

Eight Weeks of Conversation Cafe

Week Seven: Lifestyle Topic- Forgiving Others

In this discussion we're focusing on the concept of forgiveness. To forgive means to not expect payment for a debt, to not seek revenge on the person who hurt you, and to stop feeling angry/resentful toward someone because of something they've done.

The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong. - Mahatma Gandhi

What is Gandhi saying?

What kind of strength is Gandhi talking about?

Forgiving doesn't mean forgetting, nor does it mean that you've given the message that what someone did was okay. It just means that you've let go of the anger or guilt towards someone, or towards yourself. But that can be easier said than done. If forgiveness was easy, everyone would be doing it. ~Psychology Today

How do you let go of the anger you feel toward someone who has hurt you?

Is it ever wise to forgive but not forget what the person has done? Give an example.

Why do you think it is important to ask forgiveness from those we have hurt?

While it is impossible to get through life unharmed by others, some have endured much more evil by people than others. While all of us need to forgive large and small offenses, perhaps we can learn from those who have suffered greatly. There are many such stories of forgiveness found on The Forgiveness Project. The following excerpt is the story of one man's journey to forgive.

<https://www.theforgivenessproject.com/kemal-pervanic>

Kemal Pervanic is a survivor of the notorious Omarska concentration camp, which was set up by Bosnian Serb forces in the early days of the Bosnian War. The camp, nominally an 'investigation centre', was uncovered by British journalists in 1992, leading to international outrage and condemnation.

in May 1992, the newly named Bosnian Serb Army began targeting Muslims and my village was attacked. I was captured and taken to Omarska camp where the conditions were terrible; there was very little food, no space to sit, and just two toilets for a thousand people. Luckily, I was with my middle brother and this eased the pain. But we didn't know whether the rest of our family members were alive or dead.

A lot of neighbors used this situation to settle old scores. One of the guards was my former language teacher, another was a former classmate. Many times, people were taken out and tortured. Some never returned. When I'm asked now, how is it possible for people to turn on those they know so suddenly, I tell them it takes a long time to prepare people for the slaughter of their neighbors.

I spent the whole time in a state of terror, but I knew I needed to suppress my feelings in order to survive. I became able to watch someone being slaughtered like a pig without crying. It didn't mean I didn't care, but extraordinary circumstances make you react in ways you can't explain.

More than ten years after his release from this camp and his resettlement in England, he came to a point of forgiveness.

Then something strange happened. One cold January morning, I was in the shower when suddenly I found myself saying, 'I forgive you'. Year after year I'd carried the memory of the perpetrators on my shoulders. So, when this moment came I felt a huge release.

It wasn't a conscious decision to forgive, something just changed inside me. Perhaps it was because my father's recent death had inspired me to make some personal amends (I'd contacted former girlfriends and apologized in case I'd ever hurt them unintentionally). Perhaps I forgave because I realized that death can come at any time and take away the opportunity for reconciliation.

I went back again to Bosnia, and one day during this trip I recognized a former camp guard hitching by the side of the road. I started laughing. My friend couldn't understand why I was laughing, but what else could I do? I didn't want to swear or scream or get violent. I laughed because I remembered the monster this man had been, but now, hitch-hiking alone on a dusty road, he looked almost pitiful. That's what they call the banality of evil.

People describe these people as monsters, born with a genetically inherent mutant gene. But I don't believe that. I believe every human being is capable of killing.

What can we learn about forgiveness from this story?

What steps do you take in order to forgive someone?

