

## How Important it is to Forgive Others

*To err is human but to forgive is divine*

- Anonymous.

Dr. A. Jagan Mohan Reddy \*

### Introduction:

Among the virtues in human beings, forgiveness is the highest but perhaps the rarest one that distinguishes them from the creatures of lower species who are lacking in this quality of higher intelligence. Forgiveness is not as sublime as love, but it's a divine virtue, without necessarily being godly. The Oxford English Dictionary defines forgiveness thus

*"To grant free pardon and to give up all claim on account of an offence or debt".*

But forgiveness is much more than that. Cynics see the act of forgiving as being one of weakness, resorted to by the meek and the cowardly. The more enlightened say only the strong are capable of it, as did M K Gandhi.

*"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong."*

But a question may arise as to why one should forgive?

### Why Should We Forgive?

*"It restores the joy and harmony that was absent while your resentment lasted"*

- Dada J P Vaswani

Pure happiness is achieved because when you forgive a person who has done you harm,

you detoxify yourself of all negative energy, free your mind, and purify your soul and body. Perhaps that's why Martin Luther said: "forgiveness is pure happiness".

In the course of a debate in the American Congress, J P Benjamin made a personal attack on Senator W H Sward. It lasted for a considerable time. Then Benjamin resumed his seat, angry and bitter, to await a counter attack. To the wonder of all present Senator Seward went over to his opponent and said sweetly "Benjamin, give me a cigar. When your speech has been printed, send me two copies". Later, Seward was seen joking with his colleagues, puffing contentedly on this regard he had received from his opponent.

Anger ceaseth not by anger; anger ceaseth by forgiveness. Forgiveness is, perhaps, the most powerful antidote to anger. Forgiveness and the willingness to be reconciled to those who, for some reason or the other, are not well-disposed towards us is essential for success in both the practical and the spiritual planes of our lives. Because the act of forgiveness restores our vitality, stamina and zest for life, allowing us to use our spiritual energy, in constructive ways.

### Do Not Think of Revenge

All of us are well aware that we must be of some service to others. However, in practice,

\* The author is Associate Professor (HR) at the Institute of Public Enterprise, Osmania university campus, Hyderabad. He can be reached at adamareddy@yahoo.co.in. This article is a summary of his speech at the 80th Philosophical Congress held in Mumbai during October 24-27, 09. (courtesy: Tatvaloka) Dr. A. Jagan Mohan Reddy\*

man is keen on doing a disservice, in retaliation for any offence against him. That is, he wants the offender to suffer in some way. That, too, through him. But it must be remembered that one need not be particular about so harming people. For, they themselves will undergo suffering in one way or other. Also, by refraining, one does not earn the bad name of taking revenge.

A kindergarten teacher once decided to let her class play a game. The teacher told each child in the class to bring along a plastic bag containing a few potatoes. Each potato will be given a name of a person that the child hates, so the number, of potatoes that a child will put in his/her plastic bag will depend on the number of people he/she hates. So when the day came, every child brought some potatoes with the name of the people he/she hated. Some had 2 potatoes; some 3 while some up to 5 potatoes. The teacher then told the children to carry with them the potatoes in the plastic bag wherever they go (even to the toilet) for 1 week.

Days after days passed by, and the children started to complain due to the unpleasant smell let out by the rotten potatoes. Besides those having 5 potatoes also had to carry heavier bags. After 1 week the children were relieved because the game had finally ended...

The teacher asked: "How did you feel while carrying the potatoes with you for 1 week? The children let out their frustrations and started complaining of the trouble that they had to go through having to carry the heavy and smelly potatoes wherever they go. Then the teacher told them the hidden meaning behind the game. The teacher said: "This is exactly the situation when you carry your hatred for somebody inside your heart. The stench of hatred will contaminate our heart and you will carry it with you wherever you go. if you cannot tolerate the smell of rotten potatoes

for just 1 week, can you imagine what is it like to have the stench of hatred in your heart for your lifetime???"

The Moral of the story is that we must throw away any hatred for anyone from your heart so that we will not carry sins for a lifetime. in other words forgiving others is the best attitude to take!

OK all this is fine. But what is so special about this quality trait of forgiveness?

While listing out several transcendental qualities of a pure devotee, Krishna tells Arjuna that, inter alia, he should be free from envy and false ego, kind to all living entities, always satisfied and fully devoted to him, equal both in happiness and distress and be forgiving even in respect of those who harm him. This signifies the prime place given to the virtue of forgiveness in human life and particularly to a devotee who seeks to be near the Lord.

Great men, such as Mahatma Gandhi, who really allowed themselves to become instruments of peace and healing in a world troubled by hatred and violence, have shown us the immense power of forgiveness and compassion. Lawrence Stern once remarked, "only the brave know how to forgive ... a coward never can... it is not in his nature".

If this is so let's look at our sacred texts to find out the illustrations of incarnations of godhead, saints, sages and devotees demonstrating this rare quality of forgiveness even in moments of greatest of provocations and humiliations.

### **Acts of Forgiveness**

**Vishnu** is known to have forgiven the great sage Bhrigu even though he had hit Him with his feet and preserved his footprint on His chest as a mark of respect for the sage.

The demon king Ravana, all along considered Rama as an enemy in the mortal

category and left no stone unturned in provoking him by resorting to lowly acts including the stealing away of his wife, Sita, and keeping her in captivity. But finally when Rama killed him, he forgave the demon and allowed him to be liberated from the cycle of birth and death. As a gesture of his forgiving nature, he even allowed all other demons including Tadaka, Viradh, Khardushan, Mariachi and Kumbhkarana to be free from the worldly bondage.

Though Krishna killed the devilish Puthana who came in disguise to kill him but granted her liberation because of his forgiving nature; similarly, he forgave and liberated the other demons like Vatsasur, Bakasur, Aghasur, Dhenukasur, Kaliya, Pralambhasur, Kubalayapida, Chanur and Mushtika though they had been directed by Kansa to kill him.

### **Rishi Dayanand's Grace**

Rishi Dayanand, the illustrious founder of the Arya Samaj, was known for his fearlessness and frankness. He spoke the truth without fear and favour, and in the process, won the displeasure of many influential religious leaders. Some of them bribed his cook to administer slow poison in his food.

As Rishi Dayanand lay dying with no hope of recovery, he called the cook and giving him some money, said, "Escape to Nepal. Flee, while there is time. If my disciples learn of what has happened, they will kill you!". Every great man has borne witness to the noble ideal of forgiveness. As J Harold Smith said, "never does a man stand so tall as when he foregoes revenge, and dares to forgive an injury".

*This is all fine, but what is the Relevance of Forgiveness especially in today's context?*

We all heard the story of a mother helping a boy to escape from police despite being informed by them that it was he who killed her

son in a massive fight. Some of us might have found this story boring and meaningless in these days. but now it strikes us as inspirational and revealing. Look around, TV serials, movies, etc are building around the theme of vengeance, revenge, hate, sex and blood, to some extent even glorifying abysmal characters.

In such an ambience, when even our cultural icons have fallen from grace, the above childhood story of mother, taught us a character– building primer, bringing fresh perspective. It upholds that rare spiritual quality – forgiveness. It is not so easy to forgive. It requires great strength of character. What made the mother forgive her son's killer? Inborn compassion? Perhaps compassion and forgiveness go together. One has to be compassionate enough to be able to forgive.

In our lives, we come across awkward and difficult people, who at some time or the other cause harm, hurt and emotional damage. Nursing the wound or waiting to "hit-back" can only generate negative energy, destroying peace of mind and obstructing clarity of thought and perception. ***This may impact the efficiency of young Managers and hence in his own and their organizations interest it is high time they practice the habit of forgive and forget so that they live peacefully and allow their associates to live peacefully.***

### **Benefits of Forgiving**

All faiths worldwide recommend it. There's universal agreement among religious leaders about its benefits. Every avatar of the Supreme Being and all His prophets have preached it. It's a prayer often recited by devotees in places of worship. And non-believers too, are convinced of its great value. Doctors tell patients about its health benefits.

Old and new age Gurus will break bread to celebrate its virtues. Pranic healers and Reiki masters consider it a powerful healing tool.

Studies at the University of Wisconsin found the more forgiving people were, the less they suffered from a wide range of illnesses. The benefits included improved functioning of their cardiovascular and nervous systems. Anger and resentment towards our so-called oppressors will bring us nothing but trouble and unhappiness.

If you do not forgive, you will continue to think of the offender and the unpleasant event, said pranic healing master Choa Koi Sui. "By forgiving and blessing, you achieve inner peace and freedom." Those who follow Vedanta tradition pray to God to grant happiness even to their enemies. They pray to providence not only for their well-being but also for the prosperity of their adversaries. Vedantic Wisdom believes in a prenatal harmony, a link and celestial communion among all souls. Hence, when you hate another person you only hate yourself, as all souls are linked.

***Having understood the need for Importance and Benefits of Forgiving let's look at what is that is required to forgive truly?***

All those nice, good people who in this social age, often claim with a certain degree of sanity that they have forgiven so and so. The "so and so" may be the boss/ subordinate, the friend or a non-entity. But scratch a bit, and you get the universal statement, "If the memory lingers, it means forgiveness is not total. A bit of the hurt, of the wound still remains embedded in the subconscious mind".

### **To err is human and to forgive is divine**

Some may say they have forgiven but they often talk to other with bitterness about the

wrong done to them. This is no forgiveness, for true grievance is still present. More importantly we need to imbue the spiritual impact of forgiveness. It is not a dry and mechanical process of letting go, but an awareness of deep insight born out of compassion. Evoking the power of compassion is not easy; yet we must keep striving.

Forgiveness is not easy to develop. It needs tremendous determination to overcome the anger and revenge and intun requires perfect equanimity of mind in all situations whether of happiness or sorrow as been stated by Krishna to Arjuna; "Do thou fight for the sake of fighting, without considering happiness or defeat— and by so doing, you shall never incur sin." Thus it is only in an individual who has totally surrendered himself unto the almighty, given up all other duties and is no longer a debtor nor is obliged to anyone that the virtue of forgiveness thrives.

Forgiveness is not a onetime affair, it is a continuous process. It is a process which takes the beautiful form of an everyday prayer where hands are folded, forgiveness is sought and forgiveness given and where what that all fulfilling connectivity with the universal soul is resumed.

### **Conclusion**

To err is human; everyone is bound to do something wrong at one time or other. But in such a situation, revenge means committing not jut one mistake, but making mistake after mistake. On the contrary, forgiveness means undoing wrongs with rights. An eye for an eye and a tooth for the tooth is beastly conduct; where as forgiveness for an offence is divine. Subvert anger by forgiveness. Subdue pride by modesty and over-come animosity, hatred through love and compassion. Horrible killings are globally taking place in the name of religion.

It may be worth recalling what Jesus uttered at his crucifixion immediately before he died. Following is the first one; “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do”.

Then Jesus said, “Father forgives them, for they know not what they do”. This first saying of Jesus upon the cross was Jesus’ prayer for forgiveness for those who were crucifying him; the Roman soldiers, and apparently for all others who were involved in his crucifixion. Jesus exhorts his followers to love their enemies and to pray for those who prosecute them. This verse appears to reflect Jesus’ teaching of unqualified love and forgiveness for all, including those who might seem to oppose or even attack them.

Sandalwood perfumes even the axe that hews it down. Burn it and its perfume wafts all around. Such is the enchanting beauty of forgiveness in life. Forgiveness is the attribute of the brave. The culture of forgiveness helps in the building of a better society, where

positive values flourish, where the spirit of cooperation prevails, where desperate groups come together and form a peaceful society. Revenge on the other hand, creates an environment of mistrust in which everyone takes others to be rivals. The revenge culture rules out the growth of a healthy society.

Thus, it is evident that forgiveness is not only the highest human virtue but also the prime need of the modern time when there is more of strife, hatred, envy and anger and far less of humility, culture, patience and tolerance. If this virtue is developed and practiced by even a small group of people the world would be a much better place to live and most of the miseries afflicting the human beings would soon vanish.

### **So let me conclude by saying**

“Forgetting can be forgiven but forgiving shall not be forgotten” Sarve Jana Sukhino Bhavantu.

## **THE DARK CANDLE**

*A man had a little daughter—an only and much beloved child. He lived only for her, she was his life. So when she became ill and her illness resisted the efforts of the best obtainable physicians, he became like a man possessed, moving heaven and earth to bring about her restoration to health.*

*His best efforts proved fruitless, however, and the child died. The father was totally irreconcilable. He became a bitter recluse, shutting himself away from his many friends, refusing every activity that might restore his poise and bring him back to his normal self.*

*Then one night he had a dream. He was in heaven and witnessing a grand pageant of all the little child angels. They were marching in an apparently endless line past the Great White Throne. Every white-robed, angelic tot carried a candle. He noticed, however, that one child’s candle was not lit. Then he saw that the child with the dark candle was his own little girl. Rushing towards her, while the pageant faltered, he seized her in his arms, caressed her tenderly, and asked, “How is that your candle is the only one not lit?” “Father, they often relight it, but your tears always put it out again,” she said.*

*Just then he awoke from his dream. The lesson was crystal clear, and its effects were immediate. From that hour on he was no longer a recluse, but mingled freely and cheerfully with his former friends and associates. No longer would his little darling’s candle be extinguished by his useless tears.*

*Your loved ones will always love if you are happy.*

*Compiled by : Dr. Gaurav Bissa, Officer on Special Duty IIM, Udaipur.*