

Should the Abused Forgive?

Should people who are abused forgive the abuser? This question was discussed at a recent ISCAST seminar by Dr Alan Gijsbers, a drug and alcohol physician, Ms Roselie Freeman, a drug and alcohol counsellor, and Associate Professor David Clarke, a psychiatrist. Alan, a committed Christian and ISCAST fellow, and Roselie, a Jewish atheist, are colleagues in the Drug and Alcohol Unit at the Epworth Hospital Melbourne. They are in an ongoing professional debate as they share patients together. David, State Chairman of the Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship in Victoria has had a long-term professional interest in the interface between Christianity and psychiatry. Alan opens the discussion.

Alan Gijsbers' Approach:

*Dr Alan Gijsbers MBBS FRACP AChAM DTM&H PGDipEpi
Specialist Physician in Addiction Medicine Turning Point and the Epworth and St Vincent's Hospital.*

The nature of forgiveness

"When unjustly hurt by another, we forgive them when we overcome the resentment towards the offender, not by denying our right to the resentment, but instead by trying to offer the wrongdoer compassion, benevolence, and love; as we give these, we, as forgivers realise that the offender does not necessarily have the right to such gifts."

The thesis stated

A commonly believed myth in the secular world is that science invalidates Christian faith by proving that faith wrong. In this situation, the Christian teaching that you must forgive is challenged by clinical experience of psychologists and counsellors. They claim from their experience of people suffering injustice, and in particular those people suffering from abuse that the obligation to forgive actually hinders rather than helps recovery, in a number of ways:

1. It is unjust
2. It does not get rid of the anger and the outrage that the abuse has created. Suppressing that anger can lead to unhealthy behaviour like alcohol dependence, or other drug addiction, sometimes disguised as chronic pain.
3. It actually colludes with the patient's denial pattern where the patient pretends forgiveness has occurred when the issue is still very much with them.

See **Appendix 3** and **Appendix 2**.

What are the science-faith issues in this discussion?

The first question to ask is whether clinical experience is scientifically valid

Are the observations of **"The forgiveness trap"** (**Appendix 3**) valid?

Look at the statement **"Being heard"** (**Appendix 1**). How does one scientifically evaluate that observation? What does one make of the "ring of truth" that resonates from that statement.

Dangers of basing issues on clinical experience

- The danger of anecdote – generalisation from it may not be warranted
- The danger of observer bias – we only see what we want to see – how does this differ from the “trained eye?”
- The danger of reading into situation far more than there actually is. Experience of the repressed memory syndrome shows that ideologically committed counsellors and vulnerable patients can create figments of their imagination, not grounded in fact.

Is science the only epistemology?

Are there other ways of looking at issues which have validity – eg the “wise sayings of Proverbs – of which *being heard* might be a type.

Practical challenge to forgiveness

A number of writers describe forgiveness as being for saints, but unattainable for ordinary humans. See “Forgiveness fantasy” (**Appendix 2**) which is described as the opposite pole of the “revenge fantasy,”² and like it, it is unattainable, an impossibility.

Ideological challenges to the doctrine of forgiveness

Shmuley Boteach, a prominent Jewish Rabbi in “Kosher Emotions: a guided tour of the heart,” argues for limits and conditions on forgiveness. He is particularly critical of the South African Truth and Reconciliation commission. He has two points:

Justice is more important than forgiveness.

One has to hate evil. Hence there is only hatred for Hitler, Nazis, IRA terrorists, South African white murderers, and Timothy McVeigh. It is because of justice that forgiveness is not possible. “For us to extend forgiveness and compassion to [inveterate sinners who pay no heed to correction] in the name of religion is not just insidious, but it is to mock God who has mercy for all yet demands justice for the innocent.”³ “The bottom line is that there are some offences for which there is no forgiveness; there are some borders whose transgression society cannot tolerate in any circumstance whatsoever. Murder of the innocents is one of them.”⁴

Conditions on forgiveness

Forgiveness should not be unconditional and should only be given if there is true regret and apology by the perpetrator of the deed.⁵

Psychological approaches that take forgiveness seriously

1. Approaches that leave the issue of forgiveness aside – see “*The forgiveness trap*” (**Appendix 3**).
2. John Monbourquette, a psychotherapist and Roman Catholic priest in “How to forgive: a step-by-step guide,” takes a psychospiritual approach in describing 12 steps to forgiveness (see **12 steps of forgiveness, Appendix 4**).
3. Robert D Enright is a psychologist heavily committed to a psychological approach which strongly urges forgiveness. He has pioneered forgiveness as a psychological tool and has published extensively. He has a website, www.ForgivenessInstitute.org, a 60 point forgiveness questionnaire to measure the degree of forgiveness in your client, and in his book, “*Forgiveness is a choice: a step-by-step process for resolving anger and restoring hope*,” he

gives an outline of the forgiveness process (see **Guideposts for forgiving, Appendix 5**).

4. Robert Karen, in "*The Forgiving Self: the road from resentment to connection*", takes a much more narrative approach, with forgiveness as a possible goal once resentment has been worked through.

Scientific evaluation of Enright's approach

Since Enright claims to have scientific data for his promotion of forgiveness it is worth evaluating that:

1. He describes a study of 12 female incest survivors aged 24-54 years. All were anxious, depressed, and suffering from low self-esteem. Six were randomised to a group where they worked on forgiving the perpetrator. Six were in a control group without forgiveness counselling. "Those in the forgiveness group improved significantly. Before therapy they had been on average, moderately depressed. After forgiveness therapy they were, on average, not depressed at all. Their anxiety decreased, and their sense of hopefulness towards their own futures increased. All six were able to forgive the perpetrator...During the first year the control group showed no measurable psychological improvement....We introduced this group to the forgiveness process. Following 14 months of forgiveness instruction, these women also showed evidence of major improvement in psychological health. When we assessed the original forgiveness group one year after stopping the program, they had retained their good psychological health. All 12 women showed substantial psychological improvement."⁶
2. Enright describes a study by Cathy Coyle with 10 single men who started they felt unjustly hurt by the abortion decision of their partner. 5 men given forgiveness 1-to-1 showed evidence of decreased anger and anxiety as well as increased self-esteem and hope relative to the control group. The men in the control group were then given forgiveness education, and they were able to forgive and showed evidence of substantial psychological healing.⁷

I have some questions of this data

1. How valid is the data? I find it a bit hard to accept that all six improved in a year, all the control group showed no improvement and then all six in the control group improved when they were introduced to the forgiveness technique. One would have expected some difficulties in the treatment of this group of people and some improvement in the control group in the year they were being supported without the particular intervention.
2. How should the data have been presented? It is difficult to evaluate data which is published narratively in a book without (in the first study) being published in a peer review journal.
3. The sale of the forgiveness scale is problematic for me. How accessible should the questionnaire and indeed the whole technique be? Should it be made available free for other clinicians? We are starting to see here intellectual property as a marketable commodity.
4. Is it acceptable for the technique to be made credible by being published by the APA, the foreword to be written by Desmond Tutu and the dust jacket to proclaim that the author has been quoted in Time, McCall's, the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, the Chicago Tribune and the Los Angeles Times, as well as appearing on many radio and television shows?

The theological angle

"A theologian should be there to keep these people honest! I would hate to see the gospel of grace exchanged for a pottage of psychotherapy."

Forgiveness in the Bible

Sin and punishment—and mercy

There are many stories of sin, judgment and forgiveness in the Bible, starting with the first humans Adam and Eve who disobeyed God, ate the forbidden fruit, were ashamed of their nakedness and God in his mercy provided them with clothes (Genesis 3).

The story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4) is a story of jealousy and revenge, of God pleading with Cain to do right but Cain in his freedom and jealousy choosing wrong. Yet God does not abandon Cain, but puts his mark on Cain.

One of the greatest stories of forgiveness in the Bible is the story of Joseph whose brothers sold him into Egypt, but good came out of evil and Joseph forgave his brothers their wrongdoing (Genesis 37-50, especially 50:15-21).

One of the most telling stories is the story of the people of God (Exodus 32-34) who soon after their holiest moments when they had dedicated themselves to God turned and worshipped the golden calf. God's holy passion was against his people, but Moses prayed on their behalf and God turned back to them again. In the process Moses encounters the glory of God accompanied by the following words describing the character of the LORD:

"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

Exod 34:6-7 (NIV).

These profound words are repeated frequently in the rest of the Bible for example Psalm 103:8ff; Ps 86:5, 15; Psalm 145:8; and Jonah 4:2. The last is the most interesting, for it is the story of Jonah's harness of heart toward Nineveh compared to the LORD's compassion toward that city – the enemy of Israel. (For another attitude towards Nineveh, see the book of Nahum, especially 3:1-19). God was prepared to be merciful to Israel's ancient enemy; Jonah was not.

The story of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12) is a story of Israel's most famous king betraying one of his most loyal soldiers, sleeping with his wife and killing that soldier when he found out she was pregnant. Here is a gross abuse of power. The Bible puts the extra slant on the story that David was not satisfied with all that God has provided for him. David is profoundly sorry. That sorrow is expressed in Psalm 51, which asks God for forgiveness. The story says he received forgiveness, but at a price, for the consequences stayed with his family for the rest of his life.

Another Psalm, Psalm 32 describes the relief of having sin forgiven.

Vindication of the oppressed

There are a number of Psalms which describe God's vindication of the oppressed. These include Psalms 9 and 10, and also Psalm 41, 72. In the last the king will "Take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence..." There is a role here for the righteous in government to defend the cause of the oppressed and vindicate those who have wrong done against them. This arises out of the LORD's commitment to justice and vindication, see Isaiah 1:17, Deut 10:18, Proverbs 29:14, Isaiah 11:4, Jeremiah 22:16, Amos 4:1, Zech 7:10.

Stories of Jesus

"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go. "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

Matt 18:21-35 (NIV)

Teaching of Jesus

The Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:9-13 – with the follow-up teaching:

"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

Matt 6:14-15 (NIV)

Give, and you will receive in the way you give:

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

Luke 6:37-38 (NIV)

The example of Jesus on the cross

Then said Jesus, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

The teaching of Paul

“Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”

Col 3:12-15 (NIV)

What can we conclude? That God is shown to be a righteous judge who will not accept that anything goes. There is justice in the world, and the oppressed will be vindicated. But God is also merciful, and offers his grace as a gift. What's more God took the initiative, and sent Jesus Christ to die for sinful humankind before they had even said they were sorry. Overwhelmed by that gift, those who have received that forgiveness will in turn offer that same gift to others. That gift of forgiveness sets us free, and thus we can freely give to others also.

Roselie Freeman's approach to the issue

Roselie Freeman Dip Ed, Grad Dip Soc Sc, M Ed St. is a drug and alcohol counsellor and psychotherapist at the Epworth Hospital.

You wouldn't imagine that struggling with forgiveness would be a rewarding experience. Well, it has been. Alan and I have struggled with the forgiveness issue in our professional capacity but I have forgiven him for trying to turn me, if not into a Christian, at least into a believer! I am a very proud Jewess. My Jewish identity is one of the two most important aspects of who I am. However, at the same time I do not believe in God and feel no imperative to come to a stance of forgiveness from a religious point of view.

Just in case anyone should be thinking, "Ah well you come from the stance of a vengeful code of law," I must point out that the biblical law, "an eye for an eye," was reinterpreted almost 2000 years ago. This law was not originally a Jewish invention. It was widely accepted in ancient Mediterranean society, and was first enunciated by the Babylonian king Hammurabi, who died in 1686 BCE and who was famous for his code of law. The Talmud (Rabbinical interpretations of the Bible) found it inadvisable to follow that law literally. Long before the New Testament was written, the Rabbis suggested that the law should be interpreted to mean that if a person damages another person's eye, he is to recompense the victim with money; he is not to be punished by having his own eye removed. This stance was firmly reiterated to me as a young girl, growing up and learning with my rabbi's wife.

What is the definition of forgiveness? According to my concise Oxford dictionary to forgive is to remit, let off, pardon. According to my Word Thesaurus it can also mean clemency, pity, mercy, absolution, amnesty, exoneration, exculpation. And where is the victim left regarding these definitions?

In his paper on Forgiveness & Reconciliation⁸ in situations of sexual assault Rev. Dr. Peter Horsfield states, "Our thinking about what human forgiveness means has become confused, amoral and urgently needs clarification." He also adds that, "In pressuring, even coercing victims of sexual assault to forgive and forget we make a mockery of 'grace'. This cheapens the integrity of the woman, it cheapens the integrity of the church and ultimately, it cheapens the God of justice and compassion whom we proclaim."

From my perspective, telling someone that they must forgive is to metaphorically reabuse them. Moishe Lange a well-known Family therapist states "When I present my work on Holocaust survivors and their families, non-Jewish therapists often ask me about forgiveness. It is clear to me that, to many, the road to healing and recovery is through forgiveness. But many Holocaust survivors have confided to me that they feel completely misunderstood and re-traumatized by this attitude. I have never met a Holocaust survivor who considered the possibility of forgiving. To them, to forgive is to betray the memory of the dead. And no survivor feels authorized to forgive on their behalf. To be clear, the refusal to forgive is primarily internal, reflecting a state of mind."

The acceptance to forgive is also primarily internal. Sometimes a sincere apology from a perpetrator can be enough for someone to forgive. But what is sincere? How does the survivor evaluate what is sincere? Sometimes understanding can be the key to forgiveness. Sometimes it isn't. In seeking justice for a situation of the misdiagnosis of her mother's cancer, a client of mine has successfully sued the

offending doctor. She thought it would be liberating. She finds it isn't. My client fantasizes about the revenge she wants to have on the doctor. In fact she has it all planned. When her mother dies she will obtain a gun, kill the doctor and then kill herself. She says she knows she **must** forgive the doctor. She vacillates between revenge and forgiveness.

Judith Herman in her book *Trauma and Recovery* writes of the **fantasy of forgiveness** (see **Appendix 2**) and of the impossibility of transcending the rage and erase the impact of the trauma either by hatred or love. She states that true forgiveness cannot be granted until the perpetrator has sought and earned it. Genuine contrition in a perpetrator is a rare miracle. Fortunately, the survivor does not need to wait for it. Her healing depends on the discovery of restorative love in her own life.

My client repeats that she must forgive the offending doctor. I ask her why? She is startled. I can see that she thinks this is a strange question. I give her permission not to forgive the doctor. Her body language changes. She comes out of the slump she has been in and becomes more alert. I point out that the doctor has made a terrible, terrible mistake. In balancing the scales of justice she is planning pre-meditated murder. I ask her if she thinks the scales balance? I tell her that if she wants to forgive the doctor it is fine with me. And if she doesn't it is equally OK. She has a choice. She is both excited and confused.

Being free to make a choice and not be coerced into it ironically leaves a person more open to forgiveness than if they believe it is a requirement. Removing the burden of forgiveness can be a freeing act in itself. To finally quote Rev. Dr. Horsfield, "Forgiveness is something that may happen at the end of the long hard process of recovery, according to its own timetable and then only if the appropriate conditions for forgiveness to occur have been fulfilled."

David Clarke's approach

Associate Professor David Clarke, MBBS, PhD, FRACGP, FRANZCP, is a psychiatrist at the Monash Medical Centre and the Victorian state chairman of the Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship of Australia. He (with his wife Denise) is the joint editor of the CMDFA's Luke's Journal. He made the following observations:

1. The experience of sexual or psychological abuse is a profound one. Victims are used, not respected, told to sit quietly and to be quiet. They are trapped in a power differential and by the need to be loved. Invariably abused people grow up to have a low sense of their own worth, difficulty trusting people and difficulty with intimacy. They show many confusions, such as what is pain and what is pleasure, what is love and what is abuse, what is good and what is evil. As a consequence, such people can find themselves in intimate relationships in which they end up being used and abused again. Their emotions become numbed.
2. Forgiveness seems to be required when a wrong is committed and when there is personal offence. In these circumstances there is anger and resentment. If a wrong is committed and it seems self-explanatory or minor, usually there is no great offence and no great anger. If an eraser is borrowed and lost, for example, most people are not too upset and do not think of the need to forgive. If the act is explained by accident rather than being intentional the offence is less. Forgiveness seems to be required when there is a significant wrong that brings personal offence. (This is not a theological statement. The expression 'seems to be required' is meant to imply an observation suggesting a general human intuition).
3. Sometimes people take offence over little things. This might suggest that the anger has been displaced from something else. Sometimes people become very angry at an offence not against themselves personally but against another. This raises the question, in what way does the angry person identify with the victim so as to personalise the offence. Forgiveness can only be really achieved if one has been wronged. This type of anger (through identification with the victim) can only be resolved by recognising in what way the insult has been personal, and why it has been received as personal. One cannot really forgive someone for an offence against another person.
4. Other people seem to hold little offence after what seems serious insult - as if they find it easy to forgive. Not to feel anger and resentment after an insult is not to take oneself seriously. Strong emotion is a prerequisite to forgiveness. Easy forgiveness is not true forgiveness. Without feeling the offense forgiveness cannot be given (and psychologically would be considered unnecessary).
5. For people who have been abused, the abuse or its effects are repeated many times. New memories and new experiences will continue to bring to life, if not repeat, early abuse. Therefore forgiveness cannot be a once-off event, and people should not be chastised for not forgiving. For forgiveness to truly occur it must be an attitude that is continually present, accompanied by repeated 'acts' of forgiveness.
6. We must distinguish pardoning from forgiving. Pardoning is an action, is done once. Forgiveness is a long hard process, repeated many times.

7. Can we forgive if the other does not repent? The Christian story is of God making the move of forgiveness toward humankind “while we were yet sinners.” Jesus said on the cross “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” Forgiveness can be initiated from one side even before the offence is admitted. Human experience shows that this is hard. We must differentiate therefore between forgiveness and reconciliation. One can forgive – as in freeing the other person from condemnation. But one person alone cannot be reconciled. After serious abuse, such as child sexual abuse, repentance on the part of the perpetrator is not common. Reconciliation is nice but is often not possible, and Christians are wrong to insist upon it.
8. Forgiveness takes time. Forgiveness should not be demanded of people prematurely, before the offence is properly understood. Helpers have no right to demand forgiveness of another person until they have properly empathised with their situation. Once they have done that they will realise how difficult it is.
9. Can people forgive when justice has not been done? Yes, but it is made more difficult. On the other hand, if justice has been done, it may rob the victim of the opportunity to fully feel their rage so that the process necessary for forgiveness is short-circuited. How often have you felt dissatisfied after a person’s apology to you because it has deprived you of the opportunity to feel angry ‘legitimately’? There is therefore a process of justice, with appropriate timing, that allows proper forgiveness. (Conversely, of course, delayed justice, as it often is in our system, also interrupts the process of resolution by allowing the anger to fester).
10. Is forgiveness necessary for emotional healing? I believe so. For release of the bondage that people feel, forgiveness – a letting go - is required. But this must not be a “well it doesn’t matter” letting go. It does matter, “but I must let go.” “I release you from bondage to me, and myself from the bitterness I feel toward you.” Like grief, it is a painful process, but should not be short-circuited.
11. Christians often seem to make forgiveness seem easy. They do this for two reasons:
 - ◆ They find intense emotion difficult to bear (as all humans do) and justify this by suggesting that the Bible proscribes strong emotion. It does not. There is plenty of strong emotion in the Bible.
 - ◆ Christian theology emphasises God’s grace, and underestimates God’s wrath and anger. This is a trap. If you know your father will forgive you, the wrath is easily forgotten. It is only to the degree that we understand how much God detests, and is angry about, our sin (bad behaviour) that we will understand the enormity of His forgiveness. In helping unforgiving persons (including ourselves) we need to listen and be honest to the degree of offence, before embarking on the costly road of forgiveness.

Overall conclusions

1. Forgiveness is a process
2. Justice is an important theme
3. The sense of injustice has to be worked through and the anger, resentment and outrage acknowledged
4. Forgiveness is a gift which cannot be coerced
5. Withholding the gift has detrimental consequences.

¹ North J. Wrongdoing and forgiveness. *Philosophy* 1987;62:499-508. Quoted in Enright RD. Forgiveness is a choice: a step-by-step process for resolving anger and restoring hope. American Psychological Association. Washington DC. 2001:25.

² Herman JL. Trauma and recovery: from domestic abuse to political terror. Basic Books. 1992:189-190.

³ Boteach S. *Kosher emotions: a guided tour of the heart*. Hodder & Stoughton. 2000:140.

⁴ *Ibid.* p 142.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Paper presented to the 1995 annual convention of the APA, subsequently published in a book, but not in a peer-reviewed journal.

⁷ Coyle CT, Enright RD. Forgiveness intervention with post-abortion men. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*. 1997;65:1042-1046.

⁸ Horsfield D. Forgiveness and reconciliation in situations of sexual assault. Uniting Church in Australia commission on women and men. April 1994. A paper first delivered at the first national conference on sexual violence in faith communities. 1993.

Appendix 1

Being heard

One thing I have come to look upon as almost universal is that when a person realizes he has been deeply heard, there is a moistness in his eyes. I think in some real sense he is weeping for joy. It is as though he were saying, "Thank God somebody heard me. Somebody knows what it is like to be me". In such a moment I have the fantasy of a prisoner in a dungeon tapping out day after day a Morse code message, "Does anybody hear me? Is there somebody there? Can anyone hear me?". And finally one day he hears some faint tapping that spells out, "Yes". By that simple response he is released from his loneliness. He has become a human again. There are many, many, people living in private dungeons today, people who give no evidence of it whatsoever on the outside, where you have to listen very sharply to hear the faint message from the dungeon.

Carl Rogers

Appendix 2

The Fantasy of Forgiveness

From Judith 1. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, Basic Books, 1992, pp. 189-190.

Revolted by the fantasy of revenge, some survivors attempt to bypass their outrage altogether through a fantasy of forgiveness. This fantasy, like its polar opposite, is an attempt at empowerment. The survivor imagines that she can transcend her rage and erase the impact of the trauma through a willed, defiant act of love. But it is not possible to exorcise the trauma, through either hatred or love. Like revenge, the fantasy of forgiveness often becomes a cruel torture, because it remains out of reach for most ordinary human beings. Folk wisdom recognizes that to forgive is divine. And even divine forgiveness, in most religious systems, is not unconditional. True forgiveness cannot be granted until the perpetrator has sought and earned it through confession, repentance, and restitution.

Genuine contrition in a perpetrator is a rare miracle. Fortunately, the survivor does not need to wait for it. Her healing depends on the discovery of restorative love in her own life; it does not require that this love be extended to the perpetrator. Once the survivor has mourned the traumatic event, she may be surprised to discover how uninteresting the perpetrator has become to her and how little concern she feels for his fate. She may even feel sorrow and compassion for him, but this disengaged feeling is not the same as forgiveness.

Appendix 3

The Forgiveness Trap

From: Forward S. *Toxic Parents: overcoming their hurtful legacy and reclaiming your life*. Bantam Books. 1989:187-9

One of the most dangerous things about forgiveness is that it undercuts your ability to let go of your pent-up emotions. How can you acknowledge your anger against a parent whom you've already forgiven? Responsibility can go only one of two places: outward, onto the people who have hurt you, or inward, into yourself. Someone's got to be responsible. So you may forgive your *parents* but end up hating *yourself* all the more in exchange. I also noticed that many clients rushed to forgiveness to avoid much of the painful work of therapy. They believed that by forgiving they could find a shortcut to feeling better. A handful of them "forgave," left therapy, and wound up sinking even deeper into depression or anxiety.

Several of these clients clung to their fantasies: "All I have to do is forgive and I will be healed, I will have wonderful mental health, everybody is going to love everybody, we'll hug a lot, and we'll finally be happy." Clients all too often discovered that the empty promise of forgiveness had merely set them up for bitter disappointment. Some of them experienced a rush of well being, but it didn't last because nothing had really changed in the way they felt or in their family interactions.

I remember an especially touching session with a client named Stephanie, whose experience illustrates some of the typical problems of premature forgiveness. Stephanie, 27, was an extremely devout born-again Christian when I met her. At age 11, Stephanie had been raped by her stepfather. He had continued to abuse her until her mother threw him out of the house (for other reasons) a year later. Over the next four years, Stephanie had been molested by several of her mother's many boyfriends. She ran away from home at 16 and became a prostitute. Seven years later, she was almost beaten to death by a client. While recovering in the hospital Stephanie met an orderly who persuaded her to visit his church. A few years later they married and had a son. She was genuinely attempting to rebuild her life. But, despite her new family and her new religion, Stephanie was miserable. She spent two years in therapy, but still she couldn't shake her intense depression. That's when she came to me.

I put Stephanie in one of my incest-victims' groups. In her first session, Stephanie assured us that she had made her peace and had forgiven both her stepfather and her cold, inadequate mother. I told her that if she wanted to get rid of her depression she might have to "unforgive" for a while, to get in touch with her anger. She insisted that she believed deeply in forgiveness, that she didn't need to get angry to get better. A fairly intense struggle developed between us, partly because I was asking her to do something painful, but also because her religious beliefs contradicted her psychological needs.

Stephanie did her work dutifully, but she refused tap in to her rage. Little by little, however, she began to have outbursts of anger on behalf of other people. For example, one night she embraced another group member, saying, "Your father was a monster, I hate him!"

A few weeks later, her own repressed rage finally came out. She screamed, cursed, and accused her parents of destroying her childhood and crippling her adult years.

Afterward, I hugged her as she sobbed. I could feel her body relax. When she was calmer, I teasingly asked, "What kind of way is that for a nice Christian girl to behave?" I will never forget her reply:

I guess God wants me to get better more than He wants me to forgive.

That night was the turning point for her. People can forgive toxic parents, but they should do it at the conclusion - not at the beginning - of their emotional housecleaning. People need to get angry about what happened to them. They need to grieve over the fact that they never had the parental love they yearned for. They need to stop diminishing or discounting the damage that was done to them. Too often, "forgive and forget" means, "pretend it didn't happen."

I also believe that forgiveness is appropriate only when parents do something to earn it. Toxic parents, especially the more abusive ones, need to acknowledge what happened, take responsibility, and show a willingness to make amends. If you unilaterally absolve parents who continue to treat you badly, who deny much of your reality and feelings, and who continue to project blame onto you, you may seriously impede the emotional work you need to do. If one or both parents are dead, you can still heal the damage, by forgiving *yourself* and releasing much of the hold that they had over your emotional well-being.

At this point, you may be wondering, understandably, if you will remain bitter and angry for the rest of your life if you don't forgive your parents. In fact, quite the opposite is true. What I have seen over the years is that emotional and mental peace comes as a result of releasing yourself from your toxic parents' control, without necessarily having to forgive them. And that release can come only after you've worked through your intense feelings of outrage and grief and after you've put the responsibility on *their* shoulders, where it belongs.

Appendix 4

Twelve Steps of Forgiveness

From Monbourquette J. *How to forgive: a step-by-step guide*. Darton Longman and Todd 2000. 198 pp.)

Coming to terms with being a victim

Deciding not to seek revenge
Ending the offensive action.

Recognising the pain

Identifying defence mechanisms
Identifying resistance to the hurts

Sharing the pain

Share your wounded inner self
Sharing with the offender
If sharing with the offender is not possible

Identifying the loss properly so it can be properly grieved for

Stopping self-blame
Healing childhood wounds

Accept anger and the desire for revenge

Destructive effects of repressed anger
The benefits of anger
Putting anger to good use
Letting go of resentment

Forgive yourself

Recognising self-hatred
The origins of lack of self-esteem
Identifying with the aggressor
Forgiving self

Understand the offender

No more blaming
Discovering more about the other's background
Looking for the offender's positive motives
Discovering the offender's value and dignity
Accepting that you won't understand everything

Make sense of the offence in your life

The good side of having your life turned upside down
The good things that come from a loss

Know that you are forgiven

We need to experience forgiveness so we can forgive
Feeling worthy of forgiveness
Obstacles to recognising how much we're loved

Stop trying so hard to forgive

Stubbornness: an obstacle to forgiveness
Not a just a moral obligation

Open up to the grace of forgiving

Changing one's views of the higher power as more than just a dispenser of justice
Divine love not constrained by human forgiveness
Humble divine forgiveness

Decide whether to end or renew the relationship

Don't confuse forgiveness with reconciliation
Forgiving and ending a relationship
Growth of the victim and the offender
Celebration

Appendix 5

GUIDEPOSTS FOR FORGIVING

(From: Enright RD. *Forgiveness is a choice: a step-by-step process for resolving anger and restoring hope*. American Psychological Association. Washington DC. 2001:78.)

PHASE I—UNCOVERING YOUR ANGER

- How have you avoided dealing with anger,?
- Have you faced your anger?
- Are you afraid to expose your shame or guilt?
- Has your anger affected your health?
- Have you been obsessed about the injury or the offender?
- Do you compare your situation with that of the offender?
- Has the injury caused a permanent change in your life?
- Has the injury changed your worldview?

PHASE 2—DECIDING TO FORGIVE

- Decide that what you have been doing hasn't worked.
- Be willing to begin the forgiveness process.
- Decide to forgive.

PHASE 3—WORKING ON FORGIVENESS

- Work toward understanding.
- Work toward compassion.
- Accept the pain.
- Give the offender a gift.

PHASE 4—DISCOVERY AND RELEASE FROM EMOTIONAL PRISON

- Discover the meaning of suffering.
- Discover your need for forgiveness.
- Discover that you are not alone.
- Discover the purpose of your life.
- Discover the freedom of forgiveness.