

The Power of Forgiveness Part 2

Two months ago I wrote an article on forgiveness and the feedback was overwhelming. More people commented to me about the forgiveness article than any other. So I am compelled to go further in exploring the power of forgiveness.

To begin, I would like to tell you a story about letting go of resentments. In ancient times in the Far East, women had few rights and little respect. In the Buddhist tradition a male Buddhist monk would not even acknowledge the presence of a woman when encountered in public. With that background, here is the story.

Two Buddhist monks, a master and a student, are traveling on a road to their temple. They come to a river which must be crossed. A woman is standing on the bank afraid to cross the river. The older wise master picks up the woman and carries her across the river and puts her down safely on the other side. The two monks resume their journey in silence although the student monk is very upset with his master. After a while he can't remain silent and yells at his master, "I can't believe you would do such a thing. I am angry and disappointed with you for helping that woman." The master calmly turns to his student and replies, "I let the woman down long ago, why are you, still carrying her?" So what is the moral of the story? Don't hold on to your resentments. Learn to forgive and move on.

People will ask me, "Why is it so hard to forgive?" The reason is because it is the most powerful of human actions. It takes enormous power to overcome our need to be right and prideful. There are easy and practical ways, however, to make forgiveness easier. One practical way to make forgiveness easy is to distinguish it from an apology. You can forgive another person without seeing the person face to face. For instance, you can forgive someone who has already passed away. Apologizing is an option, not a necessity in order to forgive. Another distinction is forgiveness is not the same as acceptance. People confuse the two actions and feel guilty that if they forgive someone, they must also accept them. Not true.

I can illustrate this with my own experience. I have a family friend who is like an aunt to me. I have known her all my life and she even changed my diapers when I was a child. Now, though she is an out of control alcoholic. Her addiction is leading to progressive insanity. She is a professional at causing family upset among my relatives. I care for her and I forgive her, but I don't have to accept her. I do not engage in any communication and would not invite her over for dinner. I avoid her. That's all. No guilt. No need to accommodate or accept her any longer in my life. I need do no more than forgive.

My final comment on forgiveness involves another story, this one from September 11, 2001. There was a phone call made by a bond trader who was on the top of one of the towers of the World Trade Center. The call was recorded on his answering machine at home. This call is imprinted in my mind forever. The first thing I noted was the man called home. He did not call his stockbroker. He called home. He called home to tell his wife I love you, I am sorry, and please forgive me. He called home in his final moments

to love and forgive. This man left the world with a clean slate. His intention to forgive gave him the power to walk with bravery through life's final door. I am certain he sits in God's presence now.

We all will come to this moment in our lives. When you do, you will look back on your life and realize how silly all of your resentments were. In the end, pride is a comedy. What will be on your mind is the love you shared with others. You don't need to be in the final moment of life to realize this. Don't wait to forgive. As the story goes, set your resentments down on the bank of the river and continue life's journey, there is no need to keep carrying them.

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