

Reflection

The next time someone angers you, try some reflection. Step back from the situation. Then you can start to observe your angry thoughts. Are you jumping to any conclusions?

Imagine how Jesus would respond to your imagined enemy. Perhaps giving a smile and encouraging communication rather than showing ill-feeling in tone of voice or face. Wishing them well rather than rejection through avoidance. Pointing out the consequences of their misdeeds in a non-condemning way. Looking for something in the person that is likeable. Everyone has a good side somewhere if you look hard enough to find it.

Don't try to forgive too quickly. Wait until your anger has gone and you think you might be ready at least to accept them for what they are. But if we cannot accept then we cannot love.



Loving others - our enemies

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. *Matthew 5:44-45*

If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. *Matthew 5:39*

We think we know who our enemies are. The person up the street who turns on their music very loud, or the individual who is rude and discourteous. In fact anyone who threatens to harm our sense of well-being. We may want to avoid them, complain about them and even harbour fantasies of getting our own back on them.



Feeling really angry is a horrible emotion. It upsets our day. And if we allow anger to stay with us, it can turn into bitterness or resentment that will inwardly eat away at our happiness. And this state of mind makes those around us unhappy too. For they are affected by this mood even if the anger is not directed at them. They have to listen to our moaning about the person who has offended us.

Children and grandchildren learn from what we do much more than from what we say they should do. If we voice our contempt for the 'enemy' then a child will readily pick up the idea it is okay to adopt such an attitude. And we will have harmed their sense of right and wrong.

And of course the more people there are who are filled with feelings of dislike and even hate then what is created is a more fractured and angry society; one where conflict and social disorder are more likely to emerge. And the opposite is true - if we all can overcome enmity, and learn to better love difficult people, society is better off in so many ways.



A hidden resentment shows itself in one's gestures, tone of voice and facial expression. So the 'enemy' may not know what they have done wrong to offend us but they will nevertheless feel uncomfortable in our presence. If this is someone with whom we come into regular contact, such as a relative, person in the community or at our church, then reconciliation can be extremely powerful and important. Making a friend out of an enemy would improve the lives of two people at the same time.

Teaching focus

Loving family and friends is usually (but not always) relatively easy. The challenge for our spiritual growth is to stop disliking the immigrant, or even the social outcast whose social values and way of life is different from our own. As Jesus said:

If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? *Matthew 5:46-48*

How can we expect our own bad conduct to be forgiven by the Lord if we cannot forgive others? As we say in the Lord's prayer 'Forgive our debts as we also forgive our debtors'. You cannot experience the peacefulness of a heavenly state of mind if you carry around an unforgiving attitude.

So what does loving the enemy entail? Swedenborg pointed out that the words in the Gospel, about turning the other cheek, are not to be understood in a literal way. [see Arcana Coelestia 9049] The teaching is that we are spiritually protected from evil by the Lord as long as we do

not have anything approaching hate in our hearts. The emphasis is on our not automatically fighting back when injured.

Every evil carries with it a corresponding punishment, which is called the punishment of evil, and is in the evil as if joined with it; and from this springs the punishment of retaliation which was prescribed for the sons of Israel, because they were external and not internal men. Internal men, as the angels of heaven are, do not wish the retaliation of evil for evil, but from heavenly charity they forgive freely; for they know that the Lord protects from the evil all who are in good, and that He protects according to the good with them, and that He would not protect if on account of the evil done to them they should burn with enmity, hatred, and revenge, for these drive away protection. *Apocalypse Explained 556:8*

Group Exercise

Your home has been burgled, some valuables have been removed and everything left in a total mess. You are angry and feel your privacy and security have been violated. The police ask you to meet the criminal as part of a restorative justice programme in which victims confront wrongdoers with the consequences of their actions pointing out some home truths.

Your spiritual challenge is to love the enemy by hating the criminal act rather than the criminal himself. Offer your group the following questions:

- Trying to put yourself in the burglar's shoes, suggest possible ways he got to become the person he is. What has he possibly gone through?
- How does one start to assess the presence of any redeeming features in the person even when he appears to lack any remorse?
- What possible mitigating circumstances might be relevant? No factors of course excuses criminal behaviour.
- What would you say to point out the harm done to you? How could this be expressed in a non-resentful manner?
- What practical things might the burglar be able to do to help make amends to you?