

## **Forgiveness**

By Robert Pruet, on death row in Texas  
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„All that we are is the result of all of what we have thought,“ said Siddhartha Gautama, the first Buddha, after he attained enlightenment under the bodhi tree. He realized that the power of thought effects mind, body and soul. Think of the Placebo Effect. Simply believing in the effectiveness of a treatment effects convalescence, and a placebo injection and reassurance from a physician effectively turns off pain-transmitting neurons in the brain. Also, consider how a person’s confidence and drive effects their performance at work, in sports and other areas of their lives. You think Michael Jordan ever thought, “Oh, I guess there’s a chance this shot might miss!” as time was expiring?! HELL NO! He KNEW it would go in because he believed and it often did. And is it any wonder why positive, optimistic people tend to be more happy and successful as opposed to eternal pessimists? If it can go wrong it often does for such people.

You are what you think.

This is why the thought and act of forgiveness is so important. If someone wrongs you and you hold anger, resentment and hatred towards that person it only hurts you. Holding in negative energy causes stress to the mind and body and, I believe, results in a variety of physical and mental ailments. It’s cancerous and will manifest itself in other areas of your life. We must find ways to release ourselves from these negative states and learn to forgive others when they wrong us, not to mention ourselves when we make mistakes.

Forgiving my father was one of the toughest things I’ve ever done. After telling the story of my life and how I ended up in prison many have asked me, “How could he?!” How could my father not only kill our neighbor but also allow his sons to fall with him? He says the prosecutor refused to allow him to accept blame so my brother and I could be released. Regardless, how could he then sit there during the trial and not tell the jury what really happened?! He finally spoke up at my capital murder trial in 2002, but wasn’t that 6 years too late? These are the thoughts and questions about my father that used to eat at me. I felt such a deep resentment towards him, carried agonizing hate and anger that I fell into a great state of despair and often thought of suicide. He single-handedly ruined our lives, and this goes much further back than him murdering Ray Yarborough. How about all the times he went out robbing in the 60’s and 70’s, leaving my mother alone to raise their kids? What about allowing me to get high with him when I was barely 7 years old? The list goes on and on. To this day I don’t think my brother has completely forgiven him. So how could I?

Forgiveness is a lesson I’ve often revisited over the years. For me, I think it begins with my own mistakes and bad choices in life. I’ve made so many of them. I’ve hurt people in a multitude of ways, be it strangers that I robbed to feed my addictions or friends and family that loved me and only wanted the best for me. When I was finally able to break free of the thought patterns that held me captive within myself I felt such a deep sense of remorse and regret for all the pain I’d caused in life. My heart broke for the countless souls I’d hurt. My hope is that anyone in this life that I’ve ever wronged and hurt will forgive me.... But how can I hope to be forgiven if I can’t

forgive others? It's a two-way street. You must learn how to forgive if you want to be forgiven.

With my father the act of forgiveness goes rather deep. To begin, I recognized at some point that he's only human and makes mistakes, as we all do. I understand that his behavior and dispositions have been molded by a lifetime of influences, many of which extend beyond his own actions. He was raised in a family without much love and was abused mentally and physically as a kid by the people who were in charge of his welfare. He soon turned to a life of crime and drugs, and the vicious cycles that encompass that lifestyle consumed him whole. Of course he didn't make much of an effort to extract himself from the chains that bound him. He repeated the same mistakes most of his life and probably still falls victim to his own poor judgment this day.... He, like so many, has simply never been able to overcome himself. He's never worked out his repressed emotional themes; the ego that we all suffer from, some more so than others. And when I consider my father or anyone else struggling with themselves I have compassion and empathy for them as humans, people just like me who stumble and fall.

My father isn't essentially a bad person. Growing up, I always felt his love for me and our family. I resently received a letter from a cousin who was just a little girl when we were free. She recounted a story about my father doing the dishes for her one night when she was exhausted from a long day, a story she holds in her heart as an expression of his love. He also allowed family and friends to stay with us many times when they had no place else to go, even if we really didn't have the room. And I remember how hard he worked at low paying jobs doing back-breaking work to provide for the family instead of going out robbing and stealing like he did in the 60's and 70's. After he was released from prison in 1986 he really did try to stay out and do the right thing, but unfortunately he was never able to control his violent urges, particularly when he felt his family was being threatened.... I also know that he didn't want me following in his footsteps and become a criminal. He wanted me to finish school and break the cycle of ignorance within our family. He was simply ill-equipped to help me overcome all the hurdles in life.

Ultimately, I've come to know that the act of forgiveness is recognizing yourself in another. In the Bhagavad Gita Sri Krishna counsels Arjune, "They live in wisdom who see themselves in all and all in them." (2:58) Jesus also taught that we should love our enemies as ourselves, the implication being that the spirit of God is within us all. Everything and everyone comes from the same source of energy, the sustaining force that interconnects all of life and existence. We're all manifestations of this eternal energy, this all-pervading light. Separateness is an illusion of the senses. When I see another I see another aspect of my Self, the source of All being. Each of us is on a journey to awakening and awareness, and along the way we all stumble and fall. Invariably because of selfishness and fear. We must learn to not only forgive others when they hurt us but also ourselves when we err. We all screw up in life. It's an act of the highest form of love when we forgive. Love for the one who offends you and love for yourself.

With Love and Light,  
Robert Pruett