

FORGIVENESS – AN UNFINISHED JOURNEY

By: Glenn Smith

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I have always wanted to be the person who was able to forgive even in the most difficult of circumstances. Discussing and studying the essential characteristics and the benefits to those who adopt forgiveness as a way of life intrigues me. I have read numerous articles, books, and religious texts, and I have listened to several explanations, speeches, and sermons. Still, when I self-evaluate, I find I often fall short of my reference of a forgiving person. What has been more distressing is that I felt I was falling short spiritually. I understood the ramifications of holding on to resentments that I believed to be the poisoning of one's own soul in the name of wanting others to suffer for their actions. Still, I would fall short again and again of being that merciful person I really wanted to be.



In 2007, I attended a conference with a number of counselors, clergy, and other helping professionals interested in exploring the significance of a forgiving nature. Several individuals spoke on the benefits of living a life of forgiveness. They pointed out how it would bring you in favor with God, and how living this lifestyle was a way to cleanse oneself and had little to do with others. In the midst of these discussions, a chaplain from a local hospital gave a presentation that I will never forget. I was captivated when he stated that he believed that forgiveness, as an absolute, was unobtainable. I listened carefully as he explained that a person who forgives is not practicing an act but is a person devoted to a path. He went on to say that this path has no end, and as each of us reaches our limited comprehension of what forgiving is, we will realize how much more there is to practicing absolution.

I was thinking that this man, as a hospital chaplain, encounters individuals on a daily basis who experience both loss and triumph. He counsels those wanting to shift from hopelessness to hope, and those that are seeking answers to life's most difficult questions. Here he was, this man of faith, telling me that forgiveness is not obtainable. I was both puzzled and curious as to where he was going with all of this.

He explained that, through his experience, he had learned to look at forgiveness as a process that a person will always pursue. He asked us to perceive the undertaking of forgiving on a continuum. On one end of the continuum, he placed hate, judgment, resentment, and revenge. On the other end, he asked us to consider the antithesis of love, tolerance, mercy, and forgiveness. He spoke of individuals and their quest to move away from the darkness on the one end and

towards the light at the other. Although a person would never reach an exact destination, the closer that they moved towards the light, the healthier they would be. On a spiritual plane, he spoke of moving closer to the light as moving closer to the Creator or Spiritual Truth.

Riding home, I thought about what I had heard. I thought about all the people who I had experienced hurt through, and those who were experiencing hurt through me. I thought about what it would take to continue on this journey of learning how to let go, forgive myself, forgive others, and forgive a world that often did not match what I believed was just or fair. On that drive, I experienced for the first time a sort of self-leniency. I started to forgive myself for not knowing totally how to forgive. I recognized that I was not falling short but learning how to live a forgiving way of life. I also know that my journey is not complete and I'm okay with that. Seneca, a Roman philosopher in the mid-1st century AD, captured this same idea when he said, "To forgive all is as inhuman as to forgive none."