

## Notes on the Relationship of Forgiveness to Love.

by Frances Vaughan, PhD

*Frances Vaughan, author, psychologist, and Fetzer Institute trustee, recently offered these notes on the connection of love to forgiveness.*

Love is a universal experience. Love is multifaceted, like a diamond. Love is like light. While we cannot see white light, we see it reflected in all the colors of the rainbow, just as we see human love expressed in many different ways. Love, like inner light, is always present, but we do not see it when emotional barriers are in the way. All forms of love emerge naturally from our true nature when we remove these barriers to the awareness of love. Love of life, love of nature, love of beauty, love of others are all natural expressions of our heart's desire.

Forgiveness is the means of removing emotional obstacles to the awareness of love's presence in our lives. Forgiveness means letting go of negative emotions pertaining to the past. This includes letting go of hatred, anger, and resentment against others, and letting go of guilt, which is a form of anger turned inward against oneself. We understand that we can truly love others best when we also love ourselves, because guilt and resentment are like two sides of one coin. They usually co-exist in the mind.

As long as we feel righteous or justified in holding on to negative feelings about the past, we are not free to live wholeheartedly in the present. Our capacity for love depends on the freedom we

experience when these negative emotions are released.

The practice of forgiveness requires a willingness to let go of these emotions, even when we feel incapable of doing so. Persistence in holding the intention is valuable, since it may take time before the burdens of guilt and resentment can be released. Naming these emotions and communicating them to an empathic, non-judgmental listener, such as a therapist or counselor, can help. If a person is religious, confession may help too. It does not help to talk about these feelings to someone who reinforces them by sharing them. It may be useful to recognize that anger is often rooted in unfulfilled expectations, and may be a defense against fear.

In contrast to guilt and resentment, fear is always about the future. When we feel a lot of anger and guilt, we tend to unconsciously project it into the future and this reinforces fear. Fear, guilt, and anger are the major obstacles to our experience of love in the present.

Justified or not, repressing or holding on to these emotions takes a toll and increases suffering for everyone. The challenge is to transform the energy that is bound up in guilt, fear, and anger into creative action that can bring about positive change in oneself and the world. This process can begin by practicing forgiveness and consciously choosing to let go.

Forgiveness is the means whereby we can be freed from the burdens of the past and fulfill our deepest yearnings to be all of who we are. The desire to make a difference, to contribute to the relief of suffering and sustain life, is motivated by love.

In this way we can heal the emotional suffering that prevents us from opening our hearts. By fulfilling the longing for love, we can contribute to creating a future different from the past.

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