

FORGIVENESS, FEAR and TRUST

The fact that forgiveness can improve our wellbeing by freeing us from anger and resentment is nothing new; it has been encouraged by many and practiced by some people for thousands of years. In the last decades, the scientific community has placed a special interest in this area because it helps us dissipate the intensity of anger that gradually and quietly consumes us.

Forgiveness means stop being angry about something, and it is the job of the person, or group, who is entitled to retribution; this is a tall order but an action that will provide the rich fruit of peace of mind so we can go on with our life and enjoy ourselves today.

Forgiveness invites us to be an example to others who are also suffering from the anger generated by the disappointments of life; it creates a ripple effect that transcends any of our differences. It won't change the turbulence in the world; but it will change us.

Forgiveness is not for 'them', we practice it for our own benefit. We need to recognize that the human being is a 'fearful animal' that wants security for tomorrow; since tomorrow doesn't exist, this guarantee is an impossibility that generates fear that will turn into, and may perpetuate, anger—a feeling many of us do not know how to channel into a healthy energy such as staying still and taking deep breaths, something difficult to practice when we are facing a sudden situation that creates intense pain.

Anger is not necessarily negative; it is a phase of a process and it has deleterious effects when we get stuck in the anger phase of this process. The process may be called 'grieving' and the phases may be denial, anger, frustration and finally acceptance; however, not getting too lost in how we 'should' split this process, we can say that anger is generated by fear of either losing what we have, or not getting what we want—the rest of the fears of the human race branch from these ones. If we, for convenience, believe this; then, when we are angry it might be less difficult to identify and list our fears. To set the pace for our day, we may get up thirty minutes earlier in the morning and write down, for example:

I am afraid of:

1. Not having enough time to do what my brain wants me to do.
2. Getting 'the short end of the stick' in life, at work, or wherever I may be. Somebody will get the position I desire, etc.
3. Never getting the recognition/respect/help I deserve.
4. Not having a family, a healthy family, etc.
5. Not having a meaningful life—and exciting, enjoyable life.
6. Suffering more than I deserve.
7. Having a safe life for me, my children, my siblings, etc.
8. Others spending, wasting, stealing my money, the fruit of my labor, etc.
9. Not coping with the loss of a loved one, my child, my sibling, my spouse, my parents, etc.
10. Others getting away with damaging others' lives with impunity.
11. Forgiving those who do not deserve my forgiveness.
12. Never getting forgiveness from those I love, from society, etc.

Once we put them on paper, these fears will lose intensity and our mind will be clearer so we can enjoy our breakfast and go on with our day. As we continue to live; we'll realize that this list will be endless because every day comes with its own set of fears and we have to keep listing them every morning—even if they are the same fears—until we become aware that it is OK to have them. There is nothing wrong to have fears as long as we deal with them. If this chore becomes overwhelming, there is nothing wrong asking for help from a counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist, etc. I am not any of these; however, as an internist and gastroenterologist, my job is to 'lure' my patients into a healthier lifestyle by encourage them to do what they can do for themselves and this includes the practice of meditation, healthy nutrition and exercise—all these three require that the patient change, and to change we need to forgive—especially forgiving ourselves for not living up to our expectations.

One thing we can do to temporarily deal with fear and anger is practice pretending that we will make it for today by recognizing that we have everything we need this moment and TRUST that we will survive today. If we find it hard to trust, we may remind ourselves that yesterday we were worrying about the potential problems we would have to face today, and so far today we are surviving; we have food on the table, a cup of water, and most likely a roof over our head. Let us reflect that if we have coped with all the 'tomorrows' in our life, so far our survival record is 100%; thus, what makes us think that we won't cope with the next tomorrow? Have a great day!