

Keweenaw Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

“The Story of Forgiveness”

Rev. Erika Hewitt

Tucked among the sacred objects on my home altar, there’s a framed quote attributed to Robert Brault: “Life becomes easier when you learn to accept the apology you never got.”

This object takes special prominence in my home because – I don’t mind admitting this to you – I need to read it on a regular basis. The words have a way of finding my heart’s tender center.

Remembering to accept the apologies I never got—from any of the people who have hurt me—helps me notice and then let go of resentment. Usually, that resentment takes the form of stories: you know the stories that run in the back of our minds, like terrible muzak in a grocery store? It’s barely noticeable until the earworm burrows so deeply that we find ourselves, hours later, humming it unconsciously—or worse, feeling haunted by it.

You’re probably haunted or hounded by some of those stories, too: stories about “them” and the ways “they” hurt you. Whether the stories provoke sadness, confusion, or rage, it’s hard to escape them. The pain is real, and can last for years.

In my journey of learning to accept apologies I’ve never received, though, I’ve also learned how to shift my focus away from “them” and what “they” did to me. Instead, I try to turn loving attention on myself—not just to heal my wounded heart, but also to reclaim my identity. I don’t want someone’s hurtful behavior to define me, or force me into a Self I don’t recognize.

The other benefit of this vulnerability and empowerment is that when some of my armor falls away, I can begin to acknowledge the ways that *I’ve* hurt people: through ignorance, through error, through not having the tools to do better... or even (could it be true?) through spite. This deep honesty—*I have a heart full of wounds where arrows have landed; at times, I’ve shot those arrows into the hearts of other people*—dampens my hunger for apologies that will never arrive, and it humbles me into owning my own growing edges.

What stories—true and only half-true—are attached to your desire for apologies or forgiveness? Do they serve your spiritual life and your learning? Or is there room to let go and make room for something more life-giving?

Rev. Erika Hewitt (she/her/hers) lives in Bath, Maine. While she has two decades of experience serving UU congregations on both coasts, Erika serves as full-time staff at our Unitarian Universalist Association. She’s the UUA’s Minister of Worship Arts, overseeing resources and materials that support worship leaders around the world. Erika also has a thriving wedding ministry. She’s delighted to make a virtual visit to Keweenaw for this service!