

Page 147, Yancey: (Reflecting on his release from prison after 27 years, Nelson Mandela said to President Bill Clinton's inquiries about hating his captors): "As I felt the anger rising up, I thought to myself, 'They have already had you for twenty-seven years. And if you keep hating them, they'll have you again.' And I said, 'I want to be free.' And so I let it go. I let it go."

## Inside Out | Forgiveness is hard but it lets you heal

By Dan Gottlieb

Joyce was abused by her father when she was 12 years old. She'd hated him ever since. When I met her last year, she was 50 years old and had a long history of difficult relationships with men, depression and overall inability to enjoy life. She blamed most of her problems on her father.

Her father was clearly the cause of the problem, but what has kept her in the victim position for 38 years? Her festering resentment is preventing her from moving from victim to survivor and beyond. Her father was wrong for what he did, and Joyce's reaction was natural.

Anger has been called a judicial emotion - a reaction to injustice. So when we experience any form of injustice, most of us react with a clenched fist, a closed heart and a sense of resentment. These reactions are a natural effort to defend ourselves emotionally against further injury. And it works, in the short run. Like a scab, it protects the tender wound from infection, but if the scab stays too long, the wound never heals.

So what can be done?

Forgiveness is the process of giving up resentment toward another. It has nothing to do with reconciliation or even holding a perpetrator harmless.

But forgiveness is one of those things that sound great on paper, but feel almost impossible to do.

Forgiveness takes courage. The first step is to understand that today's suffering is about holding onto resentment and not about what happened yesterday. That shifts both power and responsibility. The second step is to find the humanity in the person we need to forgive, even if his or her behavior was inhumane.

In time, Joyce was able to see her father as a frail 80-year-old man, as opposed to a powerful middle-aged man who abused her. When he joined her in a session, she learned about the turmoil of his life back then and his many regrets. She chose not to have a close relationship with him, but she didn't need to hate him anymore..

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Dostoevsky (as Ivan) in *The Brothers Karamozov*:

There was in those days a general of aristocratic connections, the owner of great estates, one of those men — somewhat exceptional, I believe, even then — who, retiring from the service into a life of leisure, are convinced that they've earned absolute power over the lives of their subjects. There were such men then. So our general, settled on his property of two thousand souls, lives in pomp, and domineers over his poor neighbours as though they were dependents and buffoons.

He has kennels of hundreds of hounds and nearly a hundred dog-boys — all mounted, and in uniform. One day a serf-boy, a little child of eight, threw a stone in play and hurt the paw of the general's favourite hound.

‘Why is my favourite dog lame?’ He is told that the boy threw a stone that hurt the dog’s paw. ‘So you did it.’ The general looked the child up and down. ‘Take him.’ He was taken — taken from his mother and kept shut up all night. Early that morning the general comes out on horseback, with the hounds, his dependents, dog-boys, and huntsmen, all mounted around him in full hunting parade. The servants are summoned for their edification, and in front of them all stands the mother of the child. The child is brought from the lock-up. It’s a gloomy, cold, foggy, autumn day, a capital day for hunting. The general orders the child to be undressed; the child is stripped naked. He shivers, numb with terror, not daring to cry.... ‘Make him run,’ commands the general. ‘Run! run!’ shout the dog-boys. The boy runs.... ‘At him!’ yells the general, and he sets the whole pack of hounds on the child. The hounds catch him, and tear him to pieces before his mother’s eyes!... I believe the general was afterwards declared incapable of administering his estates. Well — what did he deserve? To be shot? To be shot for the satisfaction of our moral feelings? Speak, Alyosha!

“To be shot,” murmured Alyosha, lifting his eyes to Ivan with a pale, twisted smile. ... Ivan for a minute was silent, his face became all at once very sad.

“Listen! I took the case of children only to make my case clearer. Of the other tears of humanity with which the earth is soaked from its crust to its centre, I will say nothing. I have narrowed my subject on purpose. I am a bug, and I recognise in all humility that I cannot understand why the world is arranged as it is. Men are themselves to blame, I suppose; they were given paradise, they wanted freedom, and stole fire from heaven, though they knew they would become unhappy, so there is no need to pity them. With my pitiful, earthly, Euclidian understanding, all I know is that there is suffering and that there are none guilty; that cause follows effect, simply and directly; that everything flows and finds its level — but that’s only Euclidian nonsense, I know that, and I can’t consent to live by it! What comfort is it to me that there are none guilty and that cause follows effect simply and directly, and that I know it?

I must have justice, or I will destroy myself. And not justice in some remote infinite time and space, but here on earth, and that I could see myself. I have believed in it. I want to see it, and if I am dead by then, let me rise again, for if it all happens without me, it will be too unfair. Surely I haven’t suffered simply that I, my crimes and my sufferings, may manure the soil of the future harmony for somebody else. I want to see with my own eyes the hind lie down with the lion and the victim rise up and embrace his murderer. I want to be there when everyone suddenly understands what it has all been for. All the religions of the world are built on this longing, and I am a believer.

But then there are the children, and what am I to do about them? That’s a question I can’t answer. For the hundredth time I repeat, there are numbers of questions, but I’ve only taken the children, because in their case what I mean is so unanswerably clear. Listen! If all must suffer to pay for the eternal harmony, what have children to do with it, tell me, please? It’s beyond all comprehension why they should suffer, and why they should pay for the harmony. Why should they, too, furnish material to enrich the soil for the harmony of the future? I understand solidarity in sin among men. I understand solidarity in retribution, too; but there can be no such solidarity with children. And if it is really true that they must share responsibility for all their fathers’ crimes, such a truth is not of this world and is beyond my comprehension. Some jester will say, perhaps, that the child would have grown up and have sinned, but you see he didn’t grow up, he was torn to pieces by the dogs, at eight years old.

Oh, Alyosha, I am not blaspheming! I understand, of course, what an upheaval of the universe it will be when everything in heaven and earth blends in one hymn of praise and everything that lives and has lived cries aloud: ‘Thou art just, O Lord, for Thy ways are revealed.’ When the mother embraces the fiend who threw her child to the dogs, and all three cry aloud with tears, ‘Thou art just, O Lord!’ then, of course, the crown of knowledge will be reached and all will be made clear. But what pulls me up here is that I can’t accept that harmony. And while I am on earth, I make haste to take my own measures. You see, Alyosha, perhaps it really may happen that if I live to that moment, or rise again to see it, I, too, perhaps, may cry

aloud with the rest, looking at the mother embracing the child's torturer, 'Thou art just, O Lord!' but I don't want to cry aloud then. While there is still time, I hasten to protect myself, and so I renounce the higher harmony altogether. It's not worth the tears of that one tortured child who beat itself on the breast with its little fist and prayed in its stinking outhouse, with its unexpiated tears to 'dear, kind God'! It's not worth it, because those tears are unatoned for.

They must be atoned for, or there can be no harmony. But how? How are you going to atone for them? Is it possible? By their being avenged? But what do I care for avenging them? What do I care for a hell for oppressors? What good can hell do, since those children have already been tortured? And what becomes of harmony, if there is hell? I want to forgive. I want to embrace. I don't want more suffering. And if the sufferings of children go to swell the sum of sufferings which was necessary to pay for truth, then I protest that the truth is not worth such a price.

I don't want the mother to embrace the oppressor who threw her son to the dogs! She dare not forgive him! Let her forgive him for herself, if she will, let her forgive the torturer for the immeasurable suffering of her mother's heart. But the sufferings of her tortured child she has no right to forgive; she dare not forgive the torturer, even if the child were to forgive him! And if that is so, if they dare not forgive, what becomes of harmony? Is there in the whole world a being who would have the right to forgive and could forgive? I don't want harmony. From love for humanity I don't want it. I would rather be left with the unavenged suffering. I would rather remain with my unavenged suffering and unsatisfied indignation, even if I were wrong. Besides, too high a price is asked for harmony; it's beyond our means to pay so much to enter on it. And so I hasten to give back my entrance ticket, and if I am an honest man I am bound to give it back as soon as possible. And that I am doing. It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return him the ticket."

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C.S. Lewis: (*The Weight of Glory*):

A great deal of our anxiety to make excuses comes from our not really believing in the forgiveness of sins, from thinking that God will not take us to Himself again unless He is satisfied that some sort of case can be made in our favor. But that would not be forgiveness at all. Real forgiveness means looking steadily at the sin, the sin that is left over without any excuse, after all allowances have been made, and seeing it in all its horror, dirt meanness, and malice, and nevertheless being wholly reconciled to the man who has done it. That, and only that, is forgiveness, and that we can always have from God if we ask for it.

C.S. Lewis (*Mere Christianity*): Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive, as we had during World War II. And then, to mention the subject at all is to be greeted with howls of anger. It is not that people think this too high and difficult a virtue: it is that they think it hateful and contemptible. "That sort of talk makes me sick," they say. And half of you already want to ask me, "I wonder how you'd feel about forgiving the Gestapo if you were a Pole or a Jew?"

So do I. I wonder very much. Just as when Christianity tells me that I must not deny my religion even to save myself from death by torture, I wonder very much what I should do when it came to the point. I am not trying to tell you in this book what I could do—I can do precious little—I am telling you what Christianity is. I did not invent it. And there right in the middle of it, I find, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." There is no slightest suggestion that we are offered forgiveness on any other terms. It is made perfectly clear that if we do not forgive we shall not be forgiven. There are no two ways about it.

Corrie Ten Boom, a Christian woman who survived a Nazi concentration camp during the Holocaust, said, "Forgiveness is to set a prisoner free, and to realize the prisoner was you."

Scripture on the need/command to forgive:

**Colossians 3:13**

*Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. [\(NIV\)](#)*

**Matthew 18:21-22**

*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. [\(NIV\)](#)*

**Luke 6:37**

*Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. [\(NIV\)](#)*

**Matthew 6:14-16**

*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. [\(NIV\)](#)*

**Mark 11:25**

*And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. [\(NIV\)](#)*

**Luke 23:34:** *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

**Matthew 18: 23-35:** Parable of the unforgiving servant