

FORGIVENESS

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Forgiveness is tied directly with anger. Just like anger control, forgiveness is not a new invention either. It is a common knowledge that forgiveness is good for us. I do not know of any religion which does not advocate forgiveness. Unfortunately most of us just go thru the motion of talking about forgiveness and give only a lip service to the beautiful concept. We say one thing..do something else. There is no harmony between our thought, speech, and action. Consequently..the knowledge of forgiveness and going thru the religious rituals exemplifying forgiveness is not doing anything for us. Let us analyze the issue in detail.

First of all, Forgiveness is a lubricant prescribed by our saints to keep the human relationships smooth. They recognized the weakness of human nature and realized that the people would go thru many situations in a life span that may cause animosity and hostility.

Some of these situations are:

Disagreements: Disagreements are a way of life and yet don't many of us display hostility towards those who disagree with us?

Misunderstanding: Some of us misinterpret the intentions of other people and become angry and hostile to them unnecessarily.

Wrong expectations: When our expectations of other people are unrealistic and we do not get what we want, we get disappointed and become belligerent to them at times.

Hurt feelings- knowingly or unknowingly: Most of us hold a large ego about ourselves and our values. When someone humiliates or insults us, we get antagonistic.

Jealousy: Jealousy breeds hate and makes us lose our sense of discrimination.

The typical stereo type responses to the above situations are either fast revenge or slow revenge. Fast revenge results into anger, fight and sometimes physical injury on the spot. Slow revenge is more common in a civilized society. It takes the form of deep resentment, bitterness and hate and probably more damaging because of the duration involved. Some people can not forget and forgive an incidence for decades! The common results of these responses are strained relationships and non productive use of precious life. The bottom line: Usually both sides lose out . However, our ego prevents us from realizing this.

Many religions teach that we can escape from the harmful effects of animosity and hate by developing the virtues of humility/sympathy/understanding/tolerance. It is only by practicing all of these can we develop forgiveness.

Absolute and total forgiveness is too difficult a goal for us to reach right away. Let us see if we can make step by step progress by looking at different stages of forgiveness.

Stage I: Preventive form of Forgiveness

Since forgiveness is difficult for us, let us concentrate on animosity prevention. Let us constantly maintain friendly relations with all. Let us clarify misunderstandings right away. Let us not let the knot get stronger. Let us be sensitive to the feelings of other individuals and exercise humility.

Stage II : Passive Forgiveness (Forgiveness involving indifference -Live and let live philosophy)

If we did not succeed in preventing animosity/strained relationship, let us do our best to resolve the situation. If we fail, atleast let us put ourselves in a passive mode. In this mode of behavior, the other person is not your friend, nor is he your enemy. We may not be even on speaking terms with the other person. But let us never speak ill of him/her and always offer our prayers and sympathy. Let us remember that just because we could not get along with the other person does not mean that he/she is a bad person.

Stage III: Active form of forgiveness

This is the best form of forgiveness. This would involve not striking back even if someone has harmed you. It entails loving your enemies. This is the highest form of forgiveness. This is what the religions of the world are asking us to strive for and this is what was preached and actively practiced by Lord Mahavir, Jesus Christ, and many other religious leaders. Their legacy are the following beautiful words which people remember even after about 2000 years.

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.....Jesus Christ

Father, forgive them..they know not what they are doing...Jesus Christ

I forgive all souls, let all souls forgive me. I have friendship with all and enmity towards none..... Jain Scripture

Total and absolute forgiveness takes years of practice in humility, compassion, sympathy, understanding, tolerance and sensitivity to fellow beings. We can never acquire these virtues until we start melting our ego. And that is one of the reasons forgiveness is well recognized, but rarely practiced in its noblest form.

In most incidences, usually our ego, our pride, and arrogance (part of which appear to come from the unprecedented economic independence we enjoy) come in the way of forgiveness. Some how if we admit our mistakes, we feel we have gone down. We have lost our self respect, self esteem. So.. the real barrier to forgiveness is our ego, pride, and arrogance. Let me share a few suggestions to overcome the barrier:

Suggestions/Observations:

- Let us be aware of a couple of weaknesses of human nature:
 - Usually we ignore our own faults and magnify the faults of others.

· Most people are intelligent enough to know when they make mistakes. Their pride makes it difficult to admit them.

· If we can understand these weaknesses, perhaps we will be a bit more tolerant and compassionate to our fellow human beings. Since our pride and ego usually come in the way of forgiving some one, let us make use of a common friend to overcome that obstacle. All we need to do is take the initiative.

· When we say I forgive you, we should not imply that the other person is guilty. What we should say is that let us forget what happened and start afresh. Let us never dig up the dirt.

· If we say `let all souls forgive me, I forgive all souls' on a regular basis but do not change our behavior, we are not being honest to ourselves.

· We must practice preventive form of forgiveness for our misdeeds every single day.

· Let us the use the beautiful words Christianity has taught us i.e. `I apologize' as often as we can.
