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A Journey of Forgiveness

by Carolyn Baker, Ph.D.



For the past forty years of the so-called New Age Movement, individuals from every culture and tradition have imparted volumes of information and inspiration regarding the origin and alteration of human suffering. Those of us born to the World War Two generation entered a world reeling from the Nazi holocaust and at the same time hurling headlong into nuclear annihilation. During the sixties we revisited the transgressions of our ancestors against Africans kidnapped from their homeland and mercilessly transported to our shores to be sold as sub-human chattel in order to plant our crops, raise our children, and perform menial and abhorrent tasks too demeaning for such as we thought we were. The same generations which bought, sold, raped, and brutalized its slaves simultaneously genocided millions of Native Americans in the name of Christianization and Manifest Destiny. And then the

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Vietnam War forced us to confront our hypocrisy once more as we officially "lost", for the first time, yet another attempt to subdue an indigenous population.

In the eighties, with the demise of Communism and an external enemy, we awoke to the disturbing reality that two hot wars and a cold war had kept us sufficiently preoccupied so that we had not had to acknowledge the prevalence and severity of all manner of abuse rampant in our homes, schools, workplaces, and churches. Thus was born a new American institution, the talk show, in which we aired our dirty laundry, without inhibition, in all of its bizarre repugnance. Naively, we were surprised when, after a decade of well-meaning survivors of horrendous abuse telling their stories on network television, emphasizing that they had been and may continue to remain in therapy for decades, our health insurance companies pulled the plug and instituted a massive policy of managed care, also known as "managed scare", to discourage, among other things, "chronic" mental health treatment. Suddenly, with great chagrin, we realized that perhaps we had shot ourselves in the foot with our unabashed, "tell all" approach to which some people attribute the twelve-to-twenty-session limit in most health insurance benefits for psychotherapy.

Reliance on Twelve Step programs and self-help books and workshops, which had facilitated the uncovering of abuse, became more essential as the cost of therapy rose and insurance coverage subsided. As we honed our awareness, cultivated our self-esteem, and began experiencing healing and recovery, we also began turning our attention to the subject of forgiveness -- a prospect particularly appealing to the war-weary veterans of years and decades of processing their abuse issues, and a perspective vigorously reinforced by a culture sorely deficient in its comprehension

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of the healing process and obsessed with the heroic attitude of "putting it behind you".

I genuinely believe that after some thirty to forty years of deepening our consciousness and attending to our self-improvement, we are now more prepared to address the issue of forgiveness than we have been at any time in modern history. Yet our efforts in this arena, as with all other issues of becoming whole persons, requires clarification and refinement.

Forgiveness, like our recovery, is not an event but rather one of many journeys, leading to still other journeys, in the precious epic saga of each individual life. My intention, therefore, is to underscore the necessity of approaching forgiveness as a process that is extensive, often demanding, and never easy. Too many quick fixes for forgiveness, in my opinion, permeate self-help books and tapes and the workshop circuits of some of our most esteemed self-awareness gurus. I wish to convey here, the arduousness of the task called forgiveness, as well as offer permission not to commit to the task if one is not up to it. Too often, people decide to "forgive" as a result of external pressure from a self-help author or workshop facilitator or member of the clergy. While I emphasize that forgiveness is a desirable option with unimaginable rewards, I am equally aware that no one has ever forgiven anyone authentically as a result of moral duress or inducements of eternal peace of mind. In other words, the journey of forgiveness is not for the fainthearted. It is yet another step in a protracted, tedious, taxing process of healing and transformation.

I come from a long line of individuals who committed grievous atrocities against their own children and against minorities. My ancestors, treacherous pioneers who immigrated from Germany, left behind them a legacy of brutality and racism, many

of them having participated in the massacre of Native Americans in the nineteenth century, and in the Ku Klux Klan during the twentieth century. As I have pondered the grotesque behavior of some of my elders, I have prayed for their forgiveness, all the while knowing that some transgressions are so heinous as to be humanly unforgivable. Far more disturbing for me personally is their influence in my life through my parents and grandparents in the form of atrocities committed against me and other family members of my generation. My healing work with the wounds and scars sustained in childhood from this ruthless legacy ultimately led me to the dilemma of forgiveness and questions like: Can I forgive them? Should I forgive them? What does forgiveness really mean? Is it even possible?

Many individuals are struggling with people and situations in current time that may feel hopelessly unforgivable. In addition, forgiveness applies not only to past injuries but also to offenders who may no longer be present in one's life. One's work in forgiving a parent might also be translated into the process of forgiving an ex-lover or ex-spouse, an ex-friend, or a child.

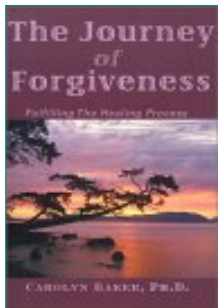
As with the evolution of consciousness in the twentieth century, forgiveness occurs, not at the beginning, but in the later stages of personal and collective healing. My own forgiveness journey has proven how crucial self-forgiveness is as an essential component of the total process. Sufficient emotional and spiritual preparation are necessary for the forgiveness journey, and it cannot begin until the time is right. Nevertheless, the journey must begin somewhere, somehow.

IT IS I WHO MUST BEGIN

**It is I who must
begin...
Once I begin, once I**

**try--
here and now,
right where I am,
not excusing myself
by saying things
would be easier
elsewhere,
without grand
speeches and
ostentatious
gestures,
but all the more
persistently
--to live in harmony
with the "voice of
Being," as I
understand it within
myself
--as soon as I begin
that,
I suddenly discover,
to my surprise, that
I am neither the
only one,
nor the first,
nor the most
important one
to have set out
upon that road...
Whether all is really
lost
or not depends
entirely on
whether or not I am
lost.**

-- Vaclav Havel



The above above was excerpted from "[The Journey of Forgiveness -- Fulfilling The Healing Process](#)", by Carolyn Baker, Ph.D., published by iuniverse.com, ©2000.

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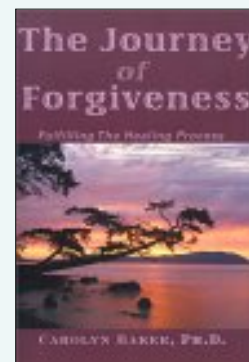
About The Author



CAROLYN BAKER, Ph.D., is a storyteller, drummer, and educator living on the Mexican border of the Southwestern United States. She leads workshops and retreats on ritual and mythology of which she has been a lifelong student. She is author of [Reclaiming the Dark Feminine : The Price of Desire](#) as well as of her recent book: [The Journey of Forgiveness -- Fulfilling The Healing Process](#). To

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This article was excerpted from



"The Journey of Forgiveness"
by Carolyn Baker, Ph.D.

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