

MONOPOLAR, BIPOLAR, TRIPOLAR SPIRITUALITY AND THE PRACTICES OF FORGIVING

The practices of forgiving reflect the spirituality of the persons involved in the managing, mitigating or mending of relationships. In bipolar spirituality, the response to an injury and its painful insult or assault, is “really about me.” In bi-polar spirituality, the issues shift to become a search for the right action, the moral and relational step in obedience to the call and will of God. In tripolar spirituality, the concern is about the other because the other is more than the enemy, more than the offender, they are the doorway to encounter with God. “The only way to truly meet God is through the enemy.” (Walter Wink)

PRACTICES OF FORGIVING AND RECONCILING

A spectrum of responses to hurt, to what is hurtful, to those who hurt us.

| Civility | Acceptance | Co-humanity | Pardon | Process | Contact | Restitution |
|--|---|---|--|--|--|---|
| Politeness courtesy | unconditional positive regard | equal regard for other | unilateral release | reach out work thru | reconnect reconcile | restore repay |
| overlook insult or injury by refusing all judgment ignoring guilt or response- ability | accept the other as fallible yet of worth tho' morally in the wrong or socially challenged in behavior. | restitution of the human. acknowledges the other as another human being in spite hurtful acts or injurious actions. | release of demands vs. offender setting self free of review or resentment, forgrieving hurt or loss. | validating repentance by one or both in mutual intention and action | mutually recognize repentance as genuine and right relationships restored or achieved | return to full moral community by returning what was usurped, repaying the injury. |
| Goals: Tolerance, Openness, Accepting Diversity, human fallibility | Affirm self-esteem, other-regard, neighbor-love and mutual value. | Extend empathy, reciprocity, mutuality, co-humanity, compassion. | Offer remission of punishment release of revenge or retaliation. | Caringly work at relating, deal with hurt/guilt/ shame. | Authentically risking trust, opening future, discern reality, settle for less, reward self | Justly seeking to restore the loss or repay the hurt done as possible. |
| Virtues: | | | | | | |
| Civility | grace | mercy | relinquishment | agape | Shared reality | justice |

“It’s about me.”---“Its about what is good.”---“It’s about the will of God.”—“It is the face of God.”

Forgiveness: definitions

(1) Forgiveness as Civility and Tolerance.

Forgiveness is enlightened social tolerance, civility, politeness that excuses an offender or an offense by offering immediate, automatic tolerance without consideration of responsibility or guilt.

Forgiveness is memory fatigue, as time passes and “heals all” and one chooses to “put it behind in forgetfulness, in what is popularly called ‘closure’.” One evicts the event, refuses to be held hostage by memory or resentment, and “gets on with life.”

(2) Forgiveness as Acceptance.

Forgiveness accepts the other in spite of the painful actions suffered, generously and benevolently—from a position of superiority—offers inclusion and some degree of relationship through excusing, covering, overlooking, ignoring, or denying in unselfish reframing of the event.

Forgiveness is an increase in our internal motivation to repair and maintain a relationship after it has been damaged by the hurtful actions of the other. (McCullough, Sandage and Worthington, 1997:22)

(3) Forgiveness as Cohumanity.

Forgiveness is the restitution of the human, the recognition of co-humanity. One human being chooses to see and accept another—in spite of a terrible past—as a fellow human being. (Yevtushenko 1964:26, Mueller-Fahrenheit 1997)

Forgiveness [as co-humanity] is morally possible because of the inherent value of all persons. The moral status of the offender may be in question, but this does not diminish the person’s inherent worth as a human being. Forgiveness is a relational stance of accepting the inherent worth of another person even after judging the wrong action. (Kellenberger, 1995: 407)

(4) Forgiveness as *Pardon*

Forgiveness is not something you do, it is something you discover: you discover you are in no position to forgive; you are more like than unlike the one who hurt you. (Patton: 1990)

Forgiveness is breaking free from bondage. An act of transgression locks the perpetrator to the victim; every offense creates human bondage; evil acts create chains—largely unconscious—of debt, guilt, obligation. Forgiveness is a complex process of “unlocking” painful bondage, of individual or mutual liberation. (Mueller-Fahrenheit 1997:24)

(5) Forgiveness as *Process*

Forgiveness is a process that includes both perpetrator and victim, occurring when the offender asks and the offended grants it, not unilaterally, but in an appropriate measure of mutuality. It may be reciprocal with both sides recognizing failure, owning responsibility, moving toward

each other, changing offensive behavior, releasing anger demands, healing resentments, redeeming the past, renewing the present, opening the future to a more just relationship.

(6) Forgiveness as *Contact*

Forgiveness is the mutual recognition that repentance is genuine and right relationships have been restored or achieved. (Frank Kimper, n.d.)

Forgiveness is an act of recognizing remorse and repentance in the perpetrator(s), and granting the person(s) release. In repenting, one returns to the point of time—the evil act—feels the shame of victimizing or of victimization, owns the hatred, cancels the wish for revenge, relinquishes actual and illusory power. In reciprocal repentance, both return, recognize, express remorse, pledge change in future actions and both release demands on the event and on the other.

(7) Forgiveness as *Restitution*.

Forgiveness is completed by the mutual search for justice that is retributive where possible, so that the stolen is returned, the injured is cared for, the loss is recompensed; where the loss is irreparable, redemptive and transformative justice seeks to change the relationship as well as the system around it to promote justice in the future, work for parity, mutuality and security in both relationships and systemic practice of fairness and respect for diversity in social solidarity.

(8) Forgiveness as *Practice*

Forgiveness is a habit, a practice, a craft. It is not simply an action, an emotional judgment, or a declarative utterance—though Christian forgiveness includes all of these dimensions. Rather forgiveness is a habit that must be practiced over time within the disciplines of Christian community. Forgiveness is a habit, a practice alongside other practices including . . . confession, repentance, excommunication, prayer and healing. (Jones 1995: 163-166)

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In asking for forgiveness, is the offender pleading/seeking:

1.
NON-RESPONSIBLE?
 The offender is nonculpable,
 Excusable; there are clear
 Extenuating circumstances.
 Moral criticism is not
 Appropriate, the person is
 Exonerated.

2.
RESPONSIBLE?
 The offender is responsible
 admits culpability; confesses
 responsibility. Moral criticism
 is appropriate. The action is
 inexcusable, an actual offense.

3.
RELEASE?
 Negative forgiveness: the
 Person seeks release from
 Debt, remission of guilt or
 Punishment, to be free.

4.
READMISSION?
 Positive forgiveness: the
 person seeks admission to
 relationship or return to
 Life in community.

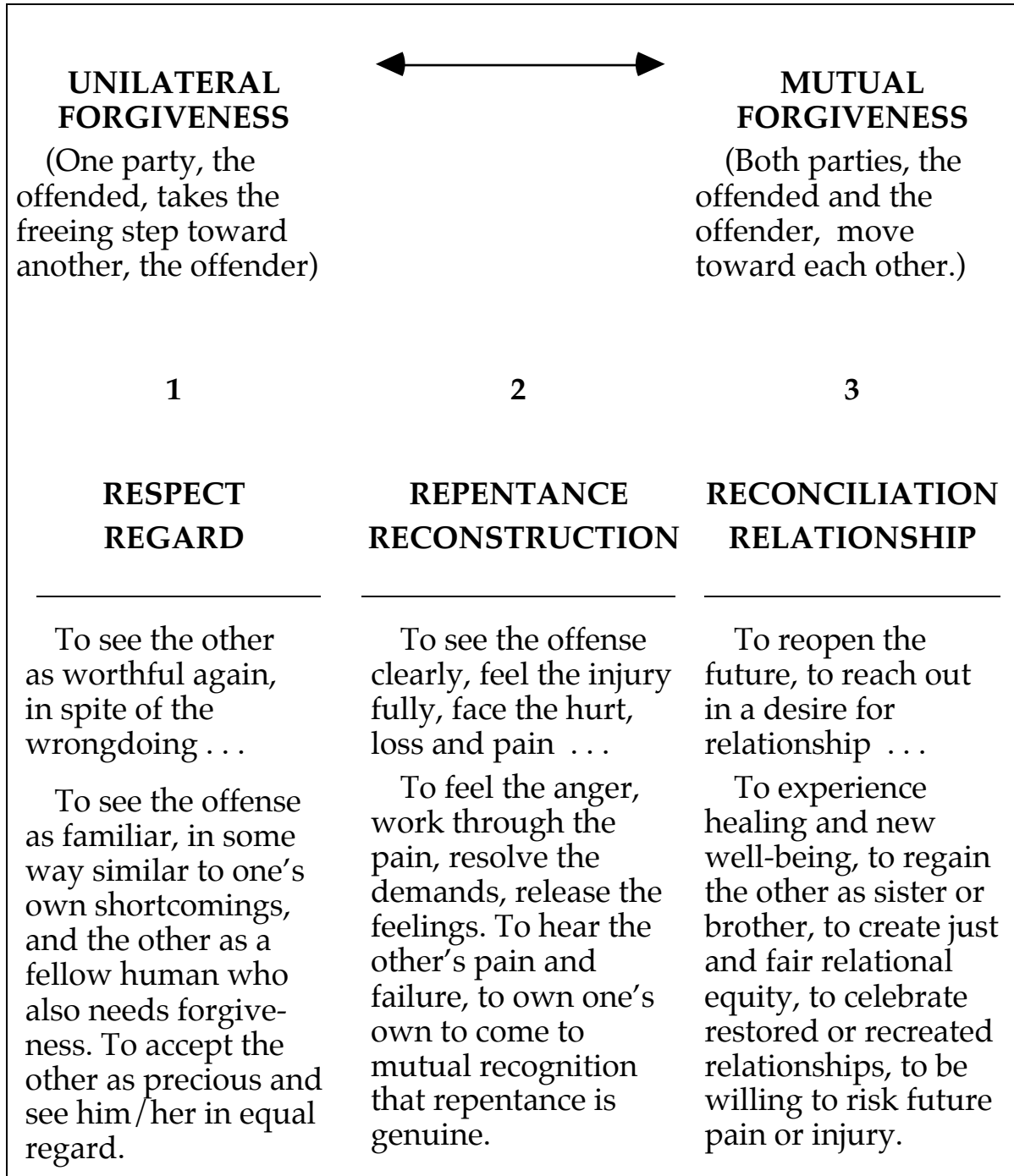
5.
**RETURN TO MORAL
 COMMUNITY?**
 Restores a moral relationship,
 creates goodwill and respect
 for well-being at appropriate
 level of moral community.

6.
**RENEWAL OF
 RELATIONSHIP?**
 Renews the relationship
 by resuming reciprocal
 relating in an open future
 of connections and actions.

7.
RESUME/RESTORE
 Returning to the past,
 going back to resume
 the old relationship in
 “the way it used to be.”
 restoring life together.

8.
RECREATE/RENEGOTIATE
 Re-creating an open, just
 relationship with a new
 contract or covenant that
 promises a different
 future.

Unilateral or Mutual Forgiveness



Forgiving

There are no two cases of injury and forgiveness that are truly alike. Each experience of pain and struggle to regain balance, healing, grace and inner peace is unique; each journey toward reconciliation and reopening of the future follows its own path. Here are some of the steps that are frequently seen.

HEAD

1. see the injury clearly
(face the unacceptable hurt)
2. see the other as human
(recover the other's co-humanity)
3. restore perceptions of offender's worth
(value other in spite of wrong done)

HEART

4. withdraw and reflect until head and heart come together in a desire to relate again.
(10 days, weeks, months)
5. realize that the other is equally precious
(discover an attitude of love for offender)
6. risk communication, extend trust
(express a desire to work through the pain)

HAND

7. let go by dropping impossible demands
(the past cannot be changed, nor the future guaranteed, but promises can be made.)
8. reach out to work through anger, pain, injury
(risk and trust until genuine intentions and authentic repentance are pledged/accepted.)
9. reopen the future to live in moral community at the level appropriate to the relationship.
(if there is no repentance, grieve the loss, go on with love for neighbor.)

What about forgiving oneself?

Forgiveness, historically defined as the interpersonal bridge, now moves from the interpersonal to become an almost exclusively intra-personal process. This shift, from the interpersonal bridge building of forgiveness to the intra-personal repair of self and the restoration of inner balance, is the logical end of individualism's task of self-care. Forgiving the self becomes the primary goal, forgiving the other an optional outcome. Reconstructing violated boundaries and resuming a blameless posture in the face of another's evil or ill will restores self esteem and exorcizes the alien event or person.

Forgiveness, as newly defined, provides a way for the person to self-adjudicate the altercation, dismiss the offender, and through the use of quasi-religious language, grant a "divinely sanctioned" absolution to the self. Self-forgiveness, as both a necessary task of self maintenance and a religiously blessed ritual of self absolution has become what we shall call, "the sacralization of narcissism."

Step 3. Self Exoneration

Self-absolution.

Self-forgiveness

Forgive yourself

Step 2 Self Emancipation.

Set yourself free.

Evict the perpetrator

Refuse to be held hostage.

Forgive as Closure

Step 1. Self Acceptance

Individualism,

Autonomy and

Self esteem,

Grounded in

Self-love

In a culture of individualism, the interpersonal, the relational, the communal are all diminished or if present at all, seen as desirable consequences to the fundamental task of constructing a solid core of unimpeachable, unimpegnable self-love that will carry one through any injury and the recovery process to an individual achievement of personal healing.

Forgiveness may be a strategy for survival, or a means of self protection. Or it may be a way of fulfilling one's sense of duty and obligation to moral principle---an act that is nonetheless about justice for the one you love most--oneself. Forgiving is still a duty, but for the narcissist, it is not to God, it has become a duty to oneself. You owe it to yourself to forgive for your own mental, emotional, physical health. To not forgive is an act of unfaithfulness to your primary allegiance, adultery against the one you love most, betrayal of your own best interests, you cuckold yourself. You owe it to your future health, it is about claiming your best years, the ones before you. Forgiveness is "the gift you give yourself," or, "the freedom you choose for yourself," or the "simple recognition that the injury or act has already gone to print, you cannot retract it or erase it, but in your own inner hard drive, you can hit 'delete' and start fresh with a clean page. Jesus' concern for regaining the sister or brother is no longer our concern. It is personal health, not relational, familial or communal health that is important.