

To Forgive Is Divine

*An Excerpt from
Mystic Pathways through
the Bible*

*T*here is a well-known saying that “To err is human, but to forgive is Divine.” It is the goal of spiritual movement that a human being not remain “human,” but become Divine—rising above normal human limitations and unfolding the dormant wings of magnanimity within their heart. One great quality that truly transforms a person into a Divine being is forgiveness, known in Sanskrit as *kshama*.

To become forgiving in nature, you do not have to forcefully plant the virtue within your heart. You need only clear away the impediments that prevent your inherent Divinity from unfolding and expressing itself. The soul

in its essence is the embodiment of all virtues. Virtue is intrinsic, while vices develop because of obstructions that obscure one’s essentially Divine nature.

If electrical power, which normally serves you in so many beneficial ways, transforms into short-circuited energy, it becomes dangerous. In the same manner, if the natural energy of the soul that spontaneously expresses in the form of virtuous qualities becomes short-circuited, it manifests as negativity. For example, think of the various circumstances when you have become angry because you expected a positive situation and instead experienced a bitter one. That anger

developed because of your misunderstanding of that experience and how it could benefit your spiritual growth. As a result, your energy became short-circuited.

In the scriptures negative qualities are represented as demons, positive qualities as gods. These two are in a constant battle. The heavenly world is never at rest. In the Mahabharata, when Krishna beheaded the terrible demon, Shishupal, a light emerged from the body of Shishupal and melted in Krishna. The mystical implication of this scriptural event is that when you destroy the negative, you have corrected the short-circuit, and the tangled energy now flows in a constructive manner.

When the scriptures urge us to unfold Divine qualities and control the negative ones, this does not imply that we should become incapable of such feelings. Anger, agitation and expectation are important aspects of the human personality, and without them we would be like a lifeless painted picture.

Instead, agitations of the mind should be under the control of your reason. A mother training a child may show anger, but she never loses sight of the love that she has towards the child. Under the umbrella of love, you allow firmness and harshness to develop with control, so that anger in itself is not an energy that overpowers your intellect. On the other hand, any form of agitation that stifles your reason is negative.

Forgiveness Is the Secret of Greatness

While suffering on the Cross, Lord Jesus calls out:

Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do. (KJV Luke 23:34)

In these resounding words, Christ directed His unconditional goodwill even towards those who crucified Him and revealed the amazing magnanimity of His heart. One who is enlightened possesses a gracious forgiving nature that expresses at all times, no matter what the circumstances may be.

Highlighting the same spirit, the Puranas of India recount an interesting story about Sage Brighu. In early times, there was a discussion among the gods about who should be worshipped as the greatest among the three deities: Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Sustainer, or Shiva the Destroyer. Eager to settle the question, great Sage Brighu said he would take up the experiment of testing the three deities to prove who was the greatest among them.

Reflecting within himself, he thought, “I will consider him the greatest who is endowed with unparalleled forbearance and has the greatest control over his temper.” With this idea in mind, Brighu first proceeded to Brahma Loka, the heavenly region where Lord Brahma dwelled.

Once there, Sage Brighu walked past Lord Brahma without touching his feet and offering the traditional adorations. Brahma could not tolerate the misconduct of the Sage. His eyes grew red with anger and he was about to pronounce a curse on Brighu. Then Goddess Saraswati, Brahma’s Divine consort, restrained him, saying, “Oh Lord, do not be angry with Brighu. He has always been courteous before. There must be some explanation for his behavior.” Brahma was thus dissuaded and Brighu quickly slipped away.

Scarcely believing that he had escaped, Sage Brighu hastened his steps to Lord Shiva’s dwelling. Approaching the great deity, Brighu again did not offer proper adorations. Rather, he began to insult Shiva, saying, “Oh Shiva, you wear snakes around your neck and keep your body smeared with ashes. Surely you must be quite mad!”

At this, Lord Shiva grew angry and reached for his trident, ready to hurl it at Brighu. But Goddess Parvati, Shiva's Divine consort, pleaded for mercy for the Sage and Shiva reluctantly agreed—at least for the time being.

Fleeing from Lord Shiva, Brighu proceeded to Lord Vishnu's abode. Lord Vishnu, the indweller of every heart, knew what the Sage's intentions were. So even before Brighu arrived, he pretended to be in deep sleep. When Brighu saw Lord Vishnu lying there so peacefully, he kicked the chest of the deity, saying, "You who are the sustainer of the world, how dare you sleep and ignore the well-being of the world!"

In response, Lord Vishnu woke up and immediately clasped the feet of the Sage, saying, "Oh Sage, your tender lotus foot has been injured by my rock-like chest. What a great sin I have committed. Please forgive me!"

Sage Brighu was amazed at the humility of Lord Vishnu. He said, "Oh Lord, it is I who

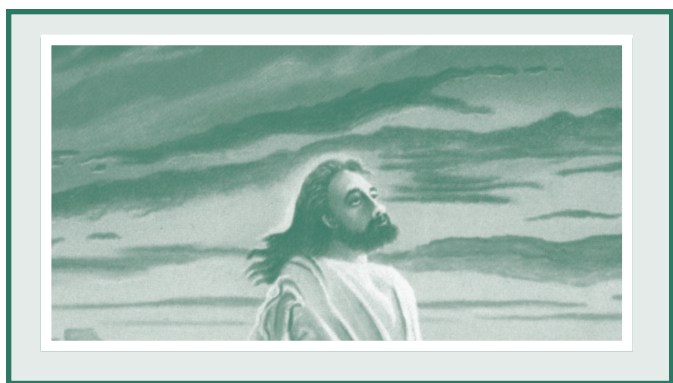
must be forgiven by you who are supremely compassionate. How can I ever be free of my sinful act of having kicked your sacred chest with my foot? The world will always speak ill of me for having done so."

Lord Vishnu replied, "Oh Sage, on the contrary, the world will sing your praises. You have pleased me by placing your foot on my chest. Just as a mother is pleased even when her infant kicks her, I am ever pleased with my devotees even when they are angry with me. As a token of my satisfaction, I have installed your footprint on my chest. Not only this, every great incarnation of mine throughout the ages will bear your footprint on his chest." Sage Brighu became immersed in Bliss. He had discovered the amazing power of Divine forgiveness.

From a mystic point of view, this story is not meant to ascertain the relative greatness of the deities because, in fact, these deities are really one appearing as three. What it intends to show is the secret of real greatness. The greatness of a person does not lie in his power and prosperity, but in the magnanimity of his heart—his readiness to love instead of to hate, to forgive instead of to bear a grudge, to be humble rather than to be proud and conceited.

The presence of a footprint on the chest of Lord Vishnu's incarnations serves as a mythological reminder of the power of forgiveness. It symbolizes the mystic fact that any aspirant who has truly enshrined Divine humility in his heart becomes a Divine incarnation, an absolute master of his anger and agitation.

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*Be Alert
Not to Develop
Pride in Forgiving*

Forgiving someone's faults, or forgiving an injury done to you by someone is wonderful, but you should not record how many times

you have done so. Do not maintain a mental or written diary that you display before the person enumerating all the good things you have done for them and the number of times you have forgiven them.

Sincere and spontaneous practice of virtue does not amplify egoism or pride. When you strive to display your virtue, it ceases to be virtue. Like a flower bud unfolding secretly in the moonlight, virtue reveals itself with shy spontaneity, sharing its graceful fragrance freely with all.

Wield the Weapon of Forgiveness

What should you do when someone continues to hurt you? The response should not be “An eye for an eye.” Ideally, one should learn to conquer evil or misunderstanding with the weapon of forgiveness. The “weapon” one chooses to use in dealing with life’s problems is always dependent upon their level of evolution. Grosser weapons are guns, pistols, knives and swords. Subtler and more proficient “weapons” are forgiveness, nonviolence, and love of God.

In normal warfare, if a particular weapon does not become effective, you must invent something more destructive. In the case of spiritual warfare, if the weapon is not effective, you employ something even more Divine. If seven days of forgiveness is not helping you to transform the evil, practice a month of forgiveness. If ten times more forgiveness does not help you to remedy a situation, then practice a hundred times more forgiveness.

Further, if you have done your best and still forgiveness has not brought about a harmonious result, never despair. Your ideal is to attain a mind that remains calm and relaxed and doesn’t waste its energy on entertaining hatred. Anger, hatred, and jealousy all waste your mental energy

and take you away from God within yourself. On the other hand, if you are able to withdraw these negative emotions, you are rewarded with the joy of transformation and a closer relationship to God within.

You gain a power that is so invincible that no power on earth can compare to it. It is the luminous power of love, the power of forgiveness, the power of compassion. As time has passed and history has written thousands of pages of war and murder, the power of love expressing through Jesus, through Buddha, through all the Divine Sages and incarnations shines forth. That power remains the most exquisite source of inspiration for humanity. In that power of love and forgiveness is the resolution to all problems, because it leads to the discovery that “I am the Self in all.” In essence, people with different personalities are not really different. They are simply waves within the same glorious ocean of the Self.

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