

# Forgiveness

December 12, 2011

*During the holiday's I watch the Lifetime Channel. You know, the one with the "sappy" movies which cause many of us to shed a tear over timeless lessons of the human condition. This year I watched a movie with a line that I thought about as it relates to my work. One of my favorite actresses of my time, Tyne Daly, notes that "Forgiveness isn't earned, it is given...in generosity".*

*As a marriage counselor, I often see couples following a betrayal of their bond together. This may be a brief infidelity or a lifetime of emotional distance. Whatever the behavior, one person has had enough! What I know, though, as a marriage counselor, is that more often than not both parties carry the seeds of marital discord. It is difficult to open the door to these conversations; especially difficult for the aggrieved spouse.*

*If we are lucky, life is long. The partner we choose in youth is still our best bet for lifetime support, stability, and compassion. People make mistakes. People fall short. Today's or yesterday's wounds don't predict tomorrow's satisfaction. Marriage is not about the mood of today. In almost all long-lasting relationships there are bouts of dissatisfaction and betrayal. The key ingredient to bridge bitterness to connectedness is forgiveness.*

*And so, I am reminded that it is very difficult to earn forgiveness from a spouse who seeks vengeance. Despite the hurt and pain of betrayal, if a spouse can understand that the betrayal was probably not about them, and rather about the other person's insecurities, then they may be able to hold a stance of possibility. Possibilities about the future and the building of a new marriage, a healthier and more flexible marriage.*

*In my own life, I was bereaved at age 37 with two little children. My husband was a pilot that died on active duty in the Marine Corps. Months after his death I began to learn of his long-standing history of infidelity. It was very difficult to reconcile his public persona as a hero with the truth of his personal moral bankruptcy. I came to realize that this was his problem in life. With this realization, I was able to grant forgiveness completely without chronic bitterness or anger. Post*

*mortem, he could never have earned my forgiveness. I simply chose to give it in generosity, not for him, but for myself.*

*There is something very freeing about forgiving another person. It says, "Your actions will no longer define me". That part of me that is free and complete and united with whatever I believe in is stronger than whatever you may do or might have done. It says that I forgive you for all that I know and all that I don't know about your behavior.*

*I don't assume that all relationships can be rectified through forgiveness. When a spouse's actions require on-going forgiveness, any logical person will have to consider their emotional and physical safety with a person that doesn't change. That said, you can still choose to leave your partner because of chronic irreconcilable behavior, and also forgive them.*

*Forgiveness is for yourself. Forgiveness restores your own balance in this world and the universe. Forgiveness allows you to move forward with other's in trust. Forgiveness allows you to share your children with someone who was a bad husband, but an OK Dad. Forgiveness allows you to care for an elderly parent when they weren't so great to you as a child. Forgiveness allows you to be a great grandparent even when your own child has forsaken you. In this life, we will always experience disappointment. We humans are simply too fallible to meet the needs and expectations of other's in our life. That is the truth and that is all right.*

*Perhaps we were never expected to. Perhaps each of us is given a set of circumstances, and we are simply meant to use those circumstances to grow, to mature, to define who we are, to discover our individual divine destiny. At the end of days, most of us will have to ask ourselves important questions. Did I become wise in my age or did I retain the judgment of youth? Was I good to others? Did I love my family unconditionally? Did I honor my promises? Did I give something to what I call humanity? Start by asking these questions about those you most need to forgive.*

*Forgiveness is often a process. Some people have a "moment", an epiphany, and it is done. Their bitterness is blown as far as the East is to the West. For others, it is a process that takes time. For these people, I encourage you to place yourself among positive people who support your journey of forgiveness. Changing your own heart is difficult*

*enough. Changing the hearts of others is almost impossible. YOU choose.  
It's YOUR life.*

*Happy Holidays*

*Maggie Yankov*