Myths of Forgiveness

Throughout our lives, parents, teachers and religious leaders have urged us to:
“Forgive and forget”, “Turn the other cheek”, “Let bygones be bygones”, “Kiss and makeup”

As a result we have all grown up with certain ideas about what forgiveness really is. If we are to forgive and let go, it is essential to dispel some of the common myths about forgiveness.

Myth #1  TO FORGIVE MEANS TO FORGET ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED
I may still remember the incident that lead to the emotional pain but the memory will no longer carry the emotional charge that it once had.

Myth #2  FORGIVENESS CAN ONLY BE ACCOMPLISHED IF I AM A SPIRITUAL OR RELIGIOUS PERSON.
Forgiveness can be accomplished by anyone who has willingness and can see the value in it for themselves.

Myth #3  I MUST FEEL LIKE FORGIVING BEFORE I CAN FORGIVE.
Forgiveness itself is a choice and is available at anytime. The choice to forgive does not deny our feelings. In actuality, the opposite is true. Forgiveness requires that I first acknowledge my feelings.

Myth #4  I CAN ONLY FORGIVE IF THE OTHER ASKS FOR IT OR APOLOGIZES FIRST.
If I am waiting for the other to take the first step, I will be waiting for the rest of my life. If I am to resolve the pain that I carry because of unforgiveness, I need to take the first step.

Myth #5  FORGIVENESS MEANS PRETENDING THAT NOTHING HAS HAPPENED.
The opposite is true. Forgiveness means facing the upsetting situation and acknowledging the fact of it. It means acknowledging the emotions that have arisen out of the upsetting situation.

Myth #6  I MUST FORGIVE IMMEDIATELY.
While forgiveness is available to me at any moment, I need to respect my readiness and willingness.

Myth #7  I MUST HAVE A GUARANTEE THAT I WON’T BE HURT AGAIN
There are no guarantees that I won’t get hurt again. Forgiveness itself is unconditional and is an expression of letting go of the past. In contrast holding on to hurts does not guarantee that I will never be hurt again.

Myth #8  I AM SUPPOSED TO FORGIVE BECAUSE MY RELIGION SAYS I SHOULD.
Forgiveness itself is a choice that is motivated by the benefit and advantage to me and my life. If I should forgive, I probably won’t. If I could forgive, I might. And if I choose to forgive, I will.

Myth #9  FORGIVENESS IS FOR THE OTHER’S BENEFIT
In actual fact, forgiveness is for my benefit. I am the one who is released to live my life again. The other may certainly gain out of my forgiveness, but forgiveness is primarily for me.

Myth #10  TO FORGIVE MEANS THAT I AM APPROVING OF SOMEONE’S NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR
Forgiveness does not say, “Sure go right ahead and hurt me again.” In actual fact, forgiveness acknowledges the hurtful situation. In the context of a relationship, forgiveness trusts that you will take my hurt into account.

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