

## **Micky Yamatani on pride as an obstacle to forgiveness and freedom**

In December 2017, I was in Traverse City, Michigan to attend a conference on freedom in Christ presented by some long-time friends, who were the speakers. Traverse City had a heavy snow at the time; the town was quite beautiful covered in white. Coming from Hawaii, I was very excited to be in the snow. This was like a mini-camp for me and I thought it was just really fun to be there. Although my friend had urged me to come that particular weekend because the conference would be good for me, the only reason I was there, really, was to spend time with my dear friends. Friends first, conference second. However, I was open minded.

The conference began with teaching about Jesus and what his death had meant. I had been exposed to Christian teachings because I attended a kindergarten run by Methodists in Japan, only because it was the closest kindergarten to my house. My family was culturally Buddhist, but not really religious.

There, I was taught about Jesus. But the extent of what I remembered was being Mary in a nativity play along with 3 other Marys simultaneously. (In this play, there was one Joseph and four Marys, as most girls wanted to be Mary, of course.) I heard at the school, and later in other situations, that Jesus had died for our sins. I simply accepted the phrase but really never understood what it meant.

Then, at the conference, I heard the explanation: The price of the sin is death. Before humans sinned, humans were immortal and we were not supposed to die, we were supposed to enjoy a perpetually happy life in the presence of God. But, Jesus, the son of God came to earth. He was sinless, therefore, as a result, he was not supposed to die. But Jesus got murdered unjustly.

Though Jesus was “killed” by humans, in reality, Jesus gave his life away willingly. He sacrificed himself and chose death. Thus, when sinless Jesus died, he died vicariously for our sins, giving us the hope of eternal life. Jesus’ voluntary death had the opposite effect on us. We, the sinful ones, now had the chance of heaven if we accepted his sacrifice for us.

It was really the first time anyone had truly explained this concept in a way which finally made sense. At the end of that night, we had the chance to make the choice to accept Jesus’s mercy and forgiveness. When I went up to the prayer station, the man there asked me, “What sins do you want to repent for?”

Even though I had heard the talk, I was bit taken aback by this request. In response, I said, “What sins?” I never thought of myself as a sinner. I thought the sinners were those who committed murder, burglary, assault, theft, deceit, fraud, adultery, etc. People who hurt others. Like my mother.

My mother was a very highly educated woman who valued career over family. But she was also a very mean person. Looking back, I now know that she was mentally ill, but, when you are a child, you are not able to see this, so you take and consume and to absorb all of the anger and violence without any shield.

To put it mildly, I was abused verbally, physically, spiritually, emotionally, etc. etc. The sadness of abuse from a parent is that you suffer both from the abuse and the abandonment. When a child gets cuts and bruises, normally, an injured child runs to her mother for medical and emotional attention, but when it is the mother who causes these injuries, there is no one to run to. Bruised and injured, with blood running down my body, I felt the physical pain, but also the profound sadness of being alone with no one to rely on or understand my emotional torment. If I cried, it would aggravate my mother even more and she would accuse me of “making up” my injuries. The best I could do was to hide them by wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pant and wear my hair long and over my face. I stayed quiet and looked down.

To this day, I still don’t know why my mother hated me so much. She seemed to believe that everything I did was “to her.” If I dropped a plate and broke it, in her mind, it was done to hurt her, if I got chicken pox, it was to embarrass her. And, so, every shortfall and shortcoming on my part was a “crime” against my mother for which I was duly punished. There was even a time when my mother got into a car accident where she ran over a pedestrian. She was at fault, but she came after me. She screamed and hit me for causing her to have this accident. She said the accident

happened because I had caused her to be anxious and irritated, thus, her irritation had caused her to drive badly. She said if the woman she had run over died, then, it was me who had killed the woman.

When you are seven or eight years old, to be told something like this is terrifying. I truly believed that I would get killed by the heavens (or her) if this woman died. I did not know that this woman was not seriously injured, so I spent countless nights in bed trembling in fear believing that I would die if this woman died.

My mother often told me that I should kill myself. She would hang a noose from the ceiling and tell me to hang myself and she would leave the room, shutting the door on my face. She would come back about an hour later and say, "Oh..... you did not kill yourself yet?"

One day, my mother said we needed to commit suicide together. She came into my room and tied one end of the rope to the bedpost. She then put the rope around her neck, then put the same rope around my neck, thus, we were tethered. She then said that, because I was such a bad child causing her troubles, we needed to die and that I would be the one killing her. She ordered me to pull the other end of the rope. She told me, pull, pull, pull, pull.....to kill her and myself.

To add another insult to an injury, during the same time, I was getting sexually abused by my own uncle, who lived with my grandparents, where we slept over every weekend. My sister would stay in my grandmother's room and I was put in the same room with my aunt and uncle. In the very early morning when my aunt would get up at around 6 a.m. to start preparing breakfast, my uncle would get me into his bed and engage in sexual activities. I was told by him to keep this a secret. When you are a young person, you can't really know what it is. You just have a gut-wrenching feeling that it is gross and not right but can't really articulate it. I had no one to go to for anything, thus, as usual, I had to keep this all to myself and pretend nothing was happening.

I was sad. No question about it. Since I was taught to pray in the kindergarten, I remember praying to God: "Dear God, please make sure I am dead before the morning comes." I knew death would put an end to all the pain and suffering.

Years passed. This pattern of abuse continued. I decided to run away...but my form of running away was to study really hard to go to college as fast as possible. I studied really hard, graduated at 17, and went to the University of Michigan. I was excited to be there, and I was doing well in school. I seemed OK but things were not OK. I was not like other girls. I had no ability to connect genuinely with other people. I didn't hate people but I felt unconnected. Years of abuse had done its damage; detachment was a defense that kept me sane. I had no ability to even know that there are such things as connections to people that brought emotional wealth. I could not have known, given the life I had, that there was love in the world.

Inside, I was full of hatred, anger, self-pity, hurt, and loneliness, yet, I had no way of knowing that I even had these emotions. I was even disconnected from my own emotions. I was flat. However, due to these repressed emotions, I was cutting myself almost every day; I had been doing this since I was 17. By my junior year, I was done, ready to call it quits. I made a very systematic plan to kill myself. To this day, I vividly remember all the steps I took to go through with the suicide. I was very aware of what I was doing. But suicide didn't work out the way I had predicted.

Unfortunately, (in my mind) I woke up in a hospital bed at the U of M Medical Center. I then ended up in the psych unit for three and a half months in which I received "therapy" that did not make much sense to me. After the discharge I felt worse than before. I had nowhere to go. There was no respite; no dream that death would end my suffering. I remember walking to a cemetery and standing by a gravestone and asking the grave, "Do you, too, not want me? Am I not welcome even by you?"

Years passed. After I graduated from college, I went onto law school and became a licensed attorney in New York and Hawaii. Time does heal wounds naturally to some extent, and as an adult not living with my mother, I was doing better. I was OK, but just OK. I was still isolated and still cutting. This was me at this conference in Traverse City where I was asked to repent.

Given my background, I was very confused by the request. Compared to my abusers, I looked extremely innocent and good, at least in my own perception. But I felt I had to say something. So I told the prayer person that many years ago, in Michigan, I had tried to take my own life. And he asked, "So you feel sorry for this and want to repent?" I said "YES" to his inquiry but actually felt in my heart, "Absolutely NO." I was not sorry. I was still convinced that anyone in my shoes would have committed suicide to put an end to a such a sad, bad life. I felt completely justified.

They prayed for me anyway and helped me make a prayer of repentance. Then, I went through this process several more times, repenting for things I did not really feel much sorrow for.

At the end of the conference, there was a chance to go to a prayer minister for a longer time and really talk over my problems and questions before praying together. I decided to try this and it made a big difference for me. The person guided me step by step, and I began to understand my sins. I finally understood that I was a BIG sinner. I may not have hit people; I may not have burned someone, or raped someone, or abused anyone—all things I had experienced. But, I was a sinner. I was full of self-pity; full of anger towards those who hurt me; full of rage; full of distrust; full of hatred in my heart for those who hurt me; full of jealousy towards others whom I believed had it better; full of pride for having accomplished so much despite the bad life I had had; full of arrogance; full of superiority; and repeated here again, absolutely full of SELF-PITY.

I did not know that these things were hindering my ability to trust in others' love for me and in God's love for me, to love God, and to follow after Jesus.

We prayed about these sins and asked God to help me forgive, to let go of hard feelings, let go of grudges, let go of the need to hold on, and more. I also asked God to free me from the cutting. The cutting that had continued up to this point was definitely a sign of *not* letting go. By continuing to put scars on my forearm, I was able to see, on my own arm, something tangible, something tangible that evidenced the past assault against me. But now that I had chosen to forgive, I didn't need that any more.

In Traverse City, at the conference, I finally understood the futility of my actions, the sins of my heart, and thus, was freed.

After my mind was freed, I started to have so many abilities that I didn't have before. I now paint and compose music. The extent of what a freed mind can do is infinite! We are all God's children.