

The T Zone

Chapter 8

Forgiveness

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Forgiveness

The healing process is not complete without forgiving those who have hurt us. Forgiveness is the logical outcome, the last step in discharging the negative content in the psyche. If we look at forgiveness as part of a process rather than as a distinct and separate act, we realize that forgiveness is not in itself a choice but rather the inevitable result of making the right choice. The act of forgiveness can neither be willed nor forced because we can not forgive those who caused us harm until we first have released all the hurt that harm has caused us.

When we have discharged all of our negative emotional content, forgiveness comes naturally and easily. It is not something we have to do but something we want to do. Otherwise forgiveness is an act of will, something we force on ourselves from the outer layers of the mind, where the psyche interacts with the external world, rather than a process that moves troubling emotional content up and out from the depths of the psyche. It is dangerous to try to force our will on the deeper levels of the psyche from the outside because it means we are attempting to move in a direction that is not in harmony with the internal functions of the psyche. The psyche will respond to our orders and demands by creating an internal rebellion, the outcome of which will be far removed from the result we originally intended.

Let's say, for example, that Tim and Bob had been best friends for years. Then Tim stole fifty dollars from Bob. Bob didn't learn about the theft for some weeks and only found out about it because Tim told a mutual friend in confidence about what he had done. That friend came forward and told Bob what had happened. Naturally, Bob was furious. His anger wasn't so much about the money. He would have given Tim the money if he had asked for it. His anger was about the breach of trust. He knew that breach could never be repaired. Tim had betrayed him. Their friendship was over. Bob decided that the only thing he could do was to forgive Tim and move on. So he went to church, prayed and forgave Tim. He felt good about it for a few days. Then he found himself getting inexplicably angry and wanting to beat Tim to pieces. Bob was perplexed. He had forgiven Tim. Why was he feeling this way?

Bob was angry because he had tried to force forgiveness on his psyche. Within a few days his unconscious responded to his prayers for forgiveness by throwing up the real feelings he had not dealt with in any meaningful way. In this instance Bob's psyche refused to either cooperate with his conscious will or collude in his dishonesty toward his real feelings. Instead his psyche rebelled and showed Bob the truth of the matter.

In dealing with the psyche it is always best to do first things first. If we wish to be free enough to forgive those who harmed us we have to first face, feel and discharge our anger and hurt. There is no real escape from the feelings buried in the psyche. They must be faced if we wish to move forward with our lives. The purpose of the T zone is to uncover and heal the dark realities buried in the psyche so we can be free to move forward and create a better reality in our lives.

The Implicit Danger in the Notion of Forgive and Forget

The popular notion that has been perpetuated for centuries about forgiveness is that we should “forgive and forget.” Implicit in this assumption is the idea that forgiveness is a form of self-sacrifice. In this view, the practice of forgiveness means that we should be big enough to forget what happened and permit the perpetrator who caused us considerable pain to be allowed back into our lives. Sometimes this practice is the sensible thing to do. For instance, I will forgive my son anything. He’s young and bound to make mistakes. Besides, there’s not a mean bone in his body. But “forgive and forget” is not always the wise thing to do. It depends on who has hurt us.

Let’s say that I was involved in a relationship with someone who was verbally and emotionally abusive on a consistent basis. This person’s behavior caused me a great deal of pain, robbed me of my self-esteem and diminished my sense of personal power. I worked very hard to forgive him. But as soon as I forgave this person, he repeated the same abusive behavior. Nothing had changed. My forgiveness work had not resolved anything except that it had encouraged my abuser to continue to abuse me. He perceived my forgiveness of him as a sign of weakness. And he was right.

Forgiveness and Self Sacrifice

Forgive and forget keeps us in harm’s way when it is practiced on the wrong kind of person. This kind of self-sacrifice is not warranted and is rarely appropriate. It is forgiveness without boundaries and without self-respect. It robs us of our self-esteem, undermines our personal power and encourages an ongoing sense of helplessness. It changes nothing. The same patterns will continue. Forgiveness as self-sacrifice is neither helpful nor noble. It does not put us on a higher level than our opponent. All thoughts to the contrary are illusory in nature, nothing but the rationalizations of weakness. Moreover, since the practice of “forgive and forget” fails to either empower us or free us from the past, it means that we will not have the power we need to make the vertical ascent, and find our wholeness. There is nothing practical, or spiritual about this form of forgiveness.

The following four points are a summary list of the major problems in the practice of “forgive and forget”:

1. The policy of “forgive and forget” is self-sacrificing. It diminishes our self-esteem and personal power.
2. Nothing changes through the practice of “forgive and forget”. The same destructive behavior continues.
3. “Forgive and forget” does not put us on a higher level than our opponent. It simply makes us vulnerable to receiving more blows.
4. The practice of “forgive and forget” prevents us from making the vertical ascent.

Forgive and Remember

A wiser course in the practice of forgiveness is to “forgive and remember”. When we forgive and remember we are able to set effective boundaries and empower ourselves. For instance, if someone abuses me I will forgive that person. I will process and discharge all my negative emotion so I can reach forgiveness. But I will also make sure, to the best of my abilities, that this individual never has an opportunity to abuse me again. He will not be allowed back into my life because he has shown me what he is capable of. My boundary regarding abuse is very simple. “Use me or abuse me, and you lose me.”

Forgiveness and Anger

The main reason I forgive those who have hurt me is so that I won't carry anger towards them in my psyche. If I do hold onto anger I hurt myself in several ways. First, the anger I allow to get stuck in my system severs my connection to the Oneness, festers in my unconscious and creates a gap in my psyche. Second, if I carry this anger in my system I am vulnerable to being attacked by other similarly abusive people. My repressed anger will bring me down to their level where I will be open to receiving their blows. Buried anger will not protect me. Instead it will expose me to more harm.

In contrast, forgiveness permits me to be centered and connected to the Oneness. That connection allows love to flow into me and through me. That love is unconditional, impersonal, sustaining and supportive. Impersonal love allows us to love our enemies and those who have hurt us. But it doesn't mean we have to personally like them. Liking someone is a personal choice. Forgiveness returns us to the impersonal state where we can love and be whole, no matter what. That is our entire obligation. We don't have to like those who have hurt us or let them back in our life, just love them and let them go in love. But we do need to set effective boundaries when we forgive. We don't want the past repeated.

If I persist in holding onto my anger it ties me indefinitely to the person who made me angry. Anger that is unacknowledged and repressed creates a karmic relationship. Karmic relationships are unpleasant, debilitating and repetitive. When we fail to deal with a traumatic situation we will experience that situation over and over again. Remember the words of Lao Tzu, "Because the sage confronts his difficulties he never experiences them." The failure to confront our anger and the practice of "forgive and forget" both lead to the same inevitable result. Negative situations continue, personal power is diminished and self-esteem is destroyed.

To forgive and remember is not self-sacrificial like the practice of forgive and forget. Rather it is self-affirming. We forgive those who trespass against us for the advantages that forgiving them brings to us. When we forgive and set effective boundaries we take back our power and increase our self-esteem.

Forgiveness and Freedom

No one has the right to abuse us. Abuse in any form is intolerable and unacceptable. To forgive and permit abuse to occur or reoccur in our life is a potent form of self-denial and lack of self-respect. We forgive to increase our strength and autonomy, not to lose our power and continue our enslavement to those who would bind us to them. When we forgive in the right way we cut our ties to the past and are no longer its slave. We emerge from forgiveness whole and psychically intact, ready to embark on an entirely new course in life.

Forgiveness and Self Love

To forgive and remember is an act of Self-love. Self-love is not narcissistic because it does not induce self-involvement. We are not preoccupied with our dilemmas. Quite the contrary; we are able put ourselves aside, enjoy life and help others. The T zone is a place of deep alchemy where the old life dies and a new one emerges from the depths of our hidden darkness. What comes out of the T zone is always wider, deeper and more enriching than the old life was. We walk through the fire to rise in the Light. Forgiveness is the moment in the process when we finally cross the threshold and emerge in that Light.