

The Importance of Forgiveness

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I take a lot of pride in the fact that I'm a very forgiving person. To me, this is not a weakness, as it is sometimes seen in our society, but a strength. Forgiving doesn't mean condoning the act. The members of your family of origin can have a lot of their own issues that they bring to the structure, and this can make for a very contentious environment growing up (and on). But if you don't deal with the issues from your family of origin, in particular, that baggage stays with you throughout your entire life. The pain from the hurt that your parents and family of origin might inflict on you can stay with you, even when you think you've dealt with it.

Wilmot says that "understanding a person's goals, reaffirming the value of the relationship, granting another person a face-saving opportunity, or participating in a fair and open process sometimes bears no fruit."

Sometimes you can't agree on the nature of the violation, and that's okay—especially if you know that it won't happen again. The dynamics change once there's a balance of power, such as when a child grows up and a parent may not have the same amount of power in the relationship. Pruitt says that steps with reconciliation begin with facts about the past. I believe this is true, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you can share those facts with the other party. It might destroy the other party if you held the mirror up and they weren't ready to look into it.

Many years ago, I began to understand that forgiveness is one of the most important skills I could develop. Also, my spiritual views of the world include a strong belief that everyone is on his or her own path, and that every experience that we have is leading us toward soul growth. I began to see my childhood and other time periods in my life as experiences that made me who I am. If you have a very high self-esteem, you feel more comfortable in your own skin, and therefore more comfortable in accepting other people in their own skin. You can't change other

people, but you can change the way you react to them. This may sound cliché and trite, but there is some wisdom in that old saying. Changing your reaction can help you move beyond feeling like a victim, and more like a person who is in control. Sometimes you need to forgive, selfishly, for your own piece of mind.

Sometimes it helps to write down your feelings in a journal as a method of really clarifying your thoughts. You can also write the other party a letter that you know you'll never mail. This can be cathartic and allow you to analyze the issues. This can help you move beyond the injured innocence, a desire for revenge or punishment, obsession, and into the transcendence stage. This doesn't mean that issues will never surface about that situation or other party again, but it can give you the tools and objectivity to analyze, understand, and confirm your feelings about forgiveness and how to apply them to your life.

There's a popular saying to "forgive and forget." I think it's healthier to forgive and not to forget. This doesn't mean to obsess or not to move on. This means you are in a strong enough place and there's a balance of power that will not allow the other party to injure you in the same way, but by embracing the lessons learned from that situation, you have become a stronger and more complete person. According to Wilmot, joining forgiveness and forgetfulness minimizes the experience of one who has trusted deeply and been betrayed.

The process of forgiveness can lead you on a tremendous journey of self-discovery. It can help you develop a philosophy about the world and your place in it. It can give you a sense of empathy and understanding and compassion for other human beings, and to realize that we're all on our own paths but are heading in the same direction. Forgiveness possesses an intangible power that rationally is not fully comprehensible.