

Forgiveness is the process of ceasing to feel resentment, indignation or anger for a perceived offense, difference or mistake, or ceasing to demand punishment or restitution. Forgiveness may be considered in terms of the person who forgives, of the person forgiven and/or in terms of the relationship between the forgiver and the person forgiven. It may be granted without any expectation of compensation, and without any response on the part of the offender (for example, one may forgive a person who is dead). Most world religions include teachings on forgiveness, and for many varying practices of forgiveness. The Prodigal Son is a well known instance of such practice of forgiveness.

The **Roman Catholic** and **Orthodox** Christian Churches teach that God's forgiveness is received through personal repentance in conjunction with the ministry of the Church. In these churches, penitents make formal confession of sins individually to a priest to obtain absolution as a formal expression of God's forgiveness. Catholics and Orthodox Christians cite Jesus conferring upon the apostles: "whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." The substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus via the crucifixion is the vehicle through which God forgives us sins. Forgiveness, is not only a spiritual duty, but as a form by which the people of God implement their mission to live as a people who are reconciled to God. Both forgiveness and repentance focus on the satisfaction of justice. When God through the Apostle Paul said "Forgive as the Lord forgave you." (Colossians 3:13). "Forgive as God forgave you, using the same means and power that God used to forgive you. God forgave you by accepting the blood of Jesus death at the hands of the executioner as the substitutionary satisfaction of His justice. To forgive those who have caused us harm, have injured us, caused us loss, is to accept Jesus' death as the Satisfaction of Justice!" Biblical texts on the subject of forgiveness. The Lord's Prayer - "Forgive us our [debts], as we forgive our debtors" "Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven.'" (Mt 18:21-22) The parable of the Unmerciful Servant, concludes: "In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." (Mt 18:34-35) "When you pray, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." (Mk 11:25). The exercise of forgiveness is part of that repentance through which the believer has access to the forgiveness of God. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34. "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Eph 4:32)

In Hinduism. Performing atonement from one's wrongdoing and asking for forgiveness is very much a part of the practice of Hinduism. Karma is a sum of all that an individual has done, is currently doing and will do. The effects of those deeds and these deeds actively create present and future experiences, thus making one responsible for one's own life, and the pain in others. Forgiveness is a great power: For Hinduism, forgiveness is a virtue of the weak, and an ornament of the strong. Forgiveness subdues all in this world; What can a wicked person do unto him who carries forgiveness in his hand? Unforgiving individual defiles himself with many enormities. Forgiveness is supreme peace; supreme contentment; and one sole happiness." Forgiveness is one of the characteristics of one born for a divine state.

Islam teaches that Allah is 'the most forgiving', and is the original source of all forgiveness. Forgiveness often requires the repentance by those being forgiven. Depending on the type of wrong committed, forgiveness can come either directly from God, or from one's fellow man who received the wrong. In the case of divine forgiveness, the asking for divine forgiveness via repentance is important. In the case of human forgiveness, it is important to both forgive, and to be forgiven. The Qur'an, teaches that there is only one error that God cannot forgive, the error of assigning equals to God. For Islam this error is a denial of monotheism, and therefore of the supreme nature of God himself. *God does not forgive idol worship if maintained until death*, (Qur'an 4:116) But if man returns to God and pleads

sincerely for forgiveness and abandons worshipping other than the one and only God, He will be forgiven. The Qu'ran makes no allowances for violent behavior. It is better to forgive another than to attack another. To receive forgiveness from God there are three requirements: Recognizing the offense itself before God. Making a commitment not to repeat that offense. Ask forgiveness from God. If the offense was committed against another human being, or against society, a fourth condition is added: Recognizing the offense before both those against whom offense was committed and before God and committing oneself not to repeat that offense, doing whatever needs to be done to rectify the offense (within reason) and asking pardon of the offended party, finally, asking God for forgiveness. Muslims are taught many phrases to keep repeating daily asking God's forgiveness. For example: "I ask forgiveness from Allah" "Glory be to You, Allah, and with You Praise (thanks), I ask Your forgiveness and I return to You in obedience". Islamic teaching presents the prophet Muhammad as an example of someone who would forgive others for their ignorance, even those who might have once considered themselves to be his enemies: Islam believe that the Prophet was the most forgiving person. He was ever ready to forgive his enemies. When he went to preach the message of God, its people mistreated him, abused him and hit him with stones. He left the city humiliated and wounded. When he took shelter under a tree, the angel of God visited him and told him that God had sent him to destroy the people because of their sin of maltreating their Prophet. Muhammad prayed to God to save the people, because what they did was out of their ignorance. "Keep to forgiveness, and enjoin kindness." Qur'an 7:199-200 "If you endure patiently and do not punish, it is better for the patient." Qur'an 16:126-127. "If one is patient in adversity and forgives — this is indeed something to set one's heart upon." Qur'an 42:43 "Let the worthy forgive and show indulgence. God is forgiving, Merciful." Qur'an 24:22

In Judaism, if a person harms someone, but then sincerely and honestly apologizes to the wronged individual and tries to rectify the wrong, the wronged individual is required to grant forgiveness: "It is forbidden to be obdurate and not allow yourself to be appeased. On the contrary, one should be easily pacified and find it difficult to become angry. When asked by an offender for forgiveness, one should forgive with a sincere mind and a willing spirit." But if the wrongdoer does not apologize, there is no religious obligation to grant forgiveness. This is because Judaism is focused on the personal responsibility of the wrongdoer. It is the wrongdoer's responsibility to recognize the wrongdoing and to seek forgiveness from those who have been harmed. In Judaism, one must go *to those he has harmed* in order to be entitled to forgiveness. This means that, unlike in Christianity, in Judaism a person cannot obtain forgiveness from God for wrongs the person has done to other people. A person can only obtain forgiveness from God for wrongs done to God. For instance, should person A assault person B, person A would have to obtain forgiveness from both person B (for the assault) and God (for breaking God's law against assault). Just as only God can forgive sins against God, so only human beings can forgive sins against human beings." Jews may, however, forgive if they choose even if the offender has not apologized. If one who has been wronged by another does not wish to rebuke or speak to the offender — because the offender is retarded or confused — then if he sincerely forgives him, neither bearing him ill-will nor administering a reprimand, he acts according to the standard of the pious. (*Deot* 6:9). Jews observe a Day of Atonement. Just prior to Yom Kippur, Jews will ask forgiveness of those they have wronged during the prior year (if they have not already done so). During Yom Kippur, Jews fast and pray for God's forgiveness for the transgressions they have made against God in the prior year. Sincere repentance is required, and once again, God can only forgive one for the sins one has committed against God; this is why it is necessary for Jews also to seek the forgiveness of those people whom they have wronged.

In Buddhism forgiveness is urged as a practice to prevent harmful thoughts from causing havoc on one's mental well-being. Buddhism recognizes that feelings of hatred and ill-will leave a lasting effect on our mind. Buddhism encourages the cultivation of thoughts that leave a wholesome effect. For Buddhism it is not a matter of seeking revenge but of

practicing forgiveness, for the victimizer is, truly, the most unfortunate of all. When resentments have already arisen, calmly proceed by going back to their roots. "If we haven't forgiven, we keep creating an identity around our pain, and that is what is reborn. That is what suffers." Buddhism puts emphasis on loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, as a means to avoiding resentments. In response to **9/11**, a Buddhist monk, reminded his students, "When we give serious consideration to our companionship in birth, old age, sickness, and death with all other beings in the world, it gives us a fresh perspective..." *'He abused me, he struck me, he overcame me, he robbed me' Those who harbor revenge, thoughts of hatred never ceases.*

Psychological theories about forgiveness have developed in recent decades. They formulated a number of models describing the process of forgiveness. They developed a 20-Step Process Model of Forgiveness. It involves: recalling the hurt; empathize; think of altruistic gift of forgiveness; commit to forgive; hold onto forgiveness. Studies show that people who forgive are happier and healthier than those who hold on resentments.

+++