



## FORGIVENESS

By Denise Miller

We forgive others, not for them, but for ourselves. Even if the wrong is never acknowledged or atoned for, we may want to feel our way back to a caring place. It's the place we'd rather live in.

The wrongs of parents are among the most difficult to forgive. We expect the world of them and don't want to lower our expectations. Decade after decade we hold the hope, often unconscious, that they will finally do right by us. We want them to own up to all their misdeeds, to apologize, to beg us for forgiveness. We want them to give us the love we've always craved. We want them to embrace us, tell us they know we were good children, to undo the favouritism or criticism, to give us their praise.

This is a very natural want. No one is perfectly mature. We may hunger for our parents to repair whatever damage they have done long after we are adults. We get into trouble though, when we let this hunger rule our lives. We become the forever-child, the forever-victim, the one who is forever searching for a love that is impossible to find.

We want them to do what is necessary to deserve our forgiveness; we can't let them have the satisfaction of our simply forgiving them. In many cases, even after they have died. As a result we may live forever in an immature place around this issue. We may forever live with and accept the horrible opinions of ourselves that were formed and fostered by them. If we hold a grudge we are hanging on, not only to our parent, but most negatively, to the bad part of the parent.

In some ways it's as if we have put our lives on hold. We will not live our lives completely until we have resolved this issue and feel the security of unconditional love. We stay locked into the badness and never grow up. We stay there waiting as that forever-child. Forever-Children don't have satisfying jobs or real relationships. We will unconsciously stay in this forever-child place, waiting for our parents to rescue us. And they never will.

We can stay there in Neverland until we die blaming them for ruining our lives. Or we can finally step into a forgiving place and step into our lives.

When we stay locked into that waiting game with our parents we do not allow reality to bother us. There may be a wonderful relationship or a very fulfilling job in our lives right now. These loving parts of our lives could heal us, but we can't allow those to be true. If they were then we would see that our parents aren't to blame anymore and we'd let them off the hook. So these jobs and relationships will always not quite be what we are hoping for. They will not quite measure up. This must be true if we base our lives on blaming our parents for ruining them. We are like a small child who loses our mother in a big store. Nothing will soothe us until she comes for us. We don't want our partner's love. Only our mother's will do.

Before we can locate our forgiving self we have to process this old hurt and anger. Some believe that it's better to leave that alone, to not dredge up the past. You have a functioning relationship with your parent now, why mess with that? This unfelt anger is keeping you from feeling any real warmth. Forgiving our parents is a core task of adulthood and one of the most crucial kinds of forgiveness because it reverberates through our psychic lives. We see our parents in our mates, our bosses and our children. If we feel rejected by our parents we will inevitably feel rejected by these important others as well.

We have all had these feelings of being overly sensitive or having our buttons pushed. Our lover doesn't call back soon enough and we begin to feel unwanted, cast aside, unattractive or depressed and then out for vengeance. Our child is pouty, angry, unwilling to make up with us. We cease to see him as a child and he turns into our tormentor, our rejecter, making our lives into a misery. This is a part of what is at stake if we don't let our parents off the hook. We re-create with the people we love, our worst experiences with our parents.

Most parents love their children, even those that beat them or molest them. But no parent is perfect and so we all have our childhood wounds. Some of us are aware of this and allow that knowledge to bring this awareness to the place of hurt that dwells within us all.

Some of our parent's bad sides were so bad though that it is impossible to hold onto the good. When we hold onto this rage, this chronic hatred inevitably this means that the worst aspects of that parent live on in our

heads. That's when we hold on to those feelings of being unloved, unlovable, and unloving.

Forgiveness does not mean that you accept or condone what your parents did to you as right. It does not mean that you deny their selfishness, their rejection, their meanness, their brutality, or any of their other limitations or character flaws.

To forgive them does two important things for you.

First - You separate from them. Stop seeing ourselves as children who depend on them for our emotional well being. Stop being their victims and recognize that we are adults with some capacity to shape our own lives and the responsibility to do so.

Second - You let them back in your heart. We can then begin to recognize some of the circumstances and limitations they laboured under and recognize the goodness in them that our pain has pushed aside. We can feel some compassion for them; not only for the hard journey they had, but also for the pain we caused them. Sometimes when we become parents we gain insight into how hard it is to get the job done right. Sometimes we see that our judgements have been horribly unfair. We may see that we've made one parent the scapegoat and the other one the god, or been unjust in some other way.

We can achieve forgiveness by taking a vital inner journey to deal with our hurts. On this journey we allow ourselves to feel the longings that have been pushed aside and made unconscious. To feel the part of us that is still a child, desperately in love and horribly hurt and hoping against hope that the parent will be good again and make everything right. When we can feel these childhood longings, understand them, talk about them, cry perhaps, a subtle change takes place within us. We are able to care about our own hurt. Not in a self-pitying way, but the secure adult part of us can soothe and embrace this child.

This is the beginning of a process that can lead us out of bitterness and into a place of releasing the bad part of our parents and recognizing the good part that we may have forgotten. This can pave the way to forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a gift to ourselves because it brings us back to the good parts of a relationship. Here we can experience ourselves as loving and

lovable people. This strengthens our sense of self, as selves separate from our parents, because like it or not we will always be identified with them.

This journey to forgiveness can be a long and complicated one. We have to be ready to forgive. We have to want to forgive. The deeper the wound, the more difficult the process is. That is why forgiving our parent is especially hard. Along the way we may have to express our protest, we may have to be angry and resentful; we may even have to punish our parents by holding a grudge. But when we get there the forgiveness we achieve will be forgiveness worth having.

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