

Chapter 2

Understanding Forgiveness

It seems that understanding forgiveness depends on the focus point of investigation. The focus point of this investigation is an examination of the thoughts, emotions, and behaviour that burn within the individuals who were hurt, by illuminating their subjective experiences. This investigation also focusses on the subjective experiences of these individuals by assisting them with changing their subjective feelings of hurt and pain to a subjective feeling of mental health, which is preceded by the ability to forgive.

Rossi's (1993) view on emotions is based on the underlying assumption that whatever occurs in the mind originates in the physiology of the body. He asserts that bridging the so-called 'gap' between the mind and body occurs by the movement of the messenger molecules that are the major pathways of communication between and within all the regulatory systems of mind and body, and who at the same time serve as the ultimate keys for the state-dependent encoding of the types of personal emotional experience and behaviour that have always been relevant to psychotherapy and mind-body healing (Rossi, 1993; Damasio, 1994). This perspective of emotional experiences includes the above mentioned aspects of cognition, feeling, and behaviour in addition to neurochemical processes (Hobson, 1994). Forgiveness from this perspective therefore presupposes a mind-body theory of emotion.

Cognitive theory necessarily ascribes more control over the emotion to the agent who has

the emotion, than a feeling theory. Mind-body theory however, necessarily divides control over the emotion between the body and the mind. Quantum brain dynamics theory on the other hand reveals that “total memory is nothing but one of the Quantum Brain Dynamic vacuum states and that consciousness is the creation and annihilation dynamics of corticons and photons in the Quantum Brain Dynamic system of the cerebral cortex”, (Jibu and Yasue, 1995, p. 188). From the quantum brain dynamics perspective therefore, the control of mind states, of which emotions are a part, is located in the creation and annihilation dynamics of corticons and photons (Zohar, 1991).

Emotions therefore need to be considered as an integral part of forgiveness. In this chapter I shall describe ways in which emotional experiences are involved in and related to our functioning on a physiological, cognitive, spiritual, and behavioural level.

An emotion can be described as a feeling of joy, sorrow or fear that could move an individual to laughter, tears or trembling. It is a complex phenomenon that consists of three main components: a) the experience or conscious feeling about an event b) the processes that occur in the brain and nervous system during that event, and c) the observable expressive patterns of behaviour, particularly those that are visible on the face, in response to the event (Izard, 1977). An emotion thus involves the cognitive structures, the nervous structures, and the physiological structures of an individual (Panksepp, 2000; Le Doux and Phelps, 2000; Cacioppo, Berntson, Larsen, Poehlmann, and Tiffany, 2000; Rende, 2000; Keltner and Ekman, 2000; Isen, 2000; Johnson-Laird and Oatley, 2000; Booth and Pennebaker, 2000; Izard, 1977).

Emotions have been found to play an important role in the way we perceive and understand situations, but our perception and cognition also plays an important role in initiating an emotion (Johnstone and Scherer, 2000; Saarni, 2000; Forgas and Vargas, 2000; Isen, 2000; Johnson-Laird and Oatley, 2000; Parrott and Spackman, 2000; Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, Mayer, 2000; Tomkins and Izard, 1965). Emotions affect the whole person. They can alter the level of electrical and bio-chemical activity in the brain, change the amount of tension in the body and the facial muscles, and they also affect the circulatory system, the

respiratory system, and the visceral-glandular system (Booth and Pennebaker, 2000; LeDoux and Phelps, 2000; Cacioppo, Berntson, Larsen, Poehlmann, and Tiffany, 2000; Barber, 1984). According to Booth and Pennebaker (2000), Leventhal and Patrick-Miller (2000), Miller and Schnoll (2000), and Hall, Mumma, Longo, and Dixon (1992), even the immune response can be enhanced as a result of directed thinking, imagining and feeling.

From a philosophical perspective, freedom of the self is interrelated to a wholesome integration of the personality (Tillich, 1957). When the personality is well integrated, the self is well integrated and it is able to express its desires as a will in action. The freedom of the will is therefore rooted in the freedom of the self, which in turn grows out of an integrated personality (Tillich, 1957). There is however no absolute freedom, because even man's freedom is limited by his nature and existence in space and time (Tillich, 1957; Von Dietfurth, 1989). Man is incapable of relocating to another planet or to another eon, and the constraints of space and time in the here and now are essential to making decisions and acting upon those decisions. Another name for the space / time constraints is context, and it seems to be an essential aspect of life, that whatever man chooses to do internally or externally, is determined by the context in which he finds himself.

When a person considers to forgive another, s/he is constrained by the context of the situation. That means that a twenty-five year old daughter, who is emotionally hurt by her father during one of his drunken spells in their kitchen, may experience the incident totally different to a four year old daughter, who is emotionally hurt by her drunken father in her bedroom. The age of the daughter and the location in the house are the crucial aspects of contextual constraints that could lead to different behaviours in the two daughters. The twenty-five year old may choose to forgive her father, since he was drunk, while the four year old may carry the pain and resentment of that incident with her for many years to come.

Murphy considers forgiveness to be the overcoming of resentment (Murphy and Hampton, 1988). He maintains that there are five reasons for choosing to forgive the person who has

wilfully hurt another:

- The perpetrator repented or had a change of heart.
- The perpetrator meant well or his/her intentions were good.
- The perpetrator has suffered enough.
- The perpetrator has experienced humiliation.
- The perpetrator has committed a first offensive act.

All five reasons allow the hurt person to separate the hurtful act from the perpetrator. When the conceptual separation between the perpetrator and the hurtful act has been accomplished, it becomes possible for the hurt person to forgive the perpetrator without condoning the hurtful act. The accomplishment of separating perpetrator and act also frees the hurt person to overcome his/her resentment towards the perpetrator by keeping self-respect, respect for others, and respect for morality intact. Since Murphy's definition of forgiveness concerns the emotional state of overcoming resentment inside the hurt person by the use of reasoning, the premises of his definition must be based upon a cognitive theory of emotion.

Hampton's definition of forgiveness also presupposes a cognitive theory of emotion (Murphy and Hampton, 1988). She however disagrees with Murphy in the sense that overcoming resentment is forgiveness (Murphy and Hampton, 1988). According to Hampton forgiveness is a process, and the overcoming of resentment and other forms of anger is the stage of psychological preparation, and only the first step of the forgiveness process (Murphy and Hampton, 1988). The second step is when the hurt person has a change of heart towards the perpetrator, and the third step is when the hurt person makes an offer of reconciliation with the perpetrator. This definition of forgiveness includes all three aspects of an emotion: the cognitive, feeling and behavioural aspects.

Psychological Understandings of Forgiveness

In the years between 1981 and 1994, an increasing interest in forgiveness amongst ministers and counsellors has increased the research output on forgiveness. These research outputs were an outcome of the sparse work on forgiveness that was done in the 1970's and 1980's, which will be discussed briefly in an attempt to provide a concise overview of the existing literature on the investigation of emotions, thoughts, and behaviours that are necessary to forgive.

Forgiveness and Ideals

Neblett's (1974) perspective on forgiveness is based on a philosophical inquiry into the nature of forgiveness as opposed to the verbal expression "I forgive you". He claims that words alone do not constitute forgiveness, and behavioural features other than verbal behaviour need to be present to effect the act of forgiveness. He conducted unstructured, unintentional observational research by observing the interpersonal interactions of individuals that he encountered in the course of his life. There is thus no given number of subjects that were included in his research, but rather an ongoing string of interpersonal interactions. These informal observations of interactional sequences between individuals were then used as the basis for his argumentation on forgiveness as an act that consisted of verbal as well as behavioural features.

Psychological Processes of Forgiveness

Smith (1981) discusses the psychological processes of forgiveness through the *Personal Construct Theory* by Kelly (1955) and attempts to show parallels with the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius. This piece of work is a theoretical comparison between the

psychological processes of forgiveness as explained by the application of the *Personal Construct Theory* and the practice of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius. There were thus no research subjects involved, and it is not clear from the discussion whether the processes of forgiveness that were used in the comparison were developed with or without a prior knowledge of St Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*. Likewise, no reference is made to the original readings that form the basis of Kelly's (1955) *Personal Construct Theory*, and whether the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius were a part of those readings.

Divorce and Forgiveness

Trainer's (1981) doctoral dissertation is the first research project on forgiveness that provides a conceptual framework, and evidence of empirically tested relationships and measurement tools which aid in the operationalisation of the types of forgiveness and the unique processes that are associated with these types. According to her, forgiveness involves a) overt gestures of forgiveness, b) cessation of overt hostile responses, c) management of hostile impulses, and a gradual letting go of resentment, d) re-emergence of positive attitudes and feelings towards the one who has done the injury, e) gestures of goodwill. She subsequently constructed a general forgiveness scale to measure these aspects of forgiveness. Clinical and survey modes of inquiry were administered to tap the respondents' subjective understanding of forgiveness before they were asked to relate their experiences to quantifiable categories that were predefined by the investigator. Their current attitudes and behaviours as well as their attitudes and behaviours at "the worst time" and "after the turning point" were measured.

A semi-structured interview was developed and conducted with 73 divorced and separated men and women. They were asked to share the phenomenology of the hurt that they experienced during the time of their divorce and/or separation. Questionnaires and coping scales that are based on coping thoughts, feelings of coping, and coping behaviours were developed, and at two retrospective time points (the worst time and after the turning point)

coping processes were elicited.

Three types of forgiveness were delineated as follows: Role-expected forgiveness is defined as an overt manifestation of forgiving behaviour characterised by fear, anxiety and resentment. Expedient forgiveness comprises an overt manifestation of forgiving behaviour that is performed as a means to an end, with accompanying condescension and hostility. Intrinsic forgiveness is comprised of an inner change of attitude and feelings towards the one who has done the injury, accompanied by benevolent behaviour.

A further differentiation along eleven dimensions were added to the three types of forgiveness, which consist of self-acceptance, perception of self and the other, personal and social power, motivation, values and beliefs, manifestation of forgiveness, nature of the relationship, and sentiments.

The study was designed to explore the relationship between types of forgiveness and change across time in blaming behaviour, power, restoration of personhood, coping modes, and disengagement from hostile impulses. The semi-structured interview, four forgiveness scales and separate scales that measure coping behaviour were developed and administered. After conducting a factor analysis of all the forgiveness measures, three underlying factors emerged. These three underlying factors corresponded to the three types of forgiveness.

Trainer (1981) found, as hypothesised, that individuals who scored high in general and intrinsic forgiveness blamed the circumstances and the ex-spouse less with the passage of time, and they refrained from blaming themselves. Individuals who scored high in expedient forgiveness blamed the ex-spouse and themselves more with time, while role-expected forgivers revealed very little blame. When personal power was restored, and when the power was equally distributed between both partners, intrinsic and general forgiveness were likely to occur. Under conditions of low personal power and unequal power relations, role-expected and expedient forgiveness were found to occur.

When individuals scored high on general and intrinsic forgiveness, they were likely to perceive themselves and the ex-spouse as having changed for the better, and they reported faith as a source of support. Individuals who scored high on expedient and role-expected forgiveness, reported an increase in self-defeating behaviour after the turning point at Time II, while it decreased in those who scored high on general and intrinsic forgiveness.

After the turning point anger subsided in those who scored high on general and intrinsic forgiveness, while it increased in those who scored high on expedient forgiveness. Anger control however, decreased across time in those who scored high on general and intrinsic forgiveness, while it increased in those who scored high on expedient and role-expected forgiveness. Those high on intrinsic forgiveness reported a sharp increase in letting go behaviour across time, while those high in expedient forgiveness reported a sharp decrease in letting go behaviour.

Forgiveness and the variables that were assumed to correlate with forgiveness were operationalised in Trainer's study. The most important findings from her study were the following:

- Individuals who were motivated intrinsically to forgive their ex-spouses made a voluntary decision to move towards forgiveness in an integrated manner. They seemed to have counter defensive coping strategies at their disposal to deal with the hurt, and to manage the hostile impulses over time. This became visible after the turning point in the subsidence of their anger, a decrease in blaming behaviour, and an absence of self-defeating behaviour.
- Individuals who were motivated to forgive by role-expected behaviour were found to value forgiveness as a means to secure the approval of God and/or other authority figures, and to defend themselves against the anxiety that was generated by the hostile impulses. Their orientation to forgive seemed to be based on fear, and as time went by self-defeating behaviours seemed to increase, while anger and blame were denied.

- Individuals who were motivated to forgive by expedient behaviour felt that 'forgiving words' and 'ceasing the demonstration of hostile behaviour' were the only two aspects that were necessary to achieve forgiveness. After the turning point, they still displayed strong feelings that nobody should win in the process, which points to defensiveness and attempts to maintain a position of power.

The findings of Trainer's work challenge findings in aggression research. Intrinsic forgiveness seems to be a response to injury that does not represent gratification of a revenge drive nor an inhibition of those drives that are based on external constraints. Instead, they appear to be expressions of a pro-social view of human response to injury that can be found in religious and philosophical traditions.

Forgive and Forget

Smedes (1984) describes forgiveness from the perspective of listening to good forgivers and from having experienced forgiveness in his own life. His work consists of an undefined number of anecdotes about people who had managed to forgive others. He added their experiences to his personal experience of traversing through the forgiveness process. His findings were gathered in an anecdotal form which he presented in a book that he wrote while he was a fellow at the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research in Collegeville, Minnesota, during 1983. His most important finding was an apparent correlation between successful forgiveness and forgetting the hurtful incident.

Forgiveness and Power

Droll's (1984) theory of forgiveness was constructed from the responses of 16 subjects in eight different types of social relationships: two close girlfriends, two male roommates,

a manager and player on a softball team, two close cousins, two fellow car poolers, a husband and wife, two classmates working on a research project, and two coworkers. The couples knew each other for at least six months. Different types of power relationships, such as expert, economic, reward, cost, and legitimate power, were used to operationalise power in the different scenarios (Droll,1984).

Droll (1984) describes forgiveness as the cessation of material demands from the offender, and diminished negative affect and/or judgements against the offender. The cessation of material demands, is the result of acting out forgiveness, while diminishing negative affect and/or judgements refer to the process of forgiveness. When an act is experienced as a transgression by the offende, and s/he makes the offender feel responsible for the transgression, the act is deemed to be adequately severe as to warrant forgiveness. Whether the offende decides to forgive or not, depends upon a framework of interactional rewards. The influence of the current social situation, the emotions and cognitions of the offende, work together in making forgiveness a process that occurs over a period of time. By actively attending to aspects of oneself in an attempt to regain cognitive consistency, information is actively organised and interpreted by the offende. The conflict that the offende experiences can lead to the experience of stress, which can result in negative affect and cognitions.

Forgiveness and Reframing

Patton (1985) presents a pastoral care perspective of human forgiveness which began as a response to two articles by his friend James Lapsley, a pastoral theologian. The first part of the book appeared in an article in the Kempson Symposium published by the Association of Mental Health Clergy in *Cura Animarum: A Journal for the Advancement of Religious Care of Troubled Persons*, volume 36, number1 (May 1984). The material and the cases that Patton used to present a view on forgiving originated in his parish in the course of his ministry. His work suggests a relation between forgiving and reframing.

Cunningham's (1985) work is based on his work as a pastoral counsellor who is called upon to facilitate the process of forgiving in the lives of those who seek his expertise. The material originates from an unknown number of people from his practice and is presented in the form of two case studies that illustrate the will to forgive and the failure of the will to forgive. He sees the process of forgiveness in four stages: 1) judgement versus denial; 2) humility versus humiliation; 3) opportunity of mutuality and negotiation; 4) actualisation of a new sense of awareness and perception. The restoration of integrity to one's self and one's relationship to others and to God is central to his proposed process of reframing.

Wrongdoing and Forgiveness

North's (1987) discussion of forgiveness is a theoretical dialectic from the vantage point of moral philosophy. No subjects are involved in her work. Instead, she juxtaposes Kant's and Hegel's views on forgiveness and moral right or moral wrong by relating them to a case study. Forgiveness from her point of view seems to be essentially an internal change of heart, which is consciously willed. This change of heart is the successful result of replacing bad thoughts with good thoughts, and bitterness and anger with compassion and affection. She comes to the conclusion that forgiveness may be seen as furthering the fundamental human values which lie at the heart of moral rules and principles.

Forgiveness, Spirituality and Counselling

Bergin's (1988) article is based on the theoretical tenets of the behavioural, psychoanalytic and humanistic approaches that are imbued with a spiritual perspective and related to an unknown number of self-reports that describe human nature. He has placed a spiritual template over the therapeutic process and aims to show the possibilities for an alternative theory of human nature. He expounds a modified description of human nature that takes the spiritual dimension of experience into account. He also includes a moral frame of

reference. Because treatment is usually guided by goals, values must be invoked to determine what are good behaviour changes. The third aspect is a composition of techniques for behaviour change that take the spiritual dimension into account.

Forgiveness and Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

The following model by Enright and the Human Development Study Group (1991) was developed by using Kohlberg's (1969) stages of moral development in order to conceptualise a developmental progression in the understanding of forgiveness. The relationship between each stage of moral development and the stage in the understanding of forgiveness is illustrated below.

The earliest period of reasoning is called preconsonance (Enright et al, 1991) consisting of two stages. When cognition is predominantly egocentric, preoccupied with avoiding pain and seeking pleasure, the individual has reached Stage 1 of the six stages of moral development. The motivation to forgive is born of a desire for revenge and restitution out of self-interest. Kohlberg's relativist justice stage corresponds to the stage of restitutorial-compensational forgiveness. Stage 2 forgiveness is motivated by guilt or by a desire for compensation and restitution.

Consonance is the next period of reasoning which also consists of two stages. Stage 3 is the good boy / good girl justice in which group consensus determines what is right and wrong. This stage of reasoning coincides with expectational forgiveness, in which forgiveness is motivated by parental and peer pressure. Stage 4 is the law and order justice in which laws are upheld to maintain an orderly society. This coincides with lawful expectational forgiveness, which is motivated by the internal pressure from religious or social expectations.

The last period of reasoning is called postconsonance. Stage 5 is the social contract orientation which is characterised by an interest in maintaining the social fabric, with the

realisation that unjust laws exist. Forgiveness as social harmony is the coinciding stage in which forgiveness restores social harmony and right relationships. Stage 6 is the universal ethical principle orientation in which conscience rather than laws or norms determines moral behaviour. Forgiveness as love is the coinciding stage in which forgiveness promotes love and increases the likelihood of reconciliation between the offender and the forgiver.

Forgiveness and the Stages Model

Rosenak and Harndon (1992) propose that the process of achieving forgiving consists of a number of emotional stages through which an individual moves, irrespective of the depth or severity of the hurt incurred, and irrespective of who committed the offence, and whether the offender is alive or has already passed away. These stages are the stages of hurt, anger, information gathering, and forgiveness. The stage of forgiveness can be divided into three additional stages, namely reframing, releasing the desire to retaliate, and wishing the offender well. The order of the stages and the progression through these stages is the same for every individual intending to forgive a past hurt. However, the magnitude and depth of the hurt will determine how fast an individual will move through these stages until forgiveness has been achieved.

Factors that are related to the offender and to the offended may also have an influence on the tempo of moving through the stages of forgiveness. Factors associated with the offender can include the following: the frequency of the offensive behaviour, the severity of the hurt incurred, whether the offender seeks forgiveness from the offended or not, and whether the incurred hurt was an intentional act or an unintentional act on the part of the offender.

Factors associated with the offended can include the following: commitment to the relationship, ego-strength (healthy self-love or the absence of self-love), the decision to forgive, and a personal history of giving or receiving forgiveness.

To assess whether forgiveness has been truly accomplished is very difficult. Rosenak and Harndon (1992) suggest that the process of forgiveness has been completed when the person who was hurt has released his desire for retaliation and has instead acquired an emotional stance of genuinely wishing the offender well. Other signs that point to the accomplishment of having truly forgiven are a lack of anger, lack of pain, a feeling of peace within, the ability to enjoy life, and the ability to pray.

Forgiveness and the Developmental Model

According to Enright (1994) the structural (developmental) model of forgiveness is a model for acquiring reasoning skills for forgiving others. It is based on Piaget's (1932 / 1968) views on forgiveness and Kohlberg's (1969) stages of moral development. This model suggests that the development of cognitive skills increases the capacity to empathise with others.

Piaget's View

According to Piaget (1932 / 1968) forgiveness can only be understood when it is placed within a developmental framework. Four aspects of forgiveness can be identified from the developmental viewpoint:

- **The maturational aspect**

Forgiveness only emerges in late middle childhood, when the child begins to reason autonomously on a moral level. On the autonomous level intentions and the flexibility of rules are emphasised, while inevitable punishment for doing wrong is de-emphasised. Forgiveness is thus placed within the moral realm, because it concerns charity or love in action. The underlying cognitive construct which is necessary to reason autonomously is thus the same as that which is necessary for forgiveness.

- **The manipulation of the object**

When a person aims to learn something new it is essential that time is given to practice whatever needs to be learnt. Learning to forgive also needs to be practiced.

- **Social input**

When one aims to promote the repetition of certain behaviours, the desired behaviours should be affirmed. When forgiving others is affirmed, forgiving is promoted. Forgiveness is also encouraged by practising certain religious beliefs and by receiving cultural support.

- **Equilibration**

Thinking about a problem creates stress and tension until a solution has been found. Thinking about forgiving others, also creates stress and tension until one has forgiven. That means that periods of confusion, stress and struggle usually occur before a kind of psychological balance is reached in order for an individual to achieve the ability to forgive (Fitzgibbons, 1986; Kaufman, 1984).

A Process Model of Forgiveness

Enright's (1994) process model of forgiveness consists of a list of eighteen psychological and behavioural processes involved in forgiving another by whom one was hurt. It focuses on the integration of cognitive, affective, and behavioural strategies involved in formulating a moral response. The processes can be grouped under the headings of pre-forgiveness, awareness, and change, but the sequence of the processes should not be seen as invariant, since they include feed-back and feed-forward loops. Enright's model of forgiveness integrates the contributions of many researchers, as can be seen in the references given below.

Pre-forgiveness

- 1) Examination of psychological defences (Kiel, 1986).
- 2) Confrontation of anger; the point is to release not harbour the anger (Trainer,

- 1981).
- 3) Admittance of shame when appropriate (Patton, 1985).
 - 4) Awareness of cathexis (Droll, 1984).
 - 5) Awareness of cognitive rehearsal of the offence (Droll, 1984).
 - 6) Insight that the injured party may be comparing self with the injurer (Kiel, 1986).
 - 7) Insight into a possibly altered 'just world' view (Flanigan, 1987 / 1992).

Awareness - new solutions may be required

- 8) A change of heart, conversion, or new insight that old resolution strategies are not working (North, 1987).
- 9) A willingness to explore forgiveness as an option (Enright, 1994).
- 10) Commitment to forgive the offender (Neblett, 1974).

Change - leading to forgiveness

- 11) Reframing through role-taking who the wrongdoer is by viewing him/her in context (Smith, 1981).
- 12) Empathy towards the offender (Cunningham, 1985).
- 13) Awareness of compassion as it emerges towards the offender (Droll, 1984).
- 14) Acceptance / absorption of the pain (Bergin, 1988).
- 15) Realisation that oneself has needed others' forgiveness in the past (Cunningham, 1985).
- 16) Realisation that self may be permanently and negatively changed by the injury (Close, 1970).
- 17) Awareness of decreased negative affect, and perhaps increased positive affect, if this begins to emerge towards the injurer (Smedes, 1984).
- 18) Awareness of internal emotional release (Smedes, 1984).

The eighteen psychological and behavioural processes will now be explained and described in greater detail:

1) Examination of psychological defences (Kiel, 1986) and

2) Confrontation of anger; the point is to release not harbour the anger (Trainer, 1981)

When an individual has been emotionally or physically hurt by another, the experience can be so devastating, that s/he withdraws into a state of numbness and defensive behaviour. For an individual in such a state, it is impossible to feel the pain that accompanies the injury. Numbing the pain does however only serve the purpose of retaining the feelings of anger and resentment, while the individual is prevented from allowing the pain to heal. Before the anger can be released, it needs to be confronted, which means, that the injured individual needs to get in touch with the pain, to feel the hurt and the anger. By facing the anger in a sense of reliving the incident and feeling the feelings as if they were happening in the now, the individual can take charge of the situation and change the accompanying painful thoughts that give him/her the power to release the anger. When the anger has been released, the healing process can begin.

3) Admittance of shame when appropriate (Patton, 1985)

When an individual has committed a deed that affected him/herself negatively in a moral sense, the individual may experience shame when s/he recalls that deed. Shame involves the whole self in context with the situation according to Patton (1985), and he deems it essential that the individual understands shame before s/he can begin to deal with the process of forgiveness. According to Patton (1985), some individuals tend to defend themselves against experiencing their shame by becoming righteous. Righteousness, however, prevents the individual from consciously experiencing their shame which makes it impossible for them to experience guilt. Acknowledging one's own guilt in the situation in which one was injured is essential, according to Patton (1985), for making self-forgiveness possible.

The concept of human creativity falls into the realm in which self-forgiveness becomes a recurrent necessity in the course of life. Man can never regard anything as perfectly done, since each improvement reveals higher possibilities according to Niebuhr (1986).

The problem in achieving self-forgiveness is the raging self. Patton (1985) holds that the intensity of the rage can be seen as an indicator of the degree of injury to the self.

Individuals with self-injury would therefore need to experience empathy from their counsellor much longer than individuals who injured others. The desire of counsellors to obtain quick results regarding individuals with self-injury must therefore be curbed. Never-ending patience seems to be essential for assisting individuals in attaining self-forgiveness.

4) Awareness of cathexis (Droll, 1984)

When the individual who has been hurt intends to forgive, s/he attempts to treat the offender as close to the way in which s/he treated the offender before the hurtful incident. According to Droll (1984) this can only be achieved by the actual meeting out of punishment to the offender, either by means of punishing the offender physically or psychologically. In addition, seven factors need to be present that make the hurtful act worthy of forgiveness: 1) The hurtful act must be experienced as an offence. 2) The individual who was hurt must acknowledge the fact that s/he was hurt. 3) The offender must be considered responsible for the hurtful act. 4) The wish to maintain the relationship and to reduce negative emotions must be present. 5) The individual who committed the hurtful act must apologise to the one who was hurt, and provide a coherent explanation of the reasons behind the hurtful action. In this regard Schlenker and Darby (1981) found that individuals who knew that they were responsible for the hurtful act tended to apologise and request forgiveness more readily. 6) The one who was hurt must experience meaning in forgiving, such as decreasing negative thoughts and emotions, and establishing positive thoughts and emotions. 7) The thoughts of the one who was hurt can have an effect on the way s/he recalls the hurtful incident, making the present experience better or worse than it was at the time.

5) Awareness of cognitive rehearsal of the offence (Droll, 1984)

The rehearsal of thoughts that are connected with the way one was hurt by another is based upon a scant amount of information that was available at the time when the hurtful behaviour occurred. When the hurt individual becomes aware of rehearsing the hurtful incident in his/her mind, s/he relives the hurtful incident and is hurt anew every time the event is rehearsed. To arrest the process of allowing oneself to feel the hurt over and over again, Droll (1984) asserts that one first needs to become aware of the cognitive rehearsal of the offence, before one can begin to gather more information surrounding the circumstances

of the offence.

6) Insight that the injured party may be comparing self with the injurer (Kiel, 1986) and

7) Insight into a possibly altered 'just world' view (Flanigan, 1987 / 1992)

When major damage has been done, and unforgivable injuries have caused indescribable pain, negative aspects of the injury fill one's entire being, and occupy one's entire consciousness. This state of mind leads one to think that one has been treated unfairly. The belief of a just world is shattered, and it feels as if one stands entirely alone. Through having been irreparably injured, one may have gained the insight that there is no justice in the world. Anger at the world, God or oneself may arise, and forgiveness does not seem to be appropriate.

People are seen to hurt each other all the time. There is no imminent justice in this world according to Flanigan (1987 / 1992), and he advocates that we need to learn to accept that a variety of people behave in a meanspirited way, and that is the way it is. This insight does however mean that forgiveness need not be interpreted as inappropriate, just because there is no one who can be punished for a specific deed. By looking at oneself objectively one can perhaps discover the gains that one could have possibly made as a result of the injury, and one could have also learnt that one has personal power that must be used to prevent the destruction of the self by such incidents. Forgiving oneself for having failed to employ one's power could be the insight that one could have gained from being irreparably damaged by another individual.

8) A change of heart, conversion, or new insight that old resolution strategies are not working (North, 1987)

When one uses the same problem solving strategy for every problem one encounters, there comes a time when that strategy is inappropriate for a particular problem. Using one's old strategy of keeping quiet and walking away may be very effective when having to deal with a raging adult, but grossly inadequate for solving a relational problem with a sensitive individual. New insights are often gained when an undeserving individual is hurt by the

thoughtless application of an inappropriate resolution strategy. In that case, forgiving the one who applied the inappropriate resolution strategy can be seen as a valuable moral act of benevolence. Benevolence by the one who was hurt could become the impetus for a change of heart or conversion in the one who thoughtlessly applied an inappropriate resolution strategy. The attitude of the individual who forgives the application of an inappropriate resolution strategy is marked by love and compassion according to North (1987), and that may cause the one who received forgiveness to experience a change of heart or conversion, by becoming loving and compassionate towards others by whom s/he is hurt.

Kant (1908) understands forgiveness in the sense that the sins are wholly deleted when one has been forgiven. That implies that if the individual who has applied an inappropriate resolution strategy has experienced a change of heart or conversion and has been forgiven by the one s/he has hurt, s/he can begin with a new slate. The experience of having had a change of heart or conversion and having been forgiven can become a powerful motive for forgiving others and for developing an attitude of love and compassion towards those by whom we are hurt.

9) A willingness to explore forgiveness as an option (Enright, 1994)

The concepts of justice and forgiveness need to be consciously explored together in order to create an awareness that focussing exclusively upon justice, as a guide for resolving problems, may perpetuate the problematic behaviour, while forgiveness may be an option for stopping the cycle of revenge.

10) Commitment to forgive the offender (Neblett, 1974)

The subject of forgiveness should be approached by endeavouring to understand our experiences and our behaviour. There are contexts in which forgiveness is given but mercy withheld, and those who apply the concepts forgive and condone interchangeably, may fail to incorporate the delicate balance that exists between the self, others and the environment. It is also possible that individuals allow themselves to forgive others to a fault, thereby failing in their responsibilities to themselves. The context of our behaviour must

therefore be considered together with the behaviour itself. Since we have free will, we are responsible for our behaviour, and torture, beatings, emotional and physical abuse are behaviours that cannot be tolerated, and should be punished for violating the rights of others. Forgiving the torturer, abuser or violator of the rights of others directs the focus away from the behaviour and towards the individual who engages in the behaviour. Recognising the inherent worth and equality of all individuals enables us to forgive.

11) Reframing through role-taking who the wrongdoer is by viewing him/her in context (Smith, 1981)

Smith (1981) believes that learning to think from another's perspective can best be practised by role-playing another individual within the same context. Harmonious interactions amongst individuals can only occur to the extent that all participants have the ability to think from another's point of view (Kelly, 1955). This principle, when applied to forgiveness implies that the individual must be understood within his/her context. An individual who wants to forgive another must therefore have developmentally advanced to a cognitive level that allows him/her to think from the perspective of another. Reframing the hurtful act can be explained as a different way of looking at a particular problem as the result of thinking from another's perspective. Reframing can thus be understood as the result of thinking from another's perspective regarding the hurtful act, which increases understanding of the other and promotes forgiveness.

12) Empathy towards the offender (Cunningham, 1985) and

13) Awareness of compassion as it emerges towards the offender (Droll, 1984).

An offender who apologises for the incurred hurt, and explains the situation that has induced him/her to behave in an offensive way is more likely regarded by the individual who was hurt as wishing to restore the relationship. An offender who fails to apologise and to explain the situation tends to cause those s/he has offended to feel more resentment, to avoid communication with the offender and to experience a desire to retaliate and terminate the relationship. The one who was offended also tends to feel that the transgression is serious and that repetition of the behaviour can be expected. S/he also

tends to make attributions regarding the offender's disposition. If the one who was offended ceases to focus on his/her personal situation only and begins to attend to the relationship and the offender's position, s/he develops empathy for the offender and his/her rationale for transgressing. If s/he decides to maintain the relationship s/he becomes aware of the emerging compassion towards the offender, and then, forgiveness often becomes the chosen method for conflict resolution.

14) Acceptance / absorption of the pain (Bergin, 1988)

Accepting and absorbing the pain are two methods of arresting the transmission of past hurts to subsequent generations. The pain is accepted by the individual when s/he suffers the pain knowingly and willingly. When the individual forgives the other(s) from the past for the hurt incurred, absorption of the pain is taking place. The absorption of pain is a means to prevent a perpetual repetition of past pain in future generations. Forgiving others is thus a powerful generator of positive change in the following generation.

15) Realisation that self has needed other's forgiveness in the past (Cunningham, 1985)

Forgiving is the expensive process of change and transformation. When we forgive another for hurting us, we are involved in a process of change that transforms our attitude to the extent that we become less dogmatic and less demanding towards the other. When we forgive another, the experience conveys the knowledge to us that we are human and therefore lacking perfection. We make mistakes and are in need of forgiveness, and by having been forgiven we can forgive others. Forgiveness does not restore innocence, it does however repair one's relationship to oneself, to others and to God (Cunningham,1985).

16) Realisation that self may be permanently and negatively changed by the injury (Close, 1970)

Looking back to the time before the individual was injured, and comparing that state with the present state, may make the injured individual realise, that s/he is now permanently and negatively changed as a result of the injury. Grief may be the resultant emotion, which

needs to be traversed before the healing process can begin.

17) Awareness of decreased negative affect, and perhaps increased positive affect, if this begins to emerge towards the injurer (Smedes, 1984) and

18) Awareness of internal emotional release (Smedes, 1984)

When one is able to view the individual, by whom one was hurt, in the context of his/her situation the negative affect towards the injurer is decreased and changed into positive affect. When we understand the position of the injurer at the time when the hurtful behaviour occurred, we usually become aware of a conflict between our assumptions about the incident, before we had sufficient information, and our present understanding as a result of sufficient information. As the conflict is resolved, negative affect towards the injurer will change to positive affect releasing the emotional tension and promoting forgiveness (McCullough, Sandage and Worthington, 1997).

A Search for Meaning in the Process of Forgiveness

The literature on forgiveness purports claims for the benefits of forgiveness to the forgiver, the offender, and their relationship. Forgiving is assumed to change the way in which offended individuals view the offence and the offender, to positively change the emotions associated with the offence, and to encourage the offended towards reconciliation. This model emphasizes the role of finding meaning in suffering and forgiving. Stegen (1993) is another researcher who has focussed on finding meaning in forgiving (Gassin and Enright, 1995). To date however, scientific investigations into the effects of forgiveness have not been conducted, and little evidence supports these claims. Positive psychological adjustment is the result of finding meaning in life and particularly in unavoidable suffering, according to Frankl (1959). He purports three types of values that allow humans to find purpose in life, namely creativity, experience and attitude. **Creativity** refers to the kind of products a person gives to society. **Experience** refers to the products that an individual

takes from society, and **attitude** refers to the kind of stand that a person takes when faced with situations that are unchangeable. When the attitude during suffering is appropriate an enhanced sense of meaning is found in the hurtful situation, which results in a positive transformation within the person who has suffered. Another addition may thus be made to the list of processes involved in forgiveness:

19) Finding meaning in the suffering and in the forgiveness process (Frankl,1959).

The processes that are involved in receiving forgiveness from another, and forgiving the self are similar to the processes involved in forgiving another by whom one was hurt.

The **Processes of Receiving Forgiveness from Another** are not the focus point of this investigation and will therefore be omitted. The **Processes of Forgiving the Self** are however essential for this study, and even though the offender may not be aware of the fact that self-forgiveness is an essential feature of the forgiveness process, it must occur before the focus can shift to future concerns. The processes of self-forgiveness will now be explained more fully.

Processes of Self-Forgiveness

- 1) Denial. What I did to other or self is not so bad; I am not particularly hurt.**
- 2) Guilt (one's own sense of justice was violated in what one did) and remorse (sadness). Perhaps self-anger is involved as one acknowledges wrong against self or other(s).**

When an individual realises that s/he was responsible for hurting another individual, s/he may be totally stunned that his/her behaviour was actually received as hurtful, since the intention was benign. In such a case the offender may experience feelings of remorse for hurting the other individual unintentionally. Denial of having been hurt by another usually occurs when mutual interactional hurting has occurred, and the one is making demands on

the other to break off the relationship. Self-anger may be the result of realising that one has misjudged the other in terms of his/her level of maturity and tolerance towards others.

3) Shame. A pervasive sense that others besides myself condemn me.

When another individual has been hurt by oneself, and one realises that the fault is one's own, shame may arise due to reliving the hurtful incident and realising the magnitude of hurt the other had to endure as a result of one's own negligence, planned purpose to hurt, or unawareness of what one did at the time when the hurting occurred. When one experiences feelings of shame, one may become acutely aware that others may also see the hurtful behaviour as contemptible, and that they may therefore also condemn oneself for the hurtful act.

4) Cathexis. Energy is consumed as I dwell on guilt, remorse, and shame (Units 2 and 3).

5) Cognitive rehearsal. Replaying the event over and over in my mind.

The interactions between guilt, remorse and shame together with replaying the event over and over in one's mind necessitates the generation of large amounts of cognitive energy. As a result of being engaged in this cycle of cognitive rehearsal and the effects of the hurtful behaviour, the individual has very little energy left for other tasks besides thinking about and reliving the past events.

6) Comparison of myself and other. If I hurt another person, I compare my more fortunate state with their less fortunate state. If I hurt myself, I compare myself before and after the hurtful event(s).

Comparison is a cognitive strategy that can make oneself feel better or worse. When the individual is still consumed with cathexis and cognitive rehearsal, comparing oneself with the one that was hurt (or with oneself before and after the hurtful event) can result in making oneself feel either better or worse, depending on whether one feels more fortunate or less fortunate than the other.

7) Realisation that the one I hurt (which could be another person or myself)

may be permanently and adversely changed by my actions.

When the one who hurt another or him/herself, realises that the resultant damage may be of an adverse or permanent nature, underlying beliefs of justice in this world may be shattered. This realisation may result in anger towards oneself for having caused the damage, and helplessness may arise in the face of the permanence of the damage and for being unequipped for repairing it or compensating for the hurt.

8) The sense of “who I am” may be altered. Realisation that I am imperfect; generalised self-criticism; perhaps self-condemnation and possibly lowered self-esteem.

The realisation that one cannot reverse neither the hurtful act nor the damage, may alter one's sense of who one is. Individuals who have consistently tried to do the right thing under the circumstances in the past, and felt they were mostly succeeding in their attempts to do the best they could, may feel particularly pained with their present failure and the resultant blemish on their character. The degree of self-condemnation and criticism towards themselves may be dependant upon the number of previous failures of a similar kind. The length of time in which their self-esteem remains lowered may be a function of the enduring patterns of cathexis and cognitive rehearsal.

9) Change of heart or conversion. Realisation that one must change course.

Restoration begins with a change of heart, conversion or realising that one must do things differently from now on. Transforming one's old behaviour patterns is the outcome of conversion.

10) Willingness to consider self-forgiveness as an option. What is self-forgiveness? Is it a worthwhile endeavour?

11) Commitment to forgive self. The person makes a commitment to avoid self-condemnation or even subtle self-revenge and self-abuse.

Before one is able to think of forgiving the self, one needs to realise that the past cannot be changed, but that the future can become different by changing one's behaviour in the present. Self-forgiveness can then be recognised as a worthwhile undertaking, since it

releases the thoughts from cathexis and cognitive rehearsal of the hurtful event, by focussing the mind on the present and engaging all one's available energy in the process of deleting the old behaviour and generating new thoughts and behaviours.

12) Reframing toward the self. One puts oneself in context, seeing the pressure one was under, past habits, or past responses. This is not done to shift the blame to others or the environment, but to see the self as vulnerable, imperfect.

13) Affective self-awareness. Being more aware of one's own suffering as a result of what one has done.

Putting one's own behaviour into the context of the circumstances at the time when the hurt occurred, opens the way for self-awareness in terms of one's own suffering that resulted from one's hurtful behaviour.

14) Compassion. Being willing to love oneself in spite of one's actions and subsequent suffering.

When one realises one has suffered as a result of what one has done, one may begin to experience feelings of compassion towards oneself.

15) Accepting the pain. Being willing to accept both the pain of one's own actions and the subsequent suffering. By accepting the pain one does not transfer the pain to others.

When one feels compassionate towards oneself, one realises that one is vulnerable and therefore worthy of self-care. However, the realisation that one was responsible for the hurtful behaviour allows one to accept the pain of one's own actions together with the subsequent suffering as one's own. By engaging in this double act of accepting responsibility for the hurt and for healing the hurt within one's own mind and heart, the pain is arrested and will not be reactively transferred to others.

16) Finding meaning in the event of offense and subsequent suffering.

17) Realisation that self has forgiven others and received forgiveness from

others in the past; thus, one could offer this now to self.

By finding meaning in the event and in the suffering, the individual is able to adjust to the new situation that has left him/her vulnerable, hurt and unchangeably altered. By changing one's attitude towards oneself, the situation one was in, and the future, one is able to allow meaning to emerge while one is still steeped in the memory of the hurtful event.

18) Realisation that one is not alone. There is special support and others have had to forgive themselves.

19) A new purpose may emerge. How one may live life from this point may be different, given the difficulties.

When one has found meaning in suffering, new ways of conducting one's life may emerge, and a new purpose may be found. This often occurs as a result of speaking to others and realising that others have also experienced failure and self-injury which lead to a need to forgive themselves before they were able to continue with their life.

20) Release. Outcome of relief from excessive guilt and remorse.

When self-forgiveness has occurred, one is usually released from feelings of guilt, remorse, and emotional tension.

Forgiveness in the Parable of the Prodigal Son

The model of forgiveness that is based on the parable of the prodigal son according to Luke 15 verses 11-32, and on Kohlberg's stages of moral development, is considered to be the classic model of forgiveness according to Mitchell (1995).

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15 verse 11-32).

There was once a man who had two sons; and the younger said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the property." So he divided his estate between them. A few days later the younger son turned the whole of his share into cash and left home for a distant country,

where he squandered it in dissolute living. He had spent it all, when a severe famine fell upon that country and he began to be in need. So he went and attached himself to one of the local land-owners, who sent him onto his farm to mind the pigs. He would have been glad to fill his belly with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. Then he came to his senses: "How many of my father's hired servants have more food than they can eat," he said, "and here am I, starving to death! I will go at once to my father, and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against God and against you; I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants'." So he set out for his father's house. But while he was still a long way off his father saw him, and his heart went out to him; he ran to meet him, flung his arms around him, and kissed him. The son said, "Father, I have sinned against God and against you; I am no longer fit to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Fetch a robe, the best we have, and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us celebrate with a feast. For this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And the festivities began.

Now the elder son had been out on the farm; and on his way back, as he approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what it meant. The servant told him, "Your brother has come home, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has him back safe and sound." But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and pleaded with him; but he retorted, "You know how I slaved for you all these years; I never once disobeyed your orders; yet you never gave me so much as a kid, to celebrate with my friends. But now that this son of yours turns up, after running through your money with his women, you kill the fatted calf for him." "My boy," said the father, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. How could we fail to celebrate this happy day? Your brother here was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and has been found."

Mitchell's Interpretation

In the parable of the prodigal son, both brothers can be conceived of as being on the level equivalent to stage 2 according to Kohlberg's levels of moral development. The older brother was not motivated to be "good" because he loved his father, but rather because he wanted to earn his reward (his share of his father's inheritance). His being "good" was however compromised, because he failed to see that he had a choice to be good or not to be good. Mitchell (1995) maintains that his perception of having a lack of choice caused him to become resentful at having to do right (good), which prevented his moral development to evolve to the next stage. He also maintains that the younger brother was motivated by self serving behaviour by asking for his share of his father's estate.

According to Mitchell (1995) the younger brother on his return was motivated by a desire for social approval (stage 4) by acknowledging the error of his ways. His father could therefore forgive him. The younger son recognised his father's generosity and shared with his father in the joy of forgiveness and in having been forgiven.

The relationship between the father and the younger son was healed according to Mitchell (1995), the penalty for the deed however was not reduced, and the son had to live with the consequences of his behaviour. Mitchell (1995) concludes that this gave him the opportunity to gain responsibility and maturity.

The older son, although outwardly performing the correct behaviour, did not recognise his own disguised resentment which prevented him from being full of joy for his brother's good fortune, and which blinded him to the accepting and loving spirit of his father. His resentment according to Mitchell (1995) created further hostility, anger, tension, and other possible negative side effects which led to self-exclusion from the home-coming feast.

Receiving and granting forgiveness seems to be linked to the level of moral development according to this model. The father is able to grant forgiveness since he is operating from a level of moral development equivalent to stage 6. The younger son has matured to a level equivalent to stage 4 after his return, and is operating from a moral level of development that allows him to ask for and receive forgiveness. The moral development of the older son

has remained on the level equivalent to stage 2.

Comments on Mitchell's Interpretation

Mitchell's interpretation of the younger son's return concludes that **after** his return, the younger son has matured to a level equivalent to stage 4. "He was operating from the moral level of development that enables him to ask for and receive forgiveness." That cannot be, since the younger son had decided to ask for forgiveness while he was still away from home. He said to himself: "I will go at once to my father, and say to him: Father, I have sinned against God and against you; I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your servants". He returned home already morally developed to a level equivalent to stage 5, the social-contract orientation.

According to Mitchell (1995) the older son "did not recognise his own disguised resentment". A person arrested on a level of moral development equal to stage 2 is incapable of experiencing resentment, nor is he/she capable of disguising that resentment. "His resentment created further hostility, anger, tension, and other possible negative side effects which led to self-exclusion from the home-coming feast". People arrested on a level of moral development equal to stage 2 are only capable of envy.

The eldest son was neither able to understand his father's generosity nor the magnitude of his brother's humility and courage in asking for forgiveness.

A Qualitative Analysis of the Parable

The parable will now be qualitatively analysed with the aim of isolating features that are essential for asking another person for forgiveness and for forgiving another person.

- ***Elements of Forgiveness / Non-forgiveness***

Forgiving can be broken down into a number of elements: getting hurt, recognising that one is hurt, denying that one is hurt, listening - the one who has done the hurting explains his position, accepting the explanation of the one who has done the hurting, rejecting the explanation, deciding to forgive, deciding not to forgive, forgiving the other, not forgiving.

- ***Analysing forgiveness***

What is the context of the situation?

The eldest son is the owner of a business in partnership with his father. His younger brother asked to be paid out his share from his father's inheritance while the older brother's share remained in the business. The younger brother went to live out of town.

What would be the attributes of a businessman and what would be expected of him?

He would have to be capable of making decisions and he would have to be able to look after himself and his interests.

Does the older brother have these attributes and does he fulfill these expectations?

The older brother worked as if he worked for his father. He assumed that his father had the right to command and that it was his duty to obey. He expected to receive gifts from his father and he expected his father to determine when to celebrate with his friends. He owned the business together with his father but he neither felt nor acted like an owner. He felt that his father was the owner and that he was only an employee.

What is the difference between the two brothers?

The youngest brother decided to leave home. He asked for his share of his father's wealth and after he had received half of the inheritance he sold it and left his hometown. Living a life of squander away from home soon left him destitute. He decided to return to his father admit his unworthiness as a son, and entreat his father for employment in the family business. Having sunk to the lowest level he is prepared to start again from the bottom. He has gone through the experience of having everything to having nothing making him conscious of what it means to have, and not to have.

The eldest brother has everything but does not know it. This unconscious state about his position in life lies at the root of his anger.

What is the underlying motivation for the father's joy and the eldest son's anger?

The father loves his sons, and he is overjoyed to see his youngest son return home after a time of absence. He loves his sons irrespective of whether they are successful or not. When he sees his youngest son approaching the house he is filled with compassion and hastens to meet him greeting him with a kiss and an embrace. His servants are ordered to present his son with the best robe, sandals and a ring, and to kill the fattened calf for a feast to which family, friends and neighbours are to be invited. Awareness about the value of relationships is the motivation for the father's joy. Love is the outstanding quality that the father displays while the eldest son is consumed by anger. His anger is motivated by his unconsciousness about having everything, and believing he has nothing.

What is the conscious reason for the eldest son's anger?

On returning from the field the eldest son heard music and dancing which lead him to enquire about the reason for the merriment. In the belief that he has nothing the eldest son is envious of his brother who in reality has nothing and envies him the feast that he thinks should be his dues. The conscious reason for his anger is envy of his brother based on a false belief.

Explanation of the father's position.

The eldest son refused to enter the house for he deemed it unfair that he who had obeyed all his father's commands was not even granted a kid to celebrate while his father slaughtered the fattened calf for his brother who had wasted his father's wealth on harlots. The failure to see that his younger brother had wasted his own inheritance instead of his father's wealth blinded him to the realisation that he himself had the choice to celebrate over the years. Failing to realise that he had a choice but never exercised it blinded him to his father's love for him. Being blind to his father's love for him resulted in failure to experience himself as equal to his father. Failure to experience himself as equal to his father made him unforgiving.

Rejecting the explanation

The eldest son was entreated to rejoice. The father tries hard to convince him that the return of his brother is a reason for rejoicing.

Accepting the explanation

The father listened to his youngest son's explanation of how he had lost his inheritance and what had made him want to return to his father. The father accepted his son's explanation then his thoughts revolved around organising the feast of joy for the youngest son's return.

Forgiving the other

When the father had accepted the youngest son's explanation his thoughts revolved around current matters. Forgiving the other is understood as the investment of thoughts into current affairs as opposed to matters lying in the past. Forgiving the other is the beginning of living ones life without returning to the past. It also means to view the present as it is, without assuming.

Conclusion

The analysis of the story of the prodigal son has yielded useful information on the attitude of the one who forgives another. It also shows the kind of behaviour needed for asking another person for forgiveness. The attitude of the one who forgives is one of attentive listening to the explanation of the other. The behaviour (thoughts) of the one who forgives is engaged in current matters.

Forgiveness and the Healing Process

Ransley and Spy (2004) debate the issue whether it necessarily helps to forgive, particularly with regard to experiencing painful memories of child abuse. Butler and Mullis (2001) have proposed forgiveness as a conflict resolution strategy in the work place, since it seems to reduce feelings of anger, resentment, and negative judgement. Having to make the choice between either forgiving or becoming transformed and beginning the process

towards healing has been a contentious issue for Ransley and Spy (2004). Whether letting go is a question of forgiveness is another issue they grapple with. Their studies are informed by the either / or issue, which fits into the linear approach to solving problems.

Conclusion

The above mentioned models of forgiveness have been formulated between 1974 and 1995 when an interest in forgiveness began to grow. In the light of the complexity involved in forgiveness it seems appropriate that the contexts are investigated in which individuals have been hurt, and how they have dealt with their hurt, their anger, and their urge to retaliate. Recent research on forgiveness has focussed mainly on the appropriateness of forgiving under myriad circumstances. Forgiveness with regard to human rights issues, abuse, and murder have lately become the focus for research, and the limitations of forgiveness have also been highlighted. This study however, continues to focus on assisting those individuals who have the desire to forgive, but are unable to do so on their own.