

FORGIVENESS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF PEACE

Translated by Achille Cattaneo

Anna Maria La Vecchia

How the need to explore this theme was born.

When I discovered that I had an illness, I asked myself what meaning it could have, what it wanted to tell me, and the word that appeared to me was “FORGIVENESS”; I began to reflect and keep this word in my heart and mind; I read various writings by various authors (D. Lumera, writer, lecturer, creator of a path of awareness, E. Poli psychotherapist, Thich Nhat Hanh, Zen monk) but above all I tried to put it into practice.

And yet, after an initial surprise (it seemed to me, in fact, that the experiment had succeeded), I realized that forgiveness is not an instantaneous, occasional fact, but an attitude that must be developed and maintained in consciousness, it is an infinite process.

It is not easy, my work on forgiveness continues, I realize that I am not always “willing” to forgive, because the occasions for forgiveness are many and always new, and therefore much vigilance, awareness, humility, generosity are required.

I have come to the conclusion that forgiveness is an aspect of Love, as a Unifying Principle.

And since I feel that forgiveness is a fundamental aspect in relationships, I wish to share with you my reflections and acquisitions.

“Forgiving is freeing a prisoner and discovering that the prisoner was you” (Sacred Scriptures)



When we feel offended, we cage the one who offended us in a series of judgments, emotions, feelings and reactions, without realizing that in reality we are in that cage and that everything we feel corrodes us and hurts us first of all.

The practice of forgiveness is very ancient and arises above all in the religious sphere, all religions deal with it, in particular the Christian tradition, for which it is a fundamental cornerstone (even if it has often been lived with a childish attitude).

In the Gospel there are two terms that indicate forgiveness:

- *aphiemi*, which means in its original meaning: to let go, to free, to remit debts; in this case forgiveness is a reflection of the divine presence in us, in fact forgiveness is a prerogative of God;
- *hilaskomai*, which means to atone, to appease the wrath of God; in this other meaning forgiveness is a means to free from evil, but it requires that the offender repent.

Buddhism, instead, places emphasis on compassion as a fundamental element of forgiveness, as an expression of unconditional love.

The attitude to forgive has therefore been developed mainly in religious or spiritual contexts both to recreate the harmony of the human being and to recover communion with the divine aspect: it therefore has a unifying, pacifying function.

But forgiveness has also become a subject of great interest for science, psychology and psychotherapy for the well-being of the person.

Psychiatrists, psychotherapists and psychologists consider forgiveness a therapeutic instrument. In the field of neuroscience, the brain areas through which forgiveness acts, bringing benefits to behavior, have been identified.

Forgiveness is good!

But is this the deepest meaning of forgiveness? Feeling

well, purifying oneself, recovering a relationship or freeing oneself from fear? Moreover, does forgiveness concern exclusively the offense inflicted on another person or suffered, or does it first concern internal relationships, between our offended, silenced, forgotten parts?

How is it possible to forgive someone else if we first cannot forgive ourselves?

Every external conflict is a manifestation of an internal conflict; if we manage to make peace with ourselves, perhaps we are more capable of making peace with others. This is the meaning of the phrase “Peace begins in our hearts”.

In essence, one can say that forgiveness in its deepest meaning has the function of restoring right relationships, re-establishing a fragmented unity, in which the separated parts have lost the sense of the original unity, and therefore recreating right relationships between the parts within us, between an Ego and a you, between the we and the you, so as to understand that what happens in our small internal microcosm is in reality the beginning of a single process which, expanding, can also reach peace among nations.

Assagioli considers forgiveness “...as the essential condition of future relations between nations which must be based on the recognition of our forgiveness”.

Saint Thomas wrote: “...Forgiveness restores the lost bond, the disturbed communion”.

And D. Lumera observed: “... If we observe ourselves well we can discover that the origin of all conflicts lies in the perception of being individuals separated from the rest, and forgiveness is the process through which the integration of this inner fracture takes place”.

In this sense forgiveness has a holistic dimension; *olos* in Greek means totality, therefore the true purpose of forgiveness is to expand consciousness by accessing an overall vision characterized by a sense of communion with oneself, others and all reality, and implies the involvement of all aspects of our being: biological, psychological, sociological, spiritual.

In light of what has been said, we can examine how forgiveness acts on our various levels:

- Physical: Influences the immune system, the cardiovascular system, the central nervous system, psychosomatic processes.
- Energetic: Influences the processes of regeneration of vital energy, frees energetic blocks, influences creativity, makes vital energy fluid.
- Emotional: Allows the manifestation of elevated emotions and feelings of compassion, love, gratitude etc., develops empathy, allows the manifestation of a state of deep peace.
- Mental: Transforms thought forms generating hatred, resentment, revenge, violence, pain into ideas, thoughts, beliefs generating peace, union, liberation, balance, compassion.
- Causal: Acts on past events that generate conflicts and imbalances in the present, acts on the quality of relationships, acts on the recognition of individual and collective responsibility, transforms into awareness the causes that generate pain.
- Spiritual: Allows contact with a conscious spiritual dimension, the development of qualities such as patience, humility, unconditional love and courage, allows contact with true spiritual power, heals the wounds of the soul.
- Consciousness-related: Favors the development of a holistic vision of reality and of oneself, allows the manifestation of higher states of consciousness.

(Daniel Lumera, “I 7 passi del Perdono” - The 7 Steps of Forgiveness”)

To these actions one must add an action at the social level, especially if those who have metabolized the process of forgiveness are educators and figures of power. These, in fact, as reference models can transmit the values expressed by forgiveness: compassion, empathy, conflict resolution, peace and social harmony.

Let us observe what states of mind and emotions are linked to the process of forgiveness.

The emotions that characterize an offended part are essentially: resentment, anger, bitterness, hostility, fear, hatred (as separation), mental rumination and victimhood.

The first step is therefore to recognize them within us, take responsibility for them and become aware of the dynamics they generate, and only afterwards can we allow ourselves to detach from such emotions (disidentification).

Emotions, recognized and used consciously, become precious allies and allow access to higher dimensions of our consciousness, thus giving space and life to emotions, feelings and qualities useful to the process, such as: empathy, humility, compassion, gratitude, generosity, harmlessness.

A fundamental quality for activating forgiveness is courage: "...Only the strong are capable of forgiving" (Gandhi); it is in fact the strength of the heart that allows forgiveness (whereas for current mentality forgiving is an act of weakness, of yielding etc.).

However, it is necessary to understand that to activate the process of forgiveness some conditions are necessary:

The will to forgive, therefore all attempts at superficial resolution of the conflict do not lead to true forgiveness: "...opportunism, the tendency to look down on those who have been the object of our forgiveness, satisfaction, not without pride, in one's own righteousness and generosity condescending in sacrificing revenge and retaliation. All this is not yet true forgiveness" (Assagioli). "...There is no forgiveness at a low price" (E. Poli)
 Forgiveness is not forgetting, excusing or justifying, nor is it the expectation that the other changes, nor is it letting go of anger immediately without inner work.

The willingness to change perspective and put oneself in the other's shoes, having the will to understand the other.

An ethical sense, that is, the feeling that there exist universal laws, among which that of right relationships, according to which there exists "...the right measure of maintaining one's individuality without being absorbed by others... in the awareness that each person's life has its meaning in the essential unity of human beings; and this also implies the sense of a true and real justice". (Assagioli)

Performing reparative actions (sincere communication, apologies etc.)



Photo by Laura Rodighiero

Forgiveness is a process and as such requires time and the crossing of various phases:

- Entering into contact with everything we feel, without discounts, and recognizing what we believe has offended us and what we believe must be forgiven, entering into deep contact with our suffering; (accusation)
- Recognizing how we can also be the cause of the event, no one is perfect; this allows us to change perspective and take responsibility for what we feel

without projecting onto the other what depends on us. Often, in fact, one reacts to presumed injustices suffered; in fact – given the fundamental egocentrism that exists, in varying degrees, in all of us – we tend to consider unjust what we do not like, what is not favorable to us, even if it is not really unjust. And, with the psychological mechanism of projection, we project onto others the states of mind, the impulses that are in us. (assumption of responsibility)

- Recognizing what the other in the relationship has nonetheless done that is useful for us, if nothing else even the simple occasion of questioning ourselves, allowing us to see our feelings more clearly and to understand how every event or encounter is for our evolution (gratitude)
- Feeling that there are no more obstacles to a sense of union and peace (love)

All this is an internal process and each phase must be lived fully and therefore experienced until the feeling is genuine, true.

And, as was said at the beginning, true forgiveness occurs only when we realize that we are not strangers to what has happened to us, that there is always a cause that belongs to us; and authentic forgiveness allows us to make peace with ourselves before with the other, allows us to accept ourselves, free energies, increase awareness and recover our own power.

”...All of us, individuals and nations alike, have our share of fault, we are wrapped in illusion, we have reasons for mutual forgiveness. (Let the watchword for all men now be: forgiveness) ”.Assagioli

Authentically forgiving does not mean suffering damage without reacting, but only that after forgiveness the reaction/action is not motivated by anger or frustration, but our words and actions will be full of determination and clarity; what drives our action will be the courage to transform conflict into something productive and evolutionary.

Forgiveness “...is a conscious act of Will and Love...” (Assagioli)

“...If at this moment all men forgave each other, individually and collectively, the world would immediately find peace.” (Assagioli)



*Il perdono (The Forgiveness) – by Arturo Martini
(private collection) Bronze
60 × 69.5 × 14 cm – 1925–26*