

Resolving Conflict – Session Six

Forgiveness

The ability to forgive the wrong done by others is a great skill in interpersonal relations. It empowers a person to overcome the hurt and bitterness, and move beyond resentment and hatred. This ability enhances the spiritual, physical and mental health of a person. To hold a grudge for a long time is greatly harmful. It decreases one's zest for life and makes one morose and cranky. It has been likened to carrying cannon on one's back, hoping for a chance to retaliate. The heavy burden of the cannon slows the person down, and its weight puts a damper on all other activities.

Islam greatly emphasizes forgiveness as a noble quality that is loved by Allah. Allah Himself forgives human beings, and He wants human beings to forgive others. A Hadith of the Holy Prophet (s) says: *Allah is Forgiving and loves forgiveness.*

The following Hadith show the benefits of forgiveness;

1. Reduces hostility: *Forgive each other, and hatred will disappear from between you.* (Holy Prophet(s))
2. Increases nobility : *Three qualities are from the most noble and generous characters of this world and the hereafter; to forgive the one who is unjust to you, to keep relations with one who cuts off from you, and to forbear when one acts ignorantly with you.* (Imam as-Sadiq (a))
3. Gives honor and dignity: *I advise you towards forgiveness, for forgiveness does not increase a servant (of Allah) except in honor, so forgive one another and Allah will increase you in honor.* (Holy Prophet (s))
4. Increases life span: *Whoever increases his ability to forgive, increases his life span* (Holy Prophet (s))
5. Rewards in the hereafter: *The reward of two things is immeasurable; forgiveness and justice.* (Imam Ali (a))

What is Forgiveness

Forgiveness means we overcome the hurt and resentment created when someone does wrong to us. We do not harbor a grudge, nor the desire to retaliate and get even. When we forgive, we make a decision to break the wall of bitterness created by the offender's behavior. No offense is worth our peace of mind, and in forgiving we are doing ourselves a favor. According to Glenn R. Schiraldi and Melissa Hallmark, in their book The Anger Management Sourcebook,; *Forgiving is taking the arrows out of our gut, rather than twisting the m around inside us.* (pg. 182)

Forgiving others is a choice we make, for ourselves. It is not to let the offender get away with his action, but to ensure that his action does not succeed in destroying our peace and happiness. It shows inner strength and wisdom, and is a great asset in being able to live in peace with others.

Obstacles to Forgiveness

The following are some misconceptions people have about forgiveness:

1. Forgiveness condones the behavior of the offender: When we forgive we are not saying the behavior is acceptable. We can still convey that point, but without the hurt and bitterness that would be there if we do not forgive. It helps us to speak up for our rights without hatred.
2. Forgiveness makes the offender think his actions do not hurt: Again, this message can be conveyed after forgiveness. The hurt was there, but was broken by the conscious desire to forgive.
3. Forgiveness makes me look weak: Actually to be able to forgive shows a lot of inner strength. It is very easy to hold grudges and harbor resentment and hatred. It takes a lot of courage to move away from that and be able to forgive.
4. Forgiveness means the offender will never change: When confronted with forgiveness and a reasonable explanation, the offender is more likely to want to change than when confronted with a lot of anger and bitterness. It is possible to put the point forward with a rationality and wisdom, coupled with kindness and affection, after one has forgiven. This is always more effective than an angry desire for justice.

Healing through forgiveness

Our personal happiness is really our own choice. We can make the decision to allow things to hurt us greatly, and then remember them for a long time. Or we can make the decision to overlook things, and move away from the pain that hurt and bitterness creates in our life. This is better for our peace of mind. It does not mean that we were not hurt, but that we were healed by the power of forgiveness.

By forgiving others, we can also learn to forgive ourselves. People are sometimes harsh on themselves and think poorly of themselves for their lack of certain skills or abilities to perform well in all aspects of life. This creates a low self-confidence and resentment against oneself. It is often reflected in our relationships with others. That is why a wise saying says: *If we are willing to look at another person's behavior towards us as a reflection of the state of his relationship with himself, rather than as a statement of our value as a person, then we will, over a period of time, cease to react at all.*

The one who benefits most from forgiveness is not the offender, but the forgiver. The forgiver unburdens himself of anger, mistrust, and hurt. It is no wonder that Imam Ali (a) says: *Forgiveness is the crown of all noble characteristics.*