

# Forgiveness and Conflict solution from a religious view

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DIDAR Assignment

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## **Final Assignment**

### **Introduction**

We decided to study more about the topic Forgiveness and we want to focus on the relation between forgiveness and religion. The reason why we decided on that topic was the day with Mpho Tutu. She impressed us when we had the chance to have the detailed and intensive meeting with her in the beginning of the week. The way she was speaking and the things, she was speaking about were very interesting for us and now we want to gain some deeper knowledge about that topic "Forgiveness". We want to focus on the effect of religious thoughts on forgiveness because religion has a big influence in some people's life and rules the way of dealing with conflicts in their everyday life. We see that most of the conflicts in our society nowadays stem from religious arguments. They are so individual and sensitive that those conflicts can be the hardest ones to solve and reconcile because people usually get offended easily and they find themselves in troubles to have successful dialogues.

Theme: Reconciliation on religious dimension

### **Research Questions**

How can we deal with conflicts and reconcile conflicts from the religious point?  
What position has forgiveness in different religions? How are the different religions dealing with conflicts and conflict- solution?

**DIMENSIONS OF FORGIVENESS:** When people have to deal with a new situation or with a change in their life, they tend to react like that: conservation! They try everything, to conserve their living situation. Just when all the efforts to conserve fail, they try to cope with that situation. Then, transformation is an opportunity. A good example is a couple, which is not able to have biological children. At first, they will try to do all, to be able to have their own, biological children. They could try to have an artificial insemination, going to a therapy and so on. Just when all the attempts fail, they will try to deal with that situation. They could adopt a child or they just change their values and living goals. They try to deal with that situation and to accept it. People tend to focus more on methods of conservation, than on methods of transformation in their lives. (Everett L. Worthington JR, 1994)

The last sentence is very relevant, when people have to deal with conflicts. They try to go on in their lives and to conserve their situation and so the conflict can't be solved. When both parties in a conflict would be open for transformation; when both sides take part in conversation, a new situation could be found and the conflict could be solved. Then, the dialogue can be successful.

When people have to deal with abuse, victimization or betrayal, they also tend to react conservatively and not transformational. It means that they are not open to change their positions in the conflict situation. As they are staying in the role as a victim, they are not able to go on their lives and to work on that conflict.

Also in the book of forgiveness we read: To be able to go on the path of forgiveness, you need to believe in it and you have to be willing to do that. Just when that requirement is there, the process of transformation can start and maybe it ends in forgiveness. The people themselves have to make the first step and the most important thing is to believe in the process and to be open for transformation. Also Mpho and Desmond Tutu's "Book of forgiveness" says something about the process and the willingness of transformation, as we wrote in the paragraph before. People also need enough courage to start the journey of forgiveness and you need to be sure, that you want to start this process without your grief, doubt and anger. The success depends on the strength of the people and transformation has to happen. Desmond and Mpho Tutu (2014)

Forgiveness brings a lot of emotional and spiritual benefits and that's the reason, why it is a theme in the major world religions. Scientists have been working with that topic just for the last years. To look at that topic from a scientific point of view is new. But what does religion have in common with forgiveness? Religion can help people, to live easier in an uncertain environment and with the process of forgiving. (Michael E. McCullough, Kenneth I. Pargament, Carl E. Thoresen)

We wanted to know, how some of the religions talk about the topic forgiveness in their faith. In the book that we found, the author asks five religious scholars from all religions: "How important or central is forgiveness in your tradition?" (Michael E. McCullough, Kenneth I. Pargament, Carl E. Thoresen)

Judaism: Forgiveness is a central theme. Since the Day of Atonement, that is the holiest day in the Jewish liturgical year, Forgiveness played an important role.

Christianity: Forgiveness is also in this religion a central theme. "It represents the possibility and reality of change and transformation of the individual in relation to others and others in relation to the individual." (Michael E. McCullough, Kenneth I. Pargament, Carl E. Thoresen, *Forgiveness: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 2000, The Guilford Press, p. 31)

Islam: People that want God to forgive them their offenses, have to learn to forgive others. Forgiveness is important for the afterlife and it brings happiness in the world. It improves relations between people and it brings more respect. Revenge to the extent harm is allowed but forgiveness is preferred. That is the middle way between forgiving people and having blood feuds. That was often the case and the fights went over generations. Forgiveness protects the people and it brings reward from Allah.

Buddhism: Forgiveness is not a central topic but the two categories compassion and forbearance are. They are central themes because of the connection with the nature and the actions of Buddha.

Hinduism: "[...] those who wish to follow the path of dharma must practice forgiveness, compassion, forbearance, and so on. Therefore, forgiveness is considered to be important in the Hindu tradition." (Michael E. McCullough, Kenneth I. Pargament, Carl E. Thoresen, *Forgiveness: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 2000, The Guilford Press, p. 32)

As the information comes from an Interview with the different scholars, it was sometimes necessary to quote them word by word, because it was impossible for me, to say in better. They chose their words carefully and they came to the point but never the less we should not forget, that it is their impression of their religion and that it is not the one and only truth. The question is asked very general and so we can only expect a general answer. According to that interview we can say, that forgiveness plays in most of the world-religions an important role. Just the Buddhism says that compassion and forbearance fit more than forgiveness.

As it is difficult to find the way of dealing with conflicts, we can take two ways of coping from religious perspective. First one is 'there is no single key to good coping.' As coping with forgiveness is a complex process in people's lives, there can be many ways because it not only depends on the personal issues but also situations and more largely the society. (Everett L. Worthington JR, 1994) When we take the

situational perspective, as McCullough and Worthington (1994) says forgiveness may be inappropriate when the wounds from a personal assault are too fresh, when the violation is too severe, or when the mistreatment is ongoing. So, if we relate it to the coping issue, it is important that we need to learn not only when to forget, but when not to forget. Secondly, as every individual has their own values, their way of coping may change. We cannot say there is just a single good coping for everyone so coping can have personal aspect. The other reason can be that every individual has different objectives in their lives. We can relate this way of coping to forgiveness and religion. Every individual may try to deal with conflicts for different reasons or objectives depending on their values, interests and religions they have. All the people may choose different paths. Some people may choose to get rid of the pain and forgive at the end, whereas the others may choose to work on it and share their stories with each other. Or even there can be other ways like just ignoring forgiveness. From the point of religion, we can take the existence of differences into consideration. Because religion is sensitive, personal and individual notion, people may choose different paths to deal with religious conflicts. All the ways can be successful or not, however one cannot be more successful than the other because we are talking more about personal values. We can see it in the story of Baumeister which is written in the book of Everett L. Worthington JR told at the American Psychological Association in 1997. He was talking with a colleague on his plans on a panel focused on forgiveness. She just said she does not believe in forgiveness. Pargament, K. I., & Rye, M. S. (1998) We can understand from here that she chose to make a personal statement which is very much related to belief and religious values rather than a method. She simply said I do not believe in forgiveness as some people do not believe in God. It is important to see those differences of values and meanings of forgiveness to different religious groups. Pargament, K. I., & Rye, M. S. (1998).

As we see in this statement, even if sometimes it is hard to respect and tolerate people from other religion, it is important to remember it from forgiving point because those different religions may approach to forgiveness in different ways. For instance, for many Christians, forgiveness can be value or love without caring about the condition whereas Jews may depend more on contexts and conditions as we see in Pargament, K. I., & Rye, M. S. (1998). For Muslims, it is an important issue to forgive. Allah and his messenger Mohammed are role models for forgiveness. It is important

for Muslims to be forgiven by God to get rid of their sins; therefore, they feel relieved and live happily. Tsang J., McCullough M. and Hoyt W. (2005).

When I discuss with my friend who is Christian she also says that you should love the other people like yourselves and everybody deserves a second chance no matter what and in which situation they are. I as a Muslim person can say, we also see God as so welcoming and as a forgiver no matter who you are and from which religion you are.

## **Conclusion**

As we are dealing with the forgiveness from religious perspective, there are subjective personal experiences and stories involved. So it would be good for victims and perpetrators to get together somehow and share their stories, open dialogues or debates and work on it rather than trying to solve it by methods without involving those sides. From all documents we have searched we see that people who have different cultures, traditions, values and religion may deal with conflicts differently and even some cannot give up the role of victim and maybe not willing to forgive the perpetrator. That's why dialogue and sharing is important.

## **'The Forgiveness Project'**

We heard about the project from UK about forgiveness and we watched a short video about that initiative. For that project, a lot of individual stories of dealing with conflicts have been collected. On the homepage we found the aims and goals as that one: "Collect & share real stories of forgiveness and reconciliation to help individuals transform the pain and conflict in their own lives."

<http://theforgivenessproject.com/about-us/>

It was very nice to see, that people are working on that topic and it showed us the actuality of that topic. In that semester, we worked a lot and in different ways on that topic and to see projects like that, bring hope in our minds and it is nice to see, that something like that is happening in the world. It opens the people's eyes and it makes sensitive for a topic like that. It is amazing to see that a project like this is made worldwide, because it deals with a lot of different conflicts and problems. People from the same region might have the same or at least similar problems

because their environment is similar but when they can see problems from people from other countries, it can also open their mind and they can maybe learn something to work on their own conflict. They can learn from each other`s and people, that are not involved have another, neutral view and that could also be helpful for people in a conflict.

### **Working Together**

We want to mention an interesting experience while we were working on that Assignment. We had different ways of working on that Assignment. I am used to write papers like that: I am used to add my own opinion after I worked with a text and to reflect on the text. Bahar has another way of working on Assignments like that: We more write like articles and essays with the summary, introduction, literature review, methods and participants, discussions and conclusion. For the main part, we do researches or studies by going to schools and investigate focusing on our research questions and make some questionnaires maybe. Then, considering our study and what we have read from other books and articles, we compare and discuss them. In the conclusion, we add our opinions but by supporting them with quotations from documents. We do not just add our own opinion without any support because they say that we are not professors so we cannot claim an idea without any study or knowledge. Also, they care a lot about plagiarism for these kind of things when you take an idea from another person.

It was interesting to work together and to find a way that is good for both of us. The whole semester we learned to work with a lot of different people and that experience helped us, to find a good way to work on that Assignment. We discussed a lot and we reflected together on the different texts, like we did it in the course too. On the one hand, discussing the texts was opening our horizon and we improved our ideas about that topic, but in the other hand, we needed more time to discuss and find the way of writing, that we both agree.

## **Literature**

Everett L. Worthington JR., Dimensions of Forgiveness: Psychological Research, Theological Perspectives, 1998, Templeton Foundation Press

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