miracle of human creation that is a lesson in faith in and of itself. Whether an eye-witness and coach at the time of birth or simply an anxious father-in-waiting who supports their mate through the pregnancy and eventual birth, the father is taught a powerful lesson about forces larger than himself that make mighty miracles occur. Observation of the pain and process of birth and the responsibility of becoming a parent immediately generate a spirit of empathy and appreciation for ones own parents that ones life up to that point could never have taught. There is no book or verbal instruction that is capable of teaching the certainty of a higher force that is behind life and the miracle of creation than to be an active and present father in the beginning of the life of ones children. There is a new level of appreciation for your mate in the process as well as your own parents and the Higher Force that makes it all happen. This gives us a lesson of faith and gratitude that is repeated over and over as one watches over a sick child, experience the indescribable power of love that comes from the young child who meets daddy at the door with great joy or the tiny hand that grabs your hand or hangs on your leg seeking a level of security that teaches a lesson of the power of universal love.

Probably one of the greatest spiritual lessons that one learns from fatherhood is the importance and the capacity of forgiveness. From the early lessons of bearing no anger for having milk vomited on your favorite suit to being

showered with urine in your face as you patiently try to change a diaper, you grow in your capacity to forgive. You learn that hurts are transitory and must be passed over, whether the hurt comes from the innocence of the young child who breaks the window while slinging his bat or the more intentional insults that come from an impatient teenager who has not yet learned that you are incapable of buying her everything she wants. Fatherhood teaches you that pains that are inflicted from others must be let go and are not worth the process of harvesting and gathering them as trophies of old hurts. Only through the unconditional love that fathers develop through interacting with their children do they learn the capacity for true forgiveness and the ultimate innocence of even the most painful act. The lesson of selflessness that you learn from caring for others, minimizes the preoccupation with ones own hurts.

Our children inspire us to be better human beings and to live up to their high expectations for us. But, we also learn humility because we are made aware of our limitations to be the fully caring and giving person we would like to be for our children. As we grow in love and embrace our sense of responsibility for these young lives placed in our care, we also learn about our frailties and our inability to be all that we would really like to be. Whether it's with physical strength to beat up the bullies or slay the monsters that they confront in their lives or their dreams, the mental strength to answer the complex questions they ask or the spiritual strength to be that really morally perfect person that we would like to be as an example for them, we realize that we all run short of the mark of excellence. With this realization, we want their forgiveness for our shortcomings. We want them to forgive us for the imperfections in our inexperienced guidance during their younger days. We want their forgiveness for our failure to be the superhero that they wanted us to be. We want them to forgive us for the days that we disappointed them. In this yearning for their forgiveness, we learn to "forgive those who have trespassed against us." Long term grudges that we have held against our own fathers, we are able to let go because we can appreciate even their gross errors in the light of our struggles to be the best fathers we can be. We develop an appreciation for those mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and friends who ran short of the mark, even in their efforts to love us the best that they could. As we seek the forgiveness of our children and the hope that they will not hold our weaknesses against us, we forego any stored malice against those whose weaknesses might have caused us hurt. We realize that those who have intentionally hurt us simply have failed to learn the lessons of forbearance and unconditional love that our study of fatherhood is teaching us. The classroom of fatherhood is a special class and the learning is specialized in such a way, that no other experience in life teaches the lessons of personal development as does this role. Fatherhood is not just a choice in this life's journey, but a necessity on the spiritual journey to become the complete human beings we are intended to become.

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