2005

Advisors: Sr. Vivienne Joyce, CSW and Dr. Carol Ochs

"THE STRUGGLE TO FORGIVE AND BE FORGIVEN"

ANNE KLAEYSEN

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for the Doctor of Ministry Degree

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Studies Program
New York, New York

SUMMARY

This project has five chapters and three appendices, as follows:

Chapter I	A statement of the problem or issue	page 1
Chapter II	Principles that guide and inform	page 6
Chapter III	Method of carrying out my project	page 19
Chapter IV	Results	page 22
Chapter V	Discussion	page 45
Appendix A	Session One - Toward a Working Definition	page 55
Appendix B	Session Two - A Method	page 61
Appendix C	Handouts	page 67

The contribution of the thesis is an understanding of the process of forgiveness and a way to introduce this process to a congregation in the form of a workshop with both cognitive and spiritual components.

The goal of the thesis was to help the members of my congregation reflect upon their interactions with others and, in a group setting, explore the dynamics of forgiveness as a way of improving their relationships and healing past hurts.

The thesis is divided into an academic survey of forgiveness and a practical application in the form of a workshop, using materials from various print and internet resources.

Chapter I: A statement of the problem or issue

A. The background or history of this issue among the congregants to whom I minister

Ethics begins with a choice - or rather a thought or feeling about a choice, an action that we take either in response to another person's action or to initiate a personal engagement. When we are hurt or when we hurt someone else, we feel off balance: all is somehow not right with the world. We carry the tension within us - of hate and anger or guilt and shame - and feel a need to take some compensatory action, to relieve ourselves of this tension and set the world right again. This is a universal human experience, certainly not limited to my religious community, but I have found that a lack of awareness and understanding of this experience keeps people from engaging in a process of forgiveness that could offer them an opportunity to explore their own humanity and to connect with others in a profoundly spiritual way.

After a hurtful experience, some people may take no affirmative action; rather, they keep inside themselves, wrapped up in layers of confusion and misunderstanding, all the hurts of a lifetime, afraid to expose or unleash them. Others who do risk exposure often do so in a manner that is retaliatory or vengeful rather than healing and transforming.

Dr. Felix Adler wrote that Ethical Culture, the religion he founded, "stands for the idea that personal relations, between individuals and between group and group, are of supreme concern." (Adler, 1946, p. 57) Forming and maintaining good relationships require us to attribute worth and dignity to every individual and then to act on that

attribution, eliciting the personal excellence within each of us to create a more humane world. It is in that light that I believe it is incumbent upon us to understand the dynamics of forgiveness and to practice it within our communities.

The 220 members of the Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island are a congenial group. They often socialize with one another outside of the Meeting House. Indeed the most successful community fundraising activity involves holding parties and dinners in members' homes or leading field trips to local sites of interest. My predecessor was Leader for thirty-three years, arriving as a young man after he and his wife had served with the Peace Corps in Kenya. They raised their children in the community, and their grandchildren currently attend the Sunday School. The interim Leader who served for 18 months during the transition to a new Leader told me that the community consisted of "a lovely group of people" and therein, he felt, was the problem. They had organized themselves socially around the Leader, but not everyone fit into that circle. His task during the transition was to help them formally reorganize themselves so that they could function as a religious community with shared values and ideals and grow beyond a small circle of friends with the clergyperson at the center.

Within a few months I understood what my colleague meant. On the surface everything seemed fine, but under the surface lurked a history of hurts that kept bubbling up: at Sunday Platforms, in committee meetings, in private conversations, in pastoral sessions. I looked for ways to address the problem in a general way that could be instructive to everyone and not threaten specific individuals. The first year I chose a platform theme of

"We Are the Ones Building an Ethical Community" and offered a series of addresses and workshops on communication and leadership skills. When I gave a Sunday Platform on forgiveness during the second year, I was encouraged by the enthusiastic response of members to the concept of forgiveness as a process and by the stories they shared with me that day, and I decided to look for an opportunity to offer them a more in-depth and interactive experience.

B. The specific need to which I plan to minister

In various congregational settings, both formal and informal, public and private, I have heard members express their feelings of having been hurt by other members, relatives, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. They struggle with how to respond. Communication is damaged and even severed in the course of that struggle. Some members become side-lined or isolated from the community if they have had an altercation with another member, dropping out of a committee, pulling back from a project, or resigning from membership altogether. Others have had personal experiences outside of the community that affect their ability to form relationships within the community. Something someone says or does pushes a button put there by a family member or friend years ago, and they are thrown back into a pattern of behavior that they do not understand.

Most people present themselves as victims. They may wonder what part they played in the conflict, but usually conclude that they have in some way been wronged. Lines are drawn, positions established, grudges held - sometimes for years, even after the death of one of the parties. When someone says, "I can never forgive what was done to me" or "I

can never forgive myself for what I did," I hear not only the anguish from pain being constantly relived, but also the longing to find relief, and the despair of believing that such relief is impossible.

There is a profound need to learn a way to return to healthy, loving relations with others and ourselves. Forgiveness can mean letting others, including ourselves, back into our hearts. There is a need to understand forgiveness as a *process*; not as a simple or solitary act or ritual that when performed miraculously brings comfort, but rather as a complex and deeply spiritual and psychological experience. There are no easy answers, no clear villains or victims. Those who would go where this journey toward forgiveness takes them need both reliable information and loving support. Adler wrote that it is the job of a moral teacher "to clarify, to classify, and to enrich the content of the conscience" (Adler, 1944, p. 37) and to be "full of cheer and encouragement" (Adler, 1946, p. 84), so with that admonition in mind, I decided to embark on a journey with my members towards a deeper understanding of forgiveness.

I plan to minister to the pain that my members feel by offering some ways for them to frame their experience. By learning about the process of forgiveness, I hope that they will be able to locate the source of their pain and understand how it has affected their lives. With that understanding, I hope that they can gain a perspective from which to examine their personal interactions and then choose to take steps to heal themselves and their relationships. By participating in a group process, I hope that they can hear one another's stories and appreciate that they are not alone, as well as provide a supportive resource to

one another. Although asking for and granting forgiveness are basic human needs, we are not always willing to act on those needs because they require us to face losses, hatreds, and discrepancies in the stories we tell ourselves about who we are. People need to be reminded of the importance of forgiveness and helped to pursue that path. They need to believe that it is possible. So with cheer and encouragement I plan to accompany those members who wish to participate in a group workshop that will explore forgiveness in both spiritual and psychological terms.

C. The relevance of my project to ministry in a wider context

The "forgiving self" is our true self: loving and generous. Through it we are able to voice anger without doing damage to others, acknowledge our own part in what has gone wrong in a relationship, and see the flaws in ourselves and others as part of our common humanity (Karen, 2003). Learning the language of forgiveness and practicing it is essential to any ministry. People who have made mistakes, who have injured others, must have a way, by assuming responsibility, expressing remorse and making amends, to return to the love and trust of the community. Those who have been injured must have a way to heal and feel wholly themselves again, even in the absence of a plea for their forgiveness. I will compose a group workshop with facilitator instructions, materials, and handouts that I hope will be useful to my colleagues in their congregations.

Chapter II: Principles that guide and inform

A. Religious principles pertinent to my project, including relevant literature that clarifies and supports these principles

Our non-theistic religious tradition grounds spirituality in personal and group relations. We do not posit either a supreme being or a story for the beginning and end of days, leaving such belief up to the individual, but we do seek a supreme way of being with one another in this world, striving thereby to create a better world for all. Our guiding principle for human relationships can be summed up as: "To each of us an attribution of worth; from each of us our unique contribution; and for all of us a community of mutual respect, justice, and care" (NLC, 1991, p. 6).

It is not enough to tolerate others or get along with them; even the "Golden Rule" of treating others as we would ourselves wish to be treated is not sufficient. We must engage with others in such ways as to experience the divine within them. This means explicitly participating in ethical relationships that have the following distinguishing characteristics (Ericson, 1988): 1) recognition of the absolute and inherent worth of every individual; 2) affirmation of the uniqueness of each person, avoiding the imposition of external norms and rules of conformity that violate individuality; 3) reciprocity and mutuality, recognizing that a truly creative relationship is one that involves giving and receiving on both sides; and 4) ability of each person in the relationship to grow into his or her best, most whole and fulfilled self. None of this is possible without forgiveness, a process that can make whole again that which has been broken.

Ethical Culture is a religion, not a study, of ethics. A study of ethics examines various systems of determining and motivating human interaction and evaluates their effectiveness. A religion of ethics embraces and activates one's passion not only to do the right thing, but also to create loving relationships with one another and to influence the whole of humanity to create a world in the here and now that sanctifies all life. When relationships are damaged, they must be healed; that is both an ethical and a religious imperative. Understanding and practicing forgiveness is, therefore, at the core of ethical religion.

Adler devotes a chapter of *An Ethical Philosophy of Life* to "The Meaning of Forgiveness," and it is from this work that my colleagues put together the "Steps to Seeking Forgiveness" that I will present in my workshop. (See Appendix B.) Adler held that "Every kind of [morally hurtful act] is an attempt in some fashion to live at the expense of other life. The spiritual principle is: live in the life of others, in the energy expended to promote the essential life in others. Moral badness is self-isolation, detachment. Spirituality is consciousness of infinite interrelatedness." (Adler, 1906, p. 203) While he believed that faith in the better nature of the wrongdoer was essential in promoting repentance, he made a distinction between that faith and forgiveness: faith is help offered from the outside for inner change; forgiveness is a record that change has actually taken place.

In order to change, we must be aware of our actions and how they affect and influence others. This requires a serious honesty and the setting aside of time to reflect upon how

we have behaved at both critical and ordinary moments. As Adler puts it, "Let us bring frequently to view our whole past career, in order that we may understand what manner of men and women we really are, and let us use this precious though painful self-knowledge as a protection for the future, the surest guarantee that we can rise on stepping-stones of our dead selves to do better things." (Adler, 1946, p. 84) This moral inventory is conducted with the understanding that we are all capable of both good and bad deeds. To have faith in the potential for goodness in the wrongdoer must also mean seeing the potential for wrongdoing in the good person. Such is human nature.

We must be able to make mistakes and learn from them, knowing that to be less than perfect does not mean we do not have worth. "It is the ABC of human reality that we are fallible and often anxious and that nevertheless we have a right to come back and expect to be trusted again. A child's world is shattered not be being confronted with his or his parents' realistic failures but by the insistence that the adult world cannot be wrong. A framework for making mistakes without disastrous consequences is as important for individuals as it is for nations." (Spetter, 1967, p. 180) In leadership skills workshops and committee meetings, I try to frame mistakes as learning opportunities, hoping to move people out of an experience of shame and blame and into one of challenge and change. In facing the wrong that we have done, an indispensable ethical practice, we must distinguish "constructive forms of penitence" from those that are "morbid and false." (Adler, 1946, p. 83) Remorse that dwells on the wrongdoing and sinks deep into self-condemnation is morbid; penitence that leads one to change one's life is constructive.

Philosopher Avishai Margalit's humanistic approach toward the difficult relation between forgiving and forgetting provided me with valuable insight. He argues that forgiveness is based on disregarding, or the image of crossing out, the offense rather than forgetting, or blotting out and deleting, it. There is nothing wrong with a wish for the past to be undone, but it is an illusion when this wish is accompanied by a magical belief that atonement can undo the past. "The central metaphor is not erasure but, rather, returning." (Margalit, 2002, p. 198) Although it is impossible to undo the past, remorse offers a non-magical way of changing our interpretation of the past. The offender presents himself or herself in a new light by expressing remorse; this is a light that can be projected into the past. Assuming responsibility for the offense can separate the act from the actor, making it possible to forgive even if the offense cannot be forgotten.

We cannot decide to forget something, anymore than we can voluntarily avoid thinking of an elephant, but we can decide to disregard something, as when a judge instructs the jury to disregard inadmissible evidence. All we can ask of someone is to consider an offense as "inadmissible evidence" for future action against the offender. "To disregard is a decision, to forget is not. Therefore, forgiveness, which is voluntary, should not be tied to forgetting, which is involuntary." (Margalit, 2002, p. 203) Forgiveness is a long effort that involves a change of heart, denoting both a process and an achievement. The ideal result is a return to the original relationship between the forgiver and the offender; this can only be achieved when the forgiver no longer feels resentment or desires revenge. We may not owe forgiveness to others, but we owe it to ourselves not to live with feelings of resentment and the desire for revenge. These attitudes are toxic. "To the

extent that forgiveness is an ethical duty, it is a duty in that special case of ethics, namely, a duty to ourselves." (Margalit, 2002, p. 207)

Ethical Culture holds that one is not fully human outside of a community, much as the Xhosa people of Africa say, "I am because we are." Since it is inevitable within a community that hurts will be inflicted and sustained, a means of repairing the damage and healing the relationship must be available and practiced. We also need to understand how it is that we sometimes pull away from people at the times when we need them the most and learn to love that which is unlovable in the other. "There is no greater joy than to have found, from time to time, that one is achieving a transformation of person: to get beyond anger, to overcome the rankling of a desire for revenge; to become able to awaken new strata of relationship and to act differently. Such capacity is the heart of private sanity." (Spetter, 1967, p. 106)

B. Clinical principles pertinent to my project, including relevant literature that clarifies and supports these principles

Without forgiveness, seeking it and granting it, we would never change and grow into healthy, fully developed human beings; we would be doomed to a one-dimensional existence, repeating patterns of behavior, and never allowing ourselves to experience the depth and complexity of human relationships. We learn forgiveness at the same time we learn generosity.

Although not specific to the process of forgiveness, Melanie Klein's work on infant

psychology provides useful insights, especially in her assertion that the need to repair what we have destroyed, including the image of the other person living within us, is an early and powerful force in our ego development (Klein, 1957). She theorized that at the beginning of life, through our encounter with our mother's breast, we organize the world into good and bad, not holding them as different aspects of one whole, but actually splitting our experience into two worlds where everything and everyone is either good or bad, depending on whether or not our needs are met. The good breast loves and nourishes us; the bad one withholds from and persecutes us. From this experience gratitude and envy emerge. Envy is the angry feeling that another person possesses and enjoys something desirable, leading to an impulse to take it away or spoil it. Gratitude comes from the enjoyment of being nourished, the feeling that one has received "a unique gift." (Klein, 1957, p. 18) This becomes the basis for trust in one's own goodness and the capacity for love.

While most of us eventually mature into adults who can unify our internal world and are capable of appreciating the ambiguity of life, the potential to return to a split universe is never lost and can throw us into feelings of blaming, grudge-holding, revenge-seeking, and worse. "This tendency toward idealization and demonization is never abandoned and plays a big part in the worshipfulness and adoration, the feuds and grudges of later life" (Karen, 2003, p. 72). Two fundamental issues in emotional health and development are how we mourn our losses and how well we separate from our parents. Forgiveness speaks to these issues. It moves us from self-centeredness into a largeness of heart. It helps us to grow from a view of good versus evil (splitting) to an ability to tolerate ambiguity

(maturity). It can make a place for all the parts of ourselves so that we do not sacrifice, deny or dissociate from authentic aspects of our being. (Karen, 2003)

The new, ambiguous world that emerges is not the Garden of Eden that the infant first experiences. It is not perfect, but it is more stable and real: not a hell of hatred, persecution and revenge, but a place where we can share with one another our experiences of anger and disappointment. In this unified and integrated world, all things good and bad are possible. Love and trust - of ourselves, others, and life - are essential to forgiveness and are characteristics of a healthy individual.

The life cycle work of Erik Erikson and the "good-enough environment" of D.W. Winnicott provide insights into how ego development can be impeded, derailed or broken by wounds sustained in childhood, resulting in repression and the formation of defense mechanisms. We learn to protect the story we tell ourselves about the life we live, sometimes developing a false self with which to face the world. Forgiveness can bring us home to our true self by accepting, embracing, and integrating the different aspects of our lives and relationships. I focused my attention on how Erikson and Winnicott define psychological and emotional health and maturity, particularly because I find their approaches consistent with Ethical Culture's religious principles.

At the heart of Erik H. Erikson's work is the issue of trust and the sense of self. He asks, "How does a healthy personality grow or, as it were, accrue from the successive stages of increasing capacity to master life's outer and inner dangers - with some vital enthusiasm

to spare?" (Erikson, 1980, p. 53) and answers that the cornerstone of a healthy personality is a sense of basic trust, "an attitude toward oneself and the world derived from the experiences of the first year of life." (Erikson, 1980, p. 57) To trust means that one has learned to depend on a consistency not only from outside caretakers, but also from oneself and one's ability to cope with inside urges. Firmly establishing an enduring pattern of trust over mistrust is the first task of the growing personality. "To develop autonomy, a firmly developed and a convincingly continued stage of early trust is necessary." (Erikson, 1980, p. 71) When trust is impaired in child development, when parents do not provide a continuity of care and attention, then adults learn mistrust and withdraw into themselves in ways that are at odds with their own sense of self and with others. "Many adults feel that their worth as people consists entirely in *what they are doing*, or rather in *what they are going to do next*, and not in what they are, as individuals." (Erikson, 1980, p. 85) The ethical choice to attribute worth to every individual, including ourselves, simply because we are human beings, not because of any value connected to what we do or could do, to treat people as ends in themselves, not as a means to another's end, addresses this spiritual and psychological pain.

A person is in a position of needing to forgive or be forgiven when basic trust has either not been established or has been broken or when one's autonomy and initiative have not been allowed to fully develop. It is a parent's responsibility not only to provide consistent physical care, but also to support and encourage a child's growth and development through successive stages of significant social interaction, so that the child can progress from basic trust to autonomy to taking initiative.

For D.W. Winnicott, healthy ego development depends upon a "good-enough environment," by which he means "that which facilitates the various individual inherited tendencies" (Winnicott, 1986, p. 22). It is a two-way process or "living relationship" (p. 23) between the infant who lives in a subjective world and the parent who adapts to the infant's needs, including the need to experience reactions to frustration that involve anger rather than trauma. Adaptation is a complex process that must provide a line of continuity to the growing child's existence: not too much holding so as to inhibit independence, not too little so as to cause a break or trauma. This approach resonates with the Ethical Culture understanding of individual "distinctive excellences" that make each of us unique and irreplaceable and that are elicited in mutual and reciprocal ethical relationships.

Health, for Winnicott, means having a sense of self and of being, of feeling real. It also means a movement towards independence, but not autonomy or withdrawal from others. "We think [of health] in terms of freedom within the personality, of capacity for trust and faith, of matters of reliability and object constancy, of freedom from self-deception, and also of something that has to do with richness rather than poverty as a quality of personal psychical reality." (p. 26) Health is not simply the absence of psychoneurotic disorder, but all that belongs to living: an integration of the positive features of love, trust, creativity, fulfillment, and the negative ones of conflicting feelings, fears, frustrations, doubts. What is most important is that we feel that we are living our own lives, taking responsibility for what we do and don't do, taking credit for our successes and blame for

our failures.

Those individuals who were never "let down" as babies are able to enjoy life and living. Those who experienced a break in the line of continuity of their existence carry with them the memories of that trauma and live stressful lives that could lead to illness and rigidity. A middle group, according to Winnicott, includes "those who carry around with them experiences of unthinkable or archaic anxiety, and who are defended more or less successfully against remembering such anxiety, but who nevertheless use any opportunity that turns up to become ill and have a breakdown in order to approach that which was unthinkably terrible." (Winnicott, 1986, p. 32) In this case, where potential breakdown predominates, the individual unconsciously organizes a "false-self front" to cope with the outside world as a defense to keep the true self from being found and hurt again. But even here there seems to be a tendency towards healthy development, and breakdown can lead to a kind of cure. My brother-in-law, a social worker in the field of child foster care, often wears a t-shirt that reads: "It's never too late to have a happy childhood." Engaging in a process of forgiveness has the potential to heal the trauma that created a false self and establish the trust required for the true self to re-emerge.

Being able to forgive and ask for forgiveness implies integration. A fully integrated person "takes full responsibility for *all* feelings and ideas that belong to being alive." (Winnicott, 1986, p. 82) To not be integrated is to locate that of which we disapprove outside of ourselves, projecting our own destructive impulses and thoughts onto others. To tolerate our own destructive impulses results in the capacity to enjoy ideas, to be

creative, to experience concern for others.

There are several definitions and process models that I found helpful in understanding the dynamics of forgiveness and will use them in my workshop as resources. (See Appendices A and B.) Dr. Robert D. Enright, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has pioneered the social scientific study of forgiveness within psychology, publishing empirically based studies on forgiveness and organizing the first national conference on forgiveness held in a university setting. His work on the psychology of interpersonal forgiveness has not only provided important insights, but has also been developed into a new area called forgiveness studies dedicated to philanthropy, scholarship, and service to helping professionals.

The following is a model of psychological variables posited by Enright and the Human Development Study Group (Enright, 1998, p. 53 and www.forgiveness-institute.org):

Uncovering Phase

During this phase the individual becomes aware of the emotional pain that has resulted from a deep, unjust injury. Characteristic feelings of anger or even hatred may be present. As these negative emotions are confronted and the injury is honestly understood, individuals may experience considerable emotional distress. Deciding on the appropriate amount of energy to process this pain and still function effectively is an important consideration during this phase. However, as the anger and other negative emotions are brought out into the open, healing can begin to occur.

Decision Phase

The individual now realizes that to continue to focus on the offense and the offender may cause more unnecessary suffering and begins to understand that a change must occur to go ahead in the healing process. He or she may then experiences a " heart conversion" or a life change in a positive direction, entertaining the idea of forgiveness as a healing strategy. The individual then commits to forgiving the offender who has caused him or her such pain. Complete forgiveness is not yet realized but the injured party has decided to explore forgiveness and to take initial steps in the direction of full forgiveness. An important first step at this point is to forego any thoughts, feelings or intentions of revenge toward the offender.

Work Phase

Here the forgiving individual begins the active work of forgiving the offender. This phase may include new ways of thinking about this person. The offended individual may strive to understand the offender's childhood or put the injurious event in context by understanding the pressures the offender was under at the time of the offense. This new way of thinking is undertaken not to excuse the person of his or her responsibility for the offense, but rather to better understand the person as a member of the human community. This new understanding may often be accompanied by a willingness to experience empathy and compassion toward the offender.

The work phase also includes the heart of forgiveness which is the acceptance of the pain

that resulted from the actions of the injurer, something not to be confused with any sense of deserving the pain but rather a bearing of pain that has been unjustly given. As the individual bears the pain, he or she chooses not to pass it on to others, including the injurer. This is often where the challenge of a "quest for the good" is most evident. The individual may now become ready to begin to offer goodwill toward the injurer in the form of merciful restraint, generosity, and love. This may or may not include a reconciliation. The goodwill may be offered while at the same time taking into consideration current issues of trust and safety in the relationship between the individual and the injurer.

Deepening Phase

In this phase the forgiving individual begins to realize that he or she is gaining emotional relief from the process of forgiving his or her offender. The forgiving individual may find meaning in the suffering that he or she has faced. The emotional relief and new found meaning may lead to increased compassion for self and others. The individual may discover a new purpose in life and an active concern for his or her community. Thus, the forgiver discovers the paradox of forgiveness: as we give to others the gifts of mercy, generosity, and love, we ourselves are healed.

This model is not meant to be viewed as a rigid sequence, but rather as a flexible set of processes with loops forward and back. As with all working models, it describes the experiences of the people within the study group and does not predict the steps one will necessarily go through.

Chapter III: Method of carrying out my project

A. The approach and procedure I will take in executing my project

- Sunday Platform address given in November 2003: "Who's Sorry Now? The Struggle to Forgive"
- Pilot Project Workshop on "The Struggle to Forgive" - Spring 2004
- Group Workshop on "The Struggle to Forgive and Be Forgiven" planned for March 2005

The address was given to the entire congregation and introduced the concept of forgiveness as an internal process, not a single act of moral obligation. By starting with what forgiveness was *not*, I was able to dispel many common misconceptions and open up new, unexplored territory for my members. Several people asked for copies of my address and others who had not been present borrowed the audiotape. A few people asked if they could pursue this topic with me either privately or in a workshop. Over the course of the next few months I saw some people who wanted to talk about forgiveness for pastoral counseling and put together an initial workshop attended by six people. As I grew into my position as Leader, I saw the need for a more in-depth experience with more people who could share their stories with one another and be a support for each other, so I decided to offer an expanded group workshop and reach out to members with an article in the newsletter and a separate letter. I will lead interested members in an exploration of the concept and dynamics of forgiveness that includes both cognitive and

spiritual approaches. While providing information for people to think about, I will also provide opportunities, through guided meditation, poetry, and parables, for people to get in touch with and express their feelings. Appendices A, B, and C contain the workshop format and handouts I plan to use.

B. Methods I will use for assessing outcomes

- questionnaire evaluation of workshop
- level and depth of discussion among participants
- follow-up session after workshop

The workshops will be open to any Ethical Humanist member or newcomer who wishes to explore the process of forgiveness with me. While this method is self-selective, I will also reach out to those individuals whom I have come to know could benefit from this experience.

Two to three workshops should be sufficient to initially explore the topic and encourage people to seek pastoral counseling on an individual basis. The first session will focus on a definition of forgiveness, exploring first what it is *not*, to address any misconceptions, then what it *is*, i.e., a healing process. The second session will focus on the stages of forgiveness. A possible third session would invite participants, with the support of the group, to explore their own stories. It is anticipated that participants will share their stories throughout the project, but this session would encourage them to use the group experience as a resource.

I will be looking for an openness in the participants to take in a new way of understanding forgiveness. In the course of sharing personal stories throughout the sessions, I will make subjective assessments about any changes in the way they emphasize different aspects of their interactions, being sensitive to when we can proceed in discussion of a particular stage of the forgiveness process and when to change course or postpone some discussion. I expect this to be a challenge for some people in terms of raising their level of awareness about their own actions. I hope that some people will be interested in pursuing this subject in a continuing support group.

Chapter IV: Results

A. Description of outcomes

1) Feedback and personal evaluation from Session One

Since only eight people had registered, I prepared fifteen folders with handouts, expecting a few more to attend, but was pleasantly surprised when twenty-three people showed up. More chairs had to be added to the circle, and folders had to be shared, so I felt a little stress, but soon regained my emotional balance and plunged in. Of the twenty-three participants, all but two were members of the congregation; one was the mother of a Sunday school parent and the other was a frequent visitor who is considering membership. There were four men and nineteen women; all of the men were married to women in the group. Of the remaining fifteen women, one was single, six were widows, and eight were married. The age range was roughly 40 to 80 years. All but the single woman had children, of whom the youngest was five years old and the others were adults, many with children of their own. The participants were all white, well educated, middle class residents of Nassau County with progressive social and political values. Seven have full-time, professional positions; the remaining are retired, mostly from teaching, health or social work positions. Most had know each other for many years, but three women were fairly new arrivals, and another woman, while a member for years, attends community events infrequently.

The following is a list of the participants with a brief profile of each, including what they identified as relationships or situations in their lives needing forgiveness:

- Ed and Claire are a middle-aged, retired married couple with grown children from previous marriages. Claire came to me for pastoral counseling last year when she was considering separating from Ed, but they have worked on their relationship and remain together. She is the music director, and he is a singer-songwriter-guitarist who is active in liberal political causes. Both have somewhat rigid personalities and have had conflicts with other members that have caused him to pull back from most activities, but she values the support of the community and stays connected. Both Ed and Claire cited difficult relationships with their respective fathers. They felt that these men would not change and that they would not get from them what they most wanted - demonstrations of love and affection, so they wanted to learn how to forgive them in their own hearts and move on.

- Sylvia is widow in her mid-70's with two grown sons. She once said that her favorite place is the library. (It has often been said that an Ethical Humanist's vision of heaven is an infinite library.) Sylvia is an active member who regularly attends Sunday colloquy and platform, weekly Leader's lunch discussions, and adult education courses. She is well regarded in the community with a pleasant, intelligent, and engaging, if somewhat subdued, personality. Her best friend in the community is Martha. Sylvia sometimes experiences guilt in personal relationships, feeling that she hasn't done enough or may have done something to offend someone. She thinks that she may miss some social signals and wonders how to make amends if she doesn't understand what she has done - or not done.

- Nancy is a newcomer who is considering membership and is not yet familiar to people in the community. She is married with two teenaged children and attended a parenting workshop with our Sunday School Director. She didn't identify a specific forgiveness issue or share any personal stories, but she did participate in the discussion.

- Rita is a married woman in her late-60's, a former Catholic and the grandmother of three girls in our Sunday School. She is currently a friend of the congregation and plans to become a member. Rita participates in "Open Doors, Open Minds," an interfaith study group that the Garden City Clergy Fellowship (of which I am chair this year) hosts. She talked about learning to forgive her mother who died when Rita was young. Because she had a loving relationship with mother, she needed to forgive what she felt was her abandonment of her.

- Evelyn and Tom are a middle-aged married couple with one son. At the time of the first session, his mother, who suffered from Alzheimer's, was in the process of dying after he had authorized the removal of her feeding tube. By the second session she had died. This end-of-life experience had put a strain on family relationships, and Tom was looking for some context for his conflicted feelings. Evelyn has been active in the community since she was a college student, but is not very well liked: people perceive her as a self-promoter of her business interests. Tom pulled back from the community some years ago when he felt that the then Buildings Committee used him

for cheap labor. I have reached out to them, trying to reconnect them to the community.

- Leon and Nora are a married couple in their mid-70's, both retired teachers, with three grown children. They are pillars of the community who are being honored at this year's Founder's Day celebration. Leon is an avid amateur actor who has produced several successful plays at the Society. Nora is a voracious reader and an avowed theist, who meditates and regularly attends Sunday colloquy and platform. They are very open and generous of spirit, but a sadness for them has been their daughter's conversion to orthodox Judaism. Although they are culturally Jewish, neither of them practiced the faith, and they do not understand their daughter's having embraced it, especially when it keeps her and her family from attending family events. They also do not understand a rabbi who would insist on their daughter adhering to rules that do not honor them as parents.

- Ruth is a single, middle-aged woman who works in the health care profession. She is very active in the community, serving on the board and several committees, but still rather private. Her sister, who is a Catholic, lives in England. Last year she traveled there frequently to help with her father, who was eventually moved to an assisted living facility. She participated in a Human Faith project last year, choosing to focus on her relationship with her sister.

- Tina is a forty-something married mother of a six-year old son and a special

education teacher in a public school. Her mother died when she was an adolescent. She is very friendly and engaged, and active in the community, deciding to run to the Board this year, but she also needs a great deal of approval and support. She said that she wanted to work on a relationship with a long-time friend from whom she had become estranged.

- Martha, a widow in her early 70's, is highly intelligent and self aware. She has three grown children from a previous marriage. Her second husband was severely depressed, and the two of them were in therapy separately and together for most of their married life. At first she seems a bit pedantic and prickly, but getting to know her is well worth the effort. Although Martha did not identify a specific personal issue, she participated in the discussion and became engaged with the concepts, in particular, how it is possible to forgive but not condone. She slowly came to an understanding of forgiveness as an internal healing process and was interested in continuing with a support group.

- Katherine is a middle-aged married woman with grown children who works for the NYS court system and is very interested in liberal political causes, which often puts her at odds with her more conservative family. She serves on the Board and the Adult Education committee. Katherine told us that she has an uneasy relationship with one of her sons.

- Barbara is a new member in her early 70's who joined with her husband. She is not

yet well known in the community, but she attends events regularly without her husband, so people are getting to know her. She didn't share a specific personal story, but was very engaged in the discussion.

- Stephanie is a widow in her 80's who just became a great-grandmother. She is a mother of three grown children and regularly attends Sunday colloquy and platform. Her daughter is a Board member. Stephanie recently and reluctantly retired as bookkeeper for one of her sons, because the commute was becoming too difficult, and her children wanted her to take it easy. Although she is a much beloved member of the Society, Stephanie often expresses a low self-esteem, apologizing too often and too easily, and feeling that she is not as intelligent or articulate as others.

- Edwina, a retired psychiatric nurse and graduate school teacher in her 70's, co-leads the weekly bereavement group with Keith, who came to the second session. She is also an active volunteer in Ethical Friends of Children, a social action project that provides needy families with children's clothing and furniture. Edwina was born in Germany and sometimes talks about a sense of guilt for the Holocaust, even though she was a child at the time.

- Muriel is a married woman in her 70's with grown children and grandchildren. She was formerly an opera singer who traveled the world and now supports cultural and arts programs in her town. She regularly attends Society events, usually without her husband, and is a well-liked member. She said that she couldn't think of anyone she

needed to forgive or anyone who needed to forgive her, but she was happy to support me by attending the workshop.

- Esther is a middle-aged married woman with two grown stepchildren, one of whom she has tried very hard to get to know, but who is unresponsive. She is a highly regarded health care professional who loves her work. As a relatively new member, she is starting to become more active on committees, and her contributions are much appreciated. She, too, participated in a Human Faith project last year and chose to work on her relationship with her stepson.

- Pat is a recently widowed woman in her 70's who just became a grandmother. She is a former Board president and active member who pulled back after her retirement and is now becoming more involved again. She and her husband had adopted two sons. One committed suicide many years ago; she lives with the other son and his wife and infant daughter. At first she said that she had no forgiveness issues, but later she realized that she had, although she didn't share with the group what they were.

- Helen and John are a married couple in their 70's, parents of three sons. They were formerly very active in PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) because of one son; another son is married with two children; the third son committed suicide. Helen is a retired social worker, and John is a retired engineer. They have become very active in the community after a hiatus of a few years. They participated in the discussion, but did not share a personal story.

- Linda is a retired psychiatric nurse and teacher. She is married, although her husband never visits the Society, and she has no children. Linda has a urinary tract problem, and the odor makes it difficult for people to get too close to her, but she is finally able to talk about it with me and another member, and I have helped her find a doctor who should be able to help her. Her mother was an alcoholic who neglected Linda.

- Irene is a widow in her 70's who infrequently attended events, but seems to be making a comeback, so we will get to know her better.

The format I used for the first session is in Appendix A. I opened and closed with a go-around, an Ethical Culture tradition that consists of individuals checking in with a group. It is a process for easing the transition from one setting to another and establishing that this is a special time and space that we are creating together. It acknowledges that as individuals we are pushed and pulled in different directions and need to collect ourselves, to re-establish who we are and what our purpose in this circle is. The go-around can start with anyone who volunteers and continues in either direction around the circle. If no one volunteers, the facilitator asks someone to start. Each person introduces himself or herself and briefly tells the group how he or she is feeling or what has happened since the last time they met: whatever makes it possible to settle into the new group setting. In this case, I asked specific questions: "What are your goals for this workshop? What are you looking for and/or hoping to gain?"

Participants are asked to speak from their own personal experience and to actively and non-judgmentally listen to everyone without interruption or "cross-talk" with other people. Respect for individual choice allows participants to pass, i.e., not to make a contribution, if they wish. Clarifying questions are not posed to the speaker: this is not an open conversation, but rather an opportunity for individuals to speak to the group from their hearts and minds, knowing that they will be heard. At the close of the opening go-around, the activity of the gathering proceeds. A closing go-around is an opportunity for individuals to take their leave of the group, again recognizing that a transition is taking place. It might take the form of a response to the experience of the gathering or simply saying farewell: whatever is needed to end one experience and embark on another.

The responses to the question about their goals for the workshop were instructive. A few passed, but most responded with their concerns about how they felt they had not succeeded in forgiving others or with personal stories. The following is a list of the responses I recorded on the newsprint, many in the form of questions they hoped would be answered: holding on to the past; I say I forgive, but I haven't really; experience of grief and loss, even after forgiveness is asked and granted; Is it forgetting? I can't forget; What is unforgivable?; It's an everyday occurrence; finding a way to forgive myself; reconnecting with others; grudge holding; trust; mutuality; not being perfect; helping others to forgive; collective guilt (German woman); How do I believe in forgiveness?; how to ask for forgiveness; acceptance and moving on; honoring the impact of the hurt; neutralizing intense emotions; lasting effects of forgiveness; How do I handle the anger?; What are the expectations?; and Is it a moral obligation?

I was encouraged by the responses because I knew that the questions would be addressed in the workshop material, and the level of personal sharing was appropriate, revealing but not too intimate. Everyone was respectful of group process, speaking from their own experiences and listening attentively, neither interrupting nor judging others.

The guided meditation worked well. It reinforced the spiritual component of the session, putting an emphasis on the internal process of forgiveness. I hope it gave them a place within themselves to return to if the discussion became difficult or brought up unpleasant memories. I emphasized that I would be presenting a descriptive model, but that they would each experience it in their own ways.

The discussion about traditional religious rituals of forgiveness was a good segue into what forgiveness is *not*. Participants shared stories from childhood: times when they were required to confess without understanding why, times when their feelings were denied, times when they were hurt and no one took responsibility, etc. We honored the reasons for forgiveness rituals, but talked about the need to make them more lively and meaningful. I asked them to think about personal stories: how much we invest in them, how much other people invest in theirs, and how it feels when those stories conflict. Can we let go of our stories to take in other points of view?

I started with what forgiveness is *not* to dispel some common misconceptions and expectations. I could sense people becoming more engaged, especially when the points

addressed something they had brought up under their goals. "Not forgetting" was an important point for them, as was forgiveness not being a one-time decision. I used the image of a circle versus a spiral: We often go back over the same emotional territory, but it makes a difference whether we do it in a circle, like a gerbil running in a wheel, or in a spiral, where we approach the same event from a different perspective, with new insight and learned wisdom.

The story I told about the U.S. pilot and the Vietnamese burn victim (Karen, 2003) brought tears to many eyes. I told it to let them know what was *possible*, not as an expectation of what forgiveness *should* be. Ruth asked if reparations had been made. I didn't know the answer, but used the question as an opportunity to explore whether they thought that should be a requirement of forgiveness.

Each of the points under what forgiveness *is* engaged the participants. They began to understand it as a process and appreciated the recognition that it involved complex and intense emotions. Emphasizing the internal aspect of forgiveness shifted the focus for some people who no longer had personal contact with those who had harmed them or whom they had harmed, and they saw forgiveness as a possibility after all. Rita shared her experience of learning to forgive her mother who had died when she was young. We talked about the importance of articulating to ourselves the conversations we would wish to have with others. Distinguishing between identity and story was important to Nora when she realized how linked they had become for her. Leon, who had raised the question about moral obligation during the opening go-around, became interested in

considering it a "moral right" to stop being hurt. The concept of punishment was important to several people when they recognized that the pleasure of vengeance is short-lived and does not heal the pain. There was discussion about the energy that it takes to remain angry and resentful and to hold grudges as compared to the energy involved in feeling sorrow and sadness.

I ended with choice to acknowledge the choice they had made to participate in this workshop and to encourage them to continue exploring where this process would take them. I closed by reading aloud the first two poems in the collection, found in Appendix C, making the connection between forgiveness and love. The closing go-around was very affirming. Some people passed, but most responded with specific aspects of the session that they had found helpful or that they would reflect upon during the week. Pat said that she had come in thinking that she had no one to forgive, but now she wasn't so sure. Others said that they appreciated the level of sharing: personal but not too revealing; they had found benefit in the community circle.

Most of the group interaction was directed towards me as the facilitator or to the group as a whole, for example, in sharing a personal story. There was little one-on-one interaction between individual participants, but everyone received the undivided attention of the group whenever he or she spoke. I decided at the outset that this project would not be a group therapy experience, so I kept attention focused on the material, but I also made room for people to reflect aloud about how the material resonated with them.

Thoughts for the next session: I will have music playing when we enter to set a reflective tone and continue it through the guided meditation. I will tell a condensed version of Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower* and invite their responses. I will invite them to continue meeting after the second session.

2. Feedback and personal evaluation from Session Two

Twenty people attended the second session a week later. I was interested to see who would return and who would come for the first time. I had left it open so that people could come to either or both sessions depending on their schedules, reasoning that any exposure to the concept of forgiveness as a process was better than none at all, and knowing that the handouts would give everyone a complete overview. Those who came to only the second session had the advantage of a review of the first session material.

Of the twenty-three participants in the first session, twelve returned for the second session. Everyone who couldn't return gave reasons (death in the family, prior engagement, out of town trip) and asked if I would offer a make-up session. The mother of the six-year old child who attended the first session stayed home so that her husband could attend the second session. This group of twenty participants consisted of two married couples, five widows and two divorcees, three men who attended without their wives, five women who attended without their husbands, and one single woman. The following is a list of the participants with a brief profile of each, including what they identified as relationships or situations in their lives needing forgiveness. Pat, Leon and Nora, Sylvia, Martha, Linda, Esther, Ruth, Katherine, Nancy, Stephanie and Edwina

returned.

- Gertrude and Harry are a married couple in their 70's with two grown children. They joined the community two years ago and regularly attend Sunday colloquy and platform, as well as other events. She was a museum docent and is still an artist. He was an accountant, but although he worked with numbers, his real passion is for language: how metaphors are used, what meanings we struggle to convey, etc. They are intelligent and articulate people who love art and music. Gertrude connected the concepts we discussed with memories of her family when she was growing up, how grudges had been held and stories had been told from differing perspectives. Harry seemed to be asking what all the fuss was about: someone does something wrong, apologizes, and everyone moves on. It took him a while to grasp the deeper dynamic.

- Carol is a middle-aged divorced woman who occasionally attends Society events, but hasn't become a member yet. After her daughter died a couple of years ago, she became friendly with members who are active in Compassionate Friends, a support group for parents whose children have died. She was struggling with being able to forgive family and friends who had not offered her the kind of support she needed when her daughter died.

- Frank is a middle-aged married man who loves to fish and often brings his catch packed in ice in the trunk of his car to share with members. He works in a group home for adolescent boys with problems and loves his work, often sharing stories

with us about his charges. He did not discuss forgiveness in terms of personal relationships, but rather in political and social justice terms. I wondered in what ways he was replacing one for the other.

- Gladys is a middle-aged divorced woman with one grown son and an elderly father who lives on his own in upstate NY. She is an assertive do-gooder who tries the patience of many members, pushing until there is an open conflict, then demanding an apology. I wasn't sure why she attended, because she doesn't strike me as a person who reflects upon her life, and I wasn't surprised when she left early.

- Keith is a middle-aged married man with two grown children, a retired science and math high school teacher. His first wife died several years ago, and he has since remarried. Keith is co-leader of the weekly bereavement group and new director of Ethical Friends of Children, an EHS social action project. In both capacities he has interacted with Gladys: favorably in the former, but explosively in the latter. This, however, was not what he talked about; instead, he focused on his relationships with his children.

- Deborah, a retired physician in her 70's and current president of an organization of doctors who support universal health care, is unhappily married, something she has talked to me about in pastoral counseling. Their marriage is a typical union of hysterical woman and compulsive, controlling man. Deborah engages in some Buddhist practices, meditating and attending retreats with another member. In recent

years she has moved far away from her husband emotionally and sought comfort from male friends. It was with regard to one of these friends that she was concerned about forgiveness.

- David is the forty-something husband of Tina from session one and father of their six-year old child. He is a health care professional in the rehabilitation field and a very active member, serving on the House & Grounds Committee and as usher and sound technician on Sundays. He participated in the discussion, but left early to rejoin his family.

I realized that two new people, Gladys and Keith, had had a recent altercation, and I wondered if that would come up during this session. They sat apart from one another and were not in a direct line of vision, although the circle afforded all participants a view of one another. I thought that Gladys became agitated when she realized that Keith was in the room, something she later confirmed to me. She didn't participate directly, choosing to pass whenever it was her turn, but she made several side comments, e.g., reminding people to introduce themselves, and at one point she stood up and paced between her chair and the window. She left during the discussion about stages of forgiveness. When I followed up with her the next week, she said that Keith owed her an apology.

Appendix B contains the format of the second session. The music at the beginning helped to set a soothing tone. I noticed that getting settled was a quieter transition than the week

before; people spoke to one another in softer voices. I gave everyone time to relax and look toward me before starting. Since the first session focused on forgiving others, I read a quotation from Hannah Arendt about *being* forgiven to set the stage for that discussion and a quotation about love from M. Scott Peck emphasizing choice, which connected it to the last topic of the previous session, thereby affording a look both forward and backward. This quiet time to reflect with soft instrumental music playing, as well as the parables and poetry that followed, established a spiritual component to complement and balance the cognitive approach.

Responses to the opening go-around were varied, depending on whether the person was returning or there for the first time. Returnees talked about how open to other people they had felt during the week, whether it was telling them that they had attended the workshop and inviting their reactions or listening to people in a more receptive way. Some of them had reflected upon their past histories, wondering in what ways they had told their stories over the years and how they might have changed them. Several had had encounters with family members whom they experienced differently because of what they had learned about forgiveness. They felt a loosening in their emotions and a shifting of perspective. Linda, who last time said she had no one to forgive, realized that she could never forgive her alcoholic mother for her difficult childhood. This feeling of never being able to forgive was distressing, but I told her that I hoped she would find the upcoming discussion of stages reassuring: her new awareness was an important first step.

The new people either gave a general goal of learning more about forgiveness or told

about a particular instance of having been hurt. Carol, whose daughter had died, was finding it hard to forgive family and friends who did not give her the support she needed. Keith was having difficulty forgiving his daughter for her forgiving *him* for something he felt did not require forgiveness. Frank wanted to know how he could forgive President Bush: He explained that he took very personally the damage he felt this administration had done to the environment and the economy, and he didn't like the way he was feeling. This helped to reinforce the internal nature of forgiveness: He would, in all likelihood, never receive an apology from the president, but he could act in ways to further his own values and try to understand, but not excuse or condone, Bush's behavior.

Participant comments made during the review of definition: As in the last session, the concept of forgiving not meaning forgetting resonated with people. Harry claimed that he always intentionally forgot hurts because he wanted to move on and didn't want to carry them with him, but later in the session he acknowledged that this rational approach did not work for everyone. There was also some discussion about how it was possible to forgive without condoning. I gave an example of my son when he was bullied in middle school: while my husband and I were supporting him emotionally and taking steps with the school administration to put an end to the bullying, we also tried to understand the reasons for the behavior, e.g., a hostile divorce. Trying to understand and feel compassion for someone who behaves badly is not the same as condoning or absolving the behavior. We touched upon identity issues again with the points about self-sacrifice and self-esteem. Maintaining one's integrity and wholeness as an individual is important as we distinguish who we are from what has happened to us. We can let someone back

into our hearts, but should not give our hearts away.

Returnees had grasped the concept of an internal, ongoing process. Most of the new people recognized it from their own experiences and seemed relieved that the model I presented acknowledged their struggle with complex emotions. This time Linda, the woman whose mother had been an alcoholic, picked up on letting go of grudges and resentments, of being more than a victim. Carol, whose daughter had died, related her experience of trying to punish people by severing contact with them. When she realized that punishing them was not healing her, she reached out to them again, acknowledging to them that they might not have known how to approach her after her daughter's death.

Participant comments during stages of granting forgiveness: Keith realized that he had gone through the various stages intuitively, without thinking about the differences and transitions. I compared the stages of a process model to a film when we freeze a frame and examine it closely. I also noted that a model is just a tool to describe a process; it is general, not specific or prescriptive. Each of us is on our own journey and will experience forgiveness differently, but learning about it helps to "normalize" our experience and ease some anxiety we may have.

The discussion of hurt and hate helped to clarify the degrees of pain and distinguish between people and the harm that they do. One might more easily forgive and forget an insult than a violation of trust. Anger might motivate us to confront someone to resolve a problem; hate keeps us locked away from others. In terms of healing, I emphasized the

personal vision of inner peace and what the participants want their lives to become. Holding on to a desire for revenge or waiting for an admission of guilt keeps us locked within a painful past. When we can imagine our lives at peace, we can take steps in that direction. The participants found the steps toward reconciliation (Simon & Simon, 1990) helpful: know what you want, think about how to reach that goal, get support, and remember that you did the best you could no matter what the outcome. They felt that this approach set realistic expectations for them.

The discussion of worth in terms of Adler's distinguishing characteristics of an ethical relationship brought me back to a song the Brooklyn Women's Chorus had sung that morning at platform: "Amazing Grace." We substituted the word "love" for "God" in recognition of the non-theistic setting of both the chorus and the congregation; still, "grace" is not a word that is often used in Ethical Culture settings. I have begun to think about grace in terms of worth, that feeling within ourselves that we have a right to live fulfilled, whole, and authentic lives, and according that right to others. Worth, like grace, is not a passive, but rather an active and lively concept that we can use creatively. Forgiveness is possible when we choose to attribute worth to ourselves and others and act so as to elicit everyone's best self. We also need to realistically protect and defend ourselves from those who choose not to attribute worth to us.

Participant comments during stages of seeking forgiveness: There was much discussion about grown children. Katherine talked about how angry her son often seems towards her. He regularly explodes and she doesn't understand where it comes from and how she

can break out of the pattern. She feels that she must have done or is doing something to offend him, but he doesn't acknowledge that when she asks him. Keith talked about an apology his son made that didn't feel like he was really asking for forgiveness. Sylvia felt that she might have hurt someone's feelings based on this person's reactions to her, but she didn't know what she had done or how to approach the person to ask. Before making amends, we must understand that we have transgressed and appreciate how that has affected the other person. It becomes difficult if the other person expects us to know this without telling us, and is an indication of how we must attend to the relationship.

Stories: I decided not to read from *The Sunflower* because I felt that its focus on Simon Wiesenthal's actual experience of the Holocaust would move the participants away from their own experiences. Parables, on the other hand, by their universal quality, draw people into an examination of their own lives. While the real life story of the Vietnamese woman and the U.S. pilot had been effective in the last session, I wanted to encourage the participants to look inside themselves. This didn't set up any unrealistic expectations of how or whom they should forgive.

Closing go-around: Participants were appreciative of the opportunity to learn more about the concept and process of forgiveness. They especially appreciated the depth of personal sharing from one another that reassured them they were not alone in their experiences. There was an interest in continuing to meet in a small group after the workshop had had a chance to settle in with them, as well as interest from a couple of people in meeting with me privately.

As in the first session, much of the participant interaction was in the form of asking me to clarify some aspect of the material presented, giving an example from one's experience with regard to the material, or sharing a more general personal story about forgiveness. Participants addressed the group rather than other individuals, making eye contact around the circle. I often reflected back what I had heard people say and came back to their contributions at different points in the presentation. While my presence as Leader placed me at the center of the group, my role as facilitator ensured that every voice was heard. One of the important steps in community building is creating time and space for everyone to be heard non-judgmentally and without interruption, thereby establishing trust. I think we accomplished that, and I look forward to the next stage when we can form a support group that will strengthen individual connections.

B. Developments not anticipated

I anticipated using a questionnaire to evaluate the outcomes of my project, but after the first session I felt that that would be inappropriate: It would frame this workshop as an adult education class rather than as a pastoral experience. I also wanted to keep the focus on the participants and their experience, rather than introducing an instrument that might shift the focus to an evaluation of how well I had done. I encouraged them after each session to find time to read the quotations and poetry in their folders, perhaps a few lines every day, to inspire them to continue exploring their feelings about forgiveness. I also suggested that, if they did not already have a daily spiritual practice, to seriously consider starting one, e.g., meditation, journal and poetry writing, nature walks, listening to music.

I felt that I was well prepared and anticipated a positive response, but I did not anticipate the deep level of engagement and personal sharing or that this would be what the participants would most appreciate about the experience. I found this very encouraging for the future. I also felt good about having struck a balance between spiritual and cognitive approaches, and facilitating a successful group process. Because people were open to sharing with one another and an environment of trust was established, I was able to come back to their personal stories, as well as mine, to illustrate various points in the presentation. This made the experience less abstract and more practical.

I did not anticipate that the impetus for starting a continuing support group on forgiveness would come from the group. I was going to suggest it, but they beat me to it, asking that we wait about a month for things to settle in with them. In terms of the models of forgiveness I presented, I felt that many of the participants, as a result of the workshop, had entered the phase of uncovering. They became more aware of and expressed the emotional pain they felt from deep, unjust injuries and remembered their experiences of emotional distress. Reflecting upon what they had learned and considering continuing in a support group would constitute a decision to process this pain, bringing it out in the open to let healing begin.

Chapter V: Discussion

A. The implications of results, both anticipated and not anticipated, as you reported them in Chapter IV

I was struck by the enormity of the topic, in range and depth, during the research phase and was concerned about how best to communicate this to my members given the pastoral goal I had to both comfort them in their pain and challenge them to take steps to heal themselves and their relationships. I anticipated that aspects of the project would resonate with people; I had experienced that after my platform address on forgiveness. But when only a few people registered for the workshop, I thought I had miscalculated the congregation's interest. The attendance of thirty-two people in one or both sessions, and the way in which they engaged with the material and with each other exceeded my expectations. In some ways I felt that we were barely able to scratch the surface of understanding forgiveness, but in other ways, particularly in the personal sharing, I felt that we plumbed some personal depths.

Ethical Humanists generally present themselves as more rational than emotional, so I felt comfortable presenting material in a cognitive approach, but preparing for the spiritual approach was more difficult in terms of finding a common ground for members with different personal beliefs. I decided to use music, guided meditation, readings, poetry and storytelling throughout the sessions to emphasize the importance of allowing thought to give way to feeling. Although no one commented specifically on those elements, I met with no resistance, and I could sense an atmosphere of calm and openness. Several participants regularly attend Sunday colloquy, a shared reflection, and I had previously

discussed their spiritual practices with them, so I knew that they would be comfortable. Others who usually attend discussion groups readily adapted to the format I established and participated fully.

Looking back at Chapter I, in terms of the history and background of the Society, I felt that the membership had shifted from a tight social circle to a looser, more inclusive community that could create an environment of trust. It seemed clear to me from the project that members could serve as a resource to one another not just in a personal way through friendships, but also in a communal way within an intentionally formed group. Even better than my perception of this change was the feedback from participants that they, too, experienced this feeling, so much so that several of them asked about forming a forgiveness support group.

A notable exception was Gladys, who came to the second session and left early. She later confirmed that she had left because of her feeling of discomfort being in the same setting with Keith, someone with whom she had a conflict. When I followed up with her, she said that he owed her an apology and proceeded to pass along some hearsay about him. I knew their story well: he facilitates a bereavement group in which she participates, and they got along until he took over a social action project that she had hoped to lead. Her social skills did not qualify her for the task, and I tried to tell her that as gently as I could at the time, but she accused me of sexism and acted in ways to sabotage his authority until he lost his patience and yelled at her. Now they are at an impasse. I had hoped that they might see themselves reflected in our workshop discussion, but he was focused on

his children, and she on his anger. Frankly, the woman would try the patience of a saint, primarily because she thinks of *herself* as a saint. It is humbling to realize that I could only accomplish a little of what I had hoped for. But then, as I told the group, this is a first step; the real work we will do mostly on our own, inside ourselves. I will continue to help facilitate a return to trust in the relationship between Gladys and Keith.

A recurrent theme was the uneasy relationship some participants have with their grown children. In the cases of Katherine, Keith, and Leon and Nora, their children have taken different religious and political paths than they would have wished for them. Katherine's son is a born-again Christian with a politically conservative outlook; Keith's daughter and Leon and Nora's daughter have become Orthodox Jews, a practice that often keeps them from family gatherings, either because of the time of day or the menu. Each parent has the sense that they have hurt their children in some way, but their children are not forthcoming in telling them how so that they can discuss it with them and start a healing process. Leon and Nora were delighted that their daughter and her family attended a play that he produced at the Society even though the timing between sundown and opening curtain was tight. The closing speech was about forgiveness, and they used this as an opportunity to talk to their daughter about the workshop they were taking, hoping to engage her in conversation, but they felt they were not successful. They are very disappointed that she will not be attending the upcoming Founder's Day celebration in their honor. Still, they are hopeful: Nora has been giving a lot of thought to their family story and how each person's interpretation of it contributes to their relationships.

I thought about these cases of strained relationships between parents and grown children in terms of the issues Erikson raises: basic trust, autonomy, and initiative. All of the families maintain strong connections, in other words, no one is completely estranged from the others; but there is a lack of trust that keeps them from a more open communication. It seems that the children may have wrested their autonomy and initiative from their parents at some cost to the relationship. There is a reluctance to reopen old wounds and relive that time. The past cannot be undone, but by revisiting the family story and shedding light on it from a different perspective won through a passage of time, perhaps they can learn to forgive each other for not being perfect and learn to appreciate each other's unique human qualities.

B. The contributions of my project to clarifying and expanding

1) the religious principles discussed in Chapter II

The ethical challenge of attributing worth to others and ourselves is nowhere clearer than in situations where someone has harmed us or we have harmed someone else. We do not feel loving, and yet we must find a way back to love. This project brought home the difference between learning about something and making it real in our lives. Forgiveness is a long, arduous journey that should not be undertaken alone. Travelers need to be comforted, supported, and challenged. They need imagination, empathy, and the will to consider the possibility that there is another perspective, another story.

Ethical Humanists are generally involved in social justice projects outside of their immediate experience, e.g., opposition to the death penalty, support of reproductive and

gay rights, environmental protection, peace work, hunger relief, and many other humanitarian and progressive causes. They may have some personal investment, but social reform on behalf of others has always been at the center of Ethical Culture religion. These issues touch our members' hearts, and they work hard for them. But what is sometimes missed is the reciprocity or mutuality of the relationship, the give and take between equals. By writing letters; signing petitions and checks; donating and delivering clothes, food, and furniture, we can keep others at arm's length. Tending to personal relationships is also an ethical action: "We do verily live and move and have our spiritual being in one another. But what we need is a new religious conception of love . . . that gives prominence not only to the unity, but also to the multiplicity, the indefeasible differences of the unique members joined in divine communion with one another." (Adler, 1946, p. 89)

This project gave participants an opportunity to reflect upon their personal relationships in a different way. It gave them a different vocabulary to talk about them and a different frame through which to see them. By learning that forgiveness is not an "all or nothing" proposition, but a long process, they could risk taking the first steps, which involve becoming awareness of their situation and the complex emotions it elicits. Taking the "moral inventory" that Adler recommends keeps us in touch with the influence we bring to bear on others, focusing our attention on how we impact their lives for good or ill. Several participants reflected on how they might have been responsible for relationships that had broken down, shifting from a previous defensive position.

2) the clinical principles discussed in Chapter II

With the exception of Frank, who couldn't forgive President Bush, all of the other participants talked about relationships with those closest to them: family and friends. This reinforced the connection of forgiveness to love. It is inevitable that we will hurt the ones we love and be hurt by them. The work of forgiveness is to find a way back into their hearts, or, if that is not possible, to ease our own hearts by accepting that we have done the best we could. Our family and friends are also a part of the story of who we are. When the connection to them is damaged or broken, our self-identity and self-esteem are affected. One's identity can be so invested in being right that it cannot make room for someone else's perspective. It can also be overwhelmed by someone else's perspective so that we have to struggle to claim our own.

This connection between identity and life story resonated with several people. They tried to identify who they were within and outside of the narrative of what had happened to put them in a place where forgiveness had become necessary. Needing to be right and holding a grudge had become so important that they lost sight of also needing to love and be loved. It was particularly hard for the parents of grown children to understand what they had done to cause estrangement from them - or at least not the close relationship they wanted. Breaking the process down into stages gave them an opportunity to examine how they felt. For many of them reconciliation seemed an ideal: they could start to imagine what they wanted that to be like, but the struggle to get there still seemed overwhelming.

C. The contributions of my project to ministry in a wider context

The materials from my project can be used in interfaith settings and adapted for use by other faith traditions. The need to forgive and be forgiven, to be allowed back into someone's heart, is universal. Without a clear understanding of what forgiveness is, and more importantly what it is *not*, people may feel overwhelmed by or rejecting of the effort.

D. Implications for future ministry

I have concluded that it is important to include the workshop I developed in our core curriculum and plan to offer it every year. I look forward to convening a forgiveness support group this summer and continuing the journey we have started with this project. I will pay close attention to the interactions within the group, shifting my role as facilitator out of the center and off to the side so that the participants create their own experience.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adler, Felix, *An Ethical Philosophy of Life*, NY: Ethica Press, 1906.

Adler, Felix, *Life and Destiny*, NY: American Ethical Union, 1944.

Adler, Felix, *Our Part in This World*, NY: Ethica Press, 1946.

Adler, Felix, *The Reconstruction of the Spiritual Ideal*, NY: Ethica Press, 1923.

Enright, Robert D. and Joanna North, editors, *Exploring Forgiveness*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.

Enright, Robert D., *Forgiveness Is a Choice: A Step-By-Step Process For Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope*, Washington, DC: APA Books, 2002.

Ericson, Edward L., *The Humanist Way*, NY: Continuum Publishing, 1988.

Erikson, Erik H., *Identity and the Life Cycle*, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1980 (first published in 1959).

Goode, Erica, "To Err May Be Human; To Forgive Is Good for You," *The NY Times*, May 23, 2001.

Karen, Robert, *The Forgiving Self: the Road from Resentment to Connection*, NY: Anchor Books, 2003.

Kellerman, Lois, Don Montagna and Jone Johnson Lewis, "Steps to Seeking Forgiveness," www.aeu.org.

Klein, Melanie, *Envy and Gratitude: A Study of the Unconscious*, NY: Basic Books, 1957.

Margalit, Avishai, *The Ethics of Memory*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Murphy, Dean E. "Beyond Justice: The Eternal Struggle to Forgive," *The NY Times*, May 26, 2002.

Muzzey, David Saville, *Ethics as a Religion*, NY: Continuum Publishing, 1998 (originally published 1951)

Simon, Dr. Sidney B. and Suzanne Simon, *Forgiveness: How to Make Peace with Your Past and Get on With Your Life*, NY: Warner Books, 1990.

Smedes, Lewis, *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*, San Francisco: Harper, 1996.

Spetter, Matthew les, *Man - the Reluctant Brother: An Exploration of Human Courage*, NY: The Fieldston Press, 1967.

"Towards Philosophical Consensus," *A Concept Map for Ethical Culture*, A Statement by the National Leaders Council (NLC) of the American Ethical Union, 1991.

Tutu, Desmond, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, NY: Doubleday, 1999.

Wiesenthal, Simon, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, NY: Schocken Books, Inc., 1997.

Winnicott, D.W., *Home Is Where We Start From*, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986.

Websites

www.forgiveness-institute.org - International Forgiveness Institute, established in 1994 as a private, non-profit organization, was an outgrowth of the social scientific research done at the University of Wisconsin - Madison since 1985 by Robert Enright and his colleagues:

www.forgivenessweb.com - The Forgiveness Web: listing of research projects around the world on forgiveness

www.forgiving.org - A Campaign for Forgiveness Research funds research projects on the effects of forgiveness and reports on their discoveries.

www.learningtoforgive.com - "Forgive For Good" website by Frederic Luskin, Ph.D., co-director of Stanford University Forgiveness Project

APPENDICES

Workshop Materials for "The Struggle to Forgive and Be Forgiven"

APPENDIX A: Session One - Toward a Working Definition

APPENDIX B: Session Two - A Method

APPENDIX C: Handouts

Workshop description:
We live with many misconceptions about the nature of forgiveness that keep us from repairing our relationships. Forgiveness is not a compliant or automatic act but an important process, an ethical struggle that can last a long time and that needs to be understood and honored. Our forgiving self is the strongest, most loving part of who we are. It allows us to voice our anger without doing damage, acknowledge our part in what has gone wrong, and see the flaws in ourselves and others as part of our humanity. This workshop introduces participants to some key concepts in the process of forgiveness and invites them to examine their own ethical struggle to forgive and be forgiven.

APPENDIX A

SESSION ONE: Toward a Working Definition

- **WELCOME and INTRODUCTIONS**

Display page 1 of newsprint:

WELCOME!
The Struggle to Forgive and Be Forgiven
March 6 - A Working Definition
March 13 - Stages in the Process

Chairs are arranged in a circle. Once everyone is seated, distribute the folders with handouts. Ask participants to introduce themselves: anyone can start and go around in the circle.

- **GOAL**

Display page 2 of newsprint: goal and diagram linking cognitive and spiritual approaches, religious ethical and psychological principles to forgiveness

To explore and gain understanding of the process of forgiveness. Why forgiveness? It is as fundamental and important as any topic in psychology and religion.

Psychology: wholeness, making room for all the parts of your self
Spirituality: connection, to those parts and to other people

Common goal of growth - transformation and change

Here in this workshop we will explore *cognitively*; that is, we will be thinking a lot, listening and talking, about forgiveness in terms of ethical religious and psychological principles. But there will also be a *spiritual* exploration as you reflect on what goes on here, take it in, and let it work on you. Together we will create the conditions that will make both kinds of exploration possible. This is *your* journey - individually and as a group. The concepts that I present are descriptive, not prescriptive. In other words, they help shed light on a human process, but each of you will experience them in your own way.

Our life's task is to become more fully who we are. All human beings yearn, in varying degrees and with varying levels of awareness, for completeness and wholeness. All of us long to be the person we were meant to be, the person we are capable of becoming.

We also yearn for connectedness to others, for love. Love is essential to our experience of being fully human. Forgiveness - of ourselves and others - heals our wounded spirits and makes love possible. Forgiveness means letting someone - even ourselves - back into our hearts.

- **GO-AROUND**

What are *your* goals for this workshop? What are you looking for and hope to gain?

Display page 3 and record responses.

- **GUIDED MEDITATION**

Now let's make some room inside ourselves to take in something new, to give ourselves room to expand creatively.

Stretch your arms up, let them really reach out to the universe, open up your chests, and take a few deep breaths. Inspiration: breath, spirit.

Now get comfortable in your seats and close your eyes. Find a place where you feel wholly and completely you: comfortable, at ease, happy, loved and loving. This place can exist in the present, in the past, or in your imagination. Rest there a while: let it support you, hold you in its embrace. Breathe. Take it in, let it inspire you. *[Wait a few minutes.]*

Hold the connection to this place inside you as we reconnect to one another in the circle.

- **INTRODUCTION**

It's important to make time and space for ourselves within ourselves. As social beings we are often defined by our relationships: "I'm someone's daughter, sister, wife, mother, friend." Like the Xhosa of South Africa, we Ethical Humanists often say, "I am because we are." But relationships aren't always easy or good: we struggle; we hurt others and get hurt. Before we can begin to repair damaged relationships, we have to understand how the hurt has affected us.

Too often traditional religions - or our interpretations of them - have encouraged, even mandated, that we leap into a place outside ourselves to grant or ask forgiveness, often in a ritualized way. My upbringing in the Catholic church required me to tell my sins to a priest in a confessional, after which he would forgive me in God's name and give me penance, the recitation of certain prayers. This short-circuits the process. It starts inside ourselves and radiates out. It is both the same and different for every person.

Religious ritual can be helpful: creating a time and space for important aspects of humanity, making sacred our interactions with one another. But it can easily lose its relevance and liveliness if the form and not the spirit is followed.

Take a moment to ask if anyone has experienced ritualized forgiveness and see if this generates discussion.

Many of your notions of forgiveness may have come from this perspective, so let's start our definition of forgiveness with what it is ***not***.

- **DEFINITION**

Display page 4 of newsprint and refer to handout in folder. Ask someone to read the first point aloud. Invite discussion, then continue around the circle.

Forgiveness is *not:*

- It is *not* forgetting. We do not erase painful past experiences from our memory when we forgive. Nothing, and no one, can turn back the clock, but we can learn from those experiences, even with the pain they caused. There is a "redemptive remembering," a way of keeping a clear picture of the past, that can bring hope for the future along with our sorrow. Once we *have* forgiven, however, we are freed to forget, because we have been healed.
- It is *not* condoning or excusing. We forgive people for things we *blame* them for. By forgiving, we are not saying that what was done to us was acceptable or unimportant. Indeed, it has made a great difference in our lives.
- It is *not* absolution. I was raised as a Catholic. I regularly confessed my sins and received absolution. The priest gave me a few prayers to say, and the slate was wiped clean - until the next time. But that is not what we are expected to do when we forgive. We do not absolve people who hurt us of the responsibility for their actions.
- It is *not* a form of self-sacrifice. Forgiveness does not mean playing the martyr and hiding our true feelings. We either forgive or we don't, wholeheartedly and honestly. Forgiveness happens in our heart of hearts or not at all, and it demands truthfulness.
- It is *not* a clear-cut, one-time decision. No matter how much you want to let go of the past and move on with your life, it is a struggle that takes time.

Before continuing to what forgiveness is, *let what it is* not *settle in by telling the story of John Plummer and Pham Thi Kim Phuc. He was the U.S. Army helicopter pilot who coordinated a raid on her village in Vietnam in 1972 that caused her to be severely burned by napalm. They met in 1996 and reconciled.*

In one of the most famous photos to come out of the Vietnam War, a small girl is running naked down the road, with an expression of unimaginable terror, her clothes burned off and her body scorched by napalm. The man who coordinated the raid on this child's village in June 1972 was a twenty-four year old U.S. Army helicopter pilot and

operations officer named John Plummer. The day after the raid, conducted by South Vietnamese airplanes, Plummer saw the photo in the military newspaper *Stars and Stripes* and was devastated. Twenty-four years later Plummer told an Associated Press reporter, "It just knocked me to my knees. And that was when I knew I could never talk about this." The guilt over the bombing raid had become a lonely torment. He suffered periodic nightmares that included the scene from the photo accompanied by the sounds of children screaming.

The girl in the photo, Pham Thi Kim Phuc, survived seventeen operations, eventually relocated to Toronto, and became an occasional goodwill ambassador for UNESCO. In 1996 Plummer heard that Kim would be speaking at a Veterans Day observance in Washington, not far from his home.

Kim's speech included the following: "If I could talk face to face with the pilot who dropped the bombs, I would tell him we cannot change history, but we should try to do good things for the present. . . " Plummer, in the audience, wrote her a note: "I am that man," and asked an officer to take it to her. At the end of the speech, he pushed through the crowd to reach her, and soon they were face to face. "She just opened her arms to me," Plummer recounted. "I fell into her arms sobbing. All I could say is, 'I'm so sorry. I'm just so sorry.'"

"It's all right," Kim responded. "I forgive. I forgive." Five months later, still connected by their peculiar history, the two were shown in an AP wire photo, their heads touching, almost cheek to cheek, his arm around her, both smiling with an almost incongruous delight, as if he had never ordered the raid that left her body scarred and in permanent pain and he did not live with recurrent nightmares.
(From *The Forgiving Self* by Robert Karen, Ph.D.)

Okay, so, what *is* forgiveness?

Display page 5 of newsprint and follow the same method as above: one person reads aloud and discussion is allowed before continuing to the next point.

- It is a by-product of an ongoing process. You may have been taught that forgiveness was an act or an attitude. If you could not forgive, then you just weren't trying hard enough. But what keeps us from forgiving is that we haven't yet healed from the wounds we suffered. Forgiveness always happens inside a storm of complex emotions.
- It is an *internal* process. We can again feel well, free and accepting as long as we want to heal and are willing to try.
- It is a sign of positive self-esteem. Rather than building an identity around something that happened to us, we can put the past into its proper perspective. Traditional religion often posits forgiveness as our moral obligation rather than our moral *right* to stop being hurt by past injuries and injustices.
- It is letting go of the intense emotions attached to incidents from our past. We do not forget, but we can feel less intensely angry, frightened, bitter or resentful.

- It is recognizing that we no longer *need* our grudges and resentments, our hatred and self-pity. We are more than a victim of injury and injustice and do not need an excuse for getting less out of life.
- It is no longer wanting to punish people who hurt us and accepting that nothing we do to punish *them* will heal *us*. Vengeance is a passion to get even, but we cannot get even, not ever, not if we try for a million years. Pain given and received never balance out; no two people weigh pain on the same scale.
- It is freeing up and putting to better use the energy once consumed by holding grudges, harboring resentments, and nursing unhealed wounds. When we break the cycle of pain and abuse, refusing to create new victims by hurting others as we were hurt, we rediscover strengths we always had and the capacity to understand and accept other people and ourselves.
- It is moving on. Forgiveness is recognizing that we have better things to do our life and then doing them.

(adapted from *Forgiveness: How to Make Peace With Your Past and Get on With Your Life* by Dr. Sidney B. Simon and Suzanne Simon)

- **CHOICE**

Display page 6 with diagram of the word "choice" at the center, surrounded by "Raise awareness of self and others" at the top, "Reflection - Meditation" to the rights, "Form intention" at the bottom, and "Take action" at the right, all connected with arrows.

Ethics starts with a choice - or a thought about a choice. It is not simple. Conditions critical to forgiveness, both internal and external, should not be overlooked. Choice to locate the forgiving self, the core of security and generosity.

Change comes from determination, inner search, creativity, and help of others, including therapists. Question of the will: importance of choice and responsibility, power of conditioning. Steps: awareness, reflection/meditation, intention, action - circular/spiraling process.

Questions [from *The Forgiving Self* by Robert Karen]:
How can we make a place for all the parts of ourselves?
How can we not sacrifice, deny, or dissociate from authentic aspects of our being?
How can we have our anger without its getting in the way of repair or spoiling goodness of connections with ourselves and others?

Answering these questions is more important than blind obedience to forgiveness.

- **CLOSING**

Refer to the quotations and poems in the folder. Read the first two poems aloud.

Quotations and poetry are provided to help with your personal spiritual exploration.
Next week we will take a look at a model of forgiveness and explore its stages.

Go-Around: What are your reactions to this session? What are you taking home with you?

APPENDIX B

SESSION TWO: A Method

- **WELCOME and REFLECTION**

Set chairs in a circle and have music playing. Welcome everyone and read opening words, drawing the connection between forgiveness and love:

"Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to a single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer's apprentice, who lacked the magic formula to break the spell."
Hannah Arendt, philosopher

"Love is as love does. Love is an act of will - namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love."
M. Scott Peck, psychologist

Let's take a moment now to settle into our seats and make space inside ourselves for what we will be experiencing this afternoon. Close your eyes and listen to the music. Reflect upon the quotations. Think your own thoughts and feel your own feelings. Find your loving and generous self.

Allow several minutes for people to settle in. Notice how their bodies relax and do not rush to move on.

- **GO-AROUND**

In what ways have you thought or felt about forgiveness since our last session? Anyone can start and we'll continue around the circle. Please remind us of your name and remember to speak from your own experience. If you were not here last week, tell us what you hope to gain from this workshop.

- **REVIEW**

Display newsprint pages from first session: Welcome and schedule, goal, definition, and choice. Refer to handouts folder for information contained there. Ask if there are any questions before continuing.

- **STAGES of Forgiveness**

Display newsprint page.

Forgiveness is often framed as an issue of a victim and a wrongdoer, and there are certainly many cases of that, but it is an issue whenever two people are in conflict. Who needs to forgive and who needs to repent is often confusing. In most situations everyone shares some blame. Lewis B. Smedes, author of "Forgive and Forget," writes, "The gift of being forgiven and love's power to forgive are like yin and yang. Each needs the other to exist. To receive the gift without using the power is absurd; it is like exhaling without inhaling or like walking without moving your legs."

Ask participants to take turns reading from the handout and stop after each stage to invite discussion.

Four stages of forgiveness (adapted from *Forgive & Forget* by Lewis B. Smedes)
1) **hurt**: when someone causes you pain so deep, unfair and personal that you cannot forget it; when you experience a pain that can only be healed by forgiving the one who has wounded you. This hurt is not to be confused with an annoyance, a slight, a disappointment, or a coming-in-second. Three examples of hurt are disloyalty, where a relationship based on promise and trust has been violated, and you are treated like a stranger; betrayal, where you are treated like an enemy; and brutality when one is violated to one's core, when a person is reduced to something "less than human excellence."

EXERCISE A: Who has hurt you?
Make a mental list of people who have hurt you in the past or are hurting you now, e.g., parents, spouses, children, friends, colleagues, teachers, strangers, systems, yourself, etc.

2) **hate**: You cannot shake the memory of how much you were hurt, and you cannot wish your enemy well. You sometimes want the person who hurt you to suffer as much as you do. This is not to be confused with anger: anger is a sign that we are alive and well; hate is a sign that we are sick and need to be healed. What makes it so hard to cure are hating *people*, instead of the evil they do; aiming our hatred at people who are closest to us - we get angry at strangers, but hatred is intimate - and hating those whom we blame.

EXERCISE B: What are you holding on to?

The Monk and the Woman

Two Buddhist monks, on their way to the monastery, found a very beautiful woman at the riverbank. Like them, she wished to cross the river, but the water was too high, so one of the monks lifted her onto his back and carried her across.

His fellow monk was thoroughly scandalized. For two hours he berated him on

his negligence in keeping the rule. Had he forgotten he was a monk? How dare he touch a woman? And worse, carry her across the river? What would people say? Had he brought their holy religion into disrepute?

The offending monk listened patiently to the never-ending sermon. Finally he broke in and said, "Brother, I dropped that woman at the river. Are you still carrying her?"

What are you holding on to? What do you find difficult to let go of? Is anything from the past haunting you? Are you holding a grudge against someone?

3) **healing**: As we forgive people, we gradually come to see the deeper truth about them - and ourselves. If you cannot free people from their wrongs and see them as the needy people they are, you tie yourself to your own painful past. Forgiving is an honest release within the forgiver's heart. You will know forgiveness has begun when you recall who hurt you and feel the power to wish them well.

Healing is influenced by:

- specific ways you were hurt, when, and by whom
- how you reacted to the injuries and injustices you experienced - including what you came be believe about yourself and what you did because you were hurt
- your present circumstances - both positive and negative aspects of your life today and the emotional support you have
- your own personal vision of inner peace and what you want your life to become

(from Simon & Simon, *How to Make Peace With Your Past and Get on with Your Life*)

4) **reconciliation**: You can invite the person who hurt you back into your life. If he or she comes honestly, love can move you both toward a new and healed relationship. This depends on the person you forgive as much as it depends on you. If he or she doesn't come back, you have to be healed alone.

So *how* is all this accomplished? Slowly, very slowly, a little at a time. It requires patience and understanding. It takes place in confusion and with anger and freely, or not at all.

Reconciliation (from Simon & Simon):
1) Know what you really want.
2) Think about what you can do to reach our goal.
3) Get emotional support.
4) Remember that you cannot know in advance how things will turn out, and that no matter how they do, you did the best you could.

Refer also to "Guideposts for Forgiving" from Forgiveness Is a Choice *by Robert Enright, but don't spend much time on it. Use it as an example of other models of stages and emphasize that each person is on his or her own spiritual journey.*

- **SEEKING FORGIVENESS**

Display newsprint page with Adler's "ethicizing relationships."

The "task of humanity," wrote Ethical Culture founder Felix Adler, was to "ethicize" human relations. He believed that an ethical relationship must have several distinguishing characteristics:

1) It must recognize the absolute and inherent worth of every individual. Persons must never be treated merely or primarily as a means to an end, but must be respected as ends in themselves.
2) It must affirm the uniqueness of each person, avoiding the imposition of external norms and rules of conformity that violate individuality.
3) It must be reciprocal, or mutual, recognizing that a truly creative relationship is one that involves giving and receiving on both sides.
Finally, (4) it must enable each person in the relationship to grow into his or her "distinctive excellence." Adler's reformulation of Kant's moral maxim is "Act so as to elicit the best in others and thereby in yourself." This can be misunderstood to suggest that we somehow know what is best for someone else. What Adler meant, expressed in a rather complicated way, was: "Act so as to elicit in others the distinctive excellence characteristic of each of them as fellow members of the ethical whole, and thereby to elicit that excellence more fully in yourself."

The "Steps to Seeking Forgiveness" from the AEU website apply "ethical philosophy to the practicalities of living." In "The Meaning of Forgiveness" a chapter in Felix Adler's book *An Ethical Philosophy of Life*, we find: "Every kind of [morally hurtful act] is an attempt in some fashion to live at the expense of other life. The spiritual principle is: live in the life of others, in the energy expended to promote the essential life in others. Moral badness is self-isolation, detachment. Spirituality is consciousness of infinite interrelatedness." "The most effectual aid [to forgiveness] is faith in the better nature of the wrongdoer." The following phases have thus been identified:

Display newsprint page and ask participants to take turns reading aloud each phase from the handout. Invite discussion.

Phase 1: Acknowledge wrong-doing
Clarify why a certain behavior was hurtful. Without understanding the harmful effects of your behavior, it will be difficult to change. Attempt to understand the hurt or pain from the point of view of those who have been hurt, and try to understand the harmful effect on yourself.
Acknowledge to yourself and others that the behavior was a mistake. Being able to acknowledge the mistake verbally is an important first step if the relationship is to be healed.

Express genuine sorrow to all those involved for the mistake you have made. When you understand the harmful effects of your behavior, and can express that with true feelings of sorrow, you open up possibilities for change and for healing.

Phase 2: Make amends

Act out of a deep sense of honoring yourself and the other party involved. Don't cater to postures of narrow defensiveness. It is courageous to face up to the harm you have done. Take the first step toward healing by being generous and proactive in your attempts to reconcile.

Find a "stroke" that is equal to your "blow." Do this by asking the party that is hurt what you can do that is equally positive to balance the negative. This is ultimately only symbolic, since we cannot undo past harm. But it is a critical sign of goodwill and true remorse.

Make amends in a timely manner. The longer you delay, the more wounds will fester. So act as swiftly as the processing of your feelings will allow.

Phase 3: Commit to change

Make a clear commitment to change your harmful patterns of behavior. This may involve clarifying what kinds of events trigger your destructive responses, and finding ways to avoid such situations or training yourself to respond differently.

Act visibly on your commitment. Change involves not only words, but actions, such as: appropriate counseling, courses in relationship skills, publicly asking for help in identifying your harmful patterns and support in your not acting on them.

Respect the process of change. Acknowledge to yourself and others that it is hard to change, and that behaviors deeply imbedded do not disappear quickly. Don't condemn yourself for slipping, and don't condone your old ways or trivialize their harmfulness. Rather, accept the actual without losing sight of the ideal.

From *Forgive & Forget* by Lewis B. Smedes: They must bring truthfulness. Without it, your coming together is false; with it, you can make a new beginning. Truthfulness is a state of mind; it has to do with your real intentions. They must truly understand the reality of what they did to hurt you. They must be truthful with the feelings you have felt. They must be truthful in listening to you. They must be truthful about your future together.

Repentance has four levels:

1) perception - seeing that they are right when they say that what you did was mean, unfair and insufferable, even if you do not agree on exactly what happened.
2) feeling - a move to pain, sharing the hurt you inflicted; guilt
3) confession - you put yourself helpless in the hands of the person you wronged. "Confession is the rumbling of a crumbling heart."
4) promise - sincere intention not to hurt again

- **STORY:** ***The Tale of Mussa and Nagib***

Mussa and Nagib were the best of friends even though they were very different. One was tall, the other short. One was fair, the other dark. One was quick to laugh and sing, the other was quiet and studious. Still, they enjoyed each other's company more than any other's and traveled across the entire world together. It happened during their journey that on one occasion Nagib saved Mussa's life. Nagib acted very bravely, and Mussa, with much appreciation, had his servants record the virtuous deed by engraving it on a stone. Later, during their travels together, Nagib grew very angry and insulted Mussa. This time, much saddened, Mussa ordered his servants to write about the event in the sand.

When his servants asked Mussa why he had recorded each event in these different ways, Mussa explained: "I want to remember my friend's kindness as if it has been engraved on my heart. On stone, it will never be forgotten. But I hope that any memory I have of his insulting words will vanish in the same way that the wind blows away this writing in the sand."

- **BRIEF REVIEW of literature: Bibliography**

Bring books for participants to review and borrow.

- **CLOSING GO-AROUND**

What are you taking home with you? Where would you like to go from here?

- **CLOSING POEM:** *play music*

Forgive me, forgiver,
Whether you be infinite omniscient
Or some unnoticed other
My existence has hurt.

*

Being what I am
What could I do but wrong?
Yet love can bring
To heart healing
To chaos meaning.

From "Confessions" by Kathleen Raine

APPENDIX C

HANDOUTS

- **Quotations**
- **Poems**
- **Definitions**
- **Stages of forgiveness**
- **Bibliography**

QUOTATIONS on Forgiveness and Love

"To forgive is to remember the past action, but to remember it as belonging to the past, as the act of one who has since undergone the great change. The miracle of the change of water into wine at the feast of Cana would not have seemed so wonderful to the guests had they not remembered that what was turned into wine had before been water. To forgive is to remember that what was water has become wine. And he, too, who has been forgiven may not forget. The remembrance of the past he will need as a warning and a safeguard. Not to see the essentially divine nature in others, and thus also in one's self is the essence of the wrong. To teach the guilty to see it is the object of punishment. To forgive is to declare that what before was ignored is now seen and known."
Felix Adler, founder of Ethical Culture

"Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to a single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer's apprentice, who lacked the magic formula to break the spell."
Hannah Arendt, philosopher

"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong. If we practice and eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, soon the whole world will be blind and toothless."
Mahatma Gandhi, pacifist

"Forgiveness is an aspect of the workings of love. It can be a bridge back from hatred and alienation as well as a liberation from two kinds of hell: bitterness and victimhood on one side; guilt, shame, and self-recrimination on the other. The wish to repair a wounded relationship, whether it takes the form of forgiveness, apology, or some other bridging gesture, is a basic human impulse. The need to forgive - which may grow out of understanding, gratitude, sympathy, regret over the hurt one caused by not forgiving, or simply a wish to reunite - may be as strong as the need to be forgiven, even it is comes upon us more subtly. . . Without forgiveness there could be no allowance for human frailty. We would keep moving on, searching for perfect connections with mythical partners who would never hurt or disappoint. In that sense, forgiveness should be thought of not only as a discrete event but also as a way of being."
Robert Karen, psychologist

"Love must be as much light, as it is a flame."
Henry David Thoreau, naturalist

"Love is . . . a completeness, a fullness, a wholeness of life. . . Life curves upward to a peak of intensity, a high point of value and meaning, at which all its latent creative possibility go into action and the person transcends himself or herself in encounter, response, and communion with another. It is for this that we came into the world - this communion and self-transcendence. We do not become fully human until we give ourselves to each other in love."
Thomas Merton, Catholic theologian

"Love is as love does. Love is an act of will - namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love."
M. Scott Peck, psychologist

". . . it is the very essence of human nature to be a person, and to need and seek personal relationships, outside of which existence has no real meaning for us. . . we human beings find our only real security, our only meaningful existence, in good personal relationships. . . It is our nature to want to 'belong,' to seek to be related to other persons, to live a life that is essentially a shared life with the dependence on other people, and their dependence on us, that mutual need involves. . . All these facts about our human need for personal relationships are summed up in the word 'love' which involves dependence as well as communion. What distinguishes mature from infantile dependence is its capacity for co-operation and for giving as well as receiving."

"Hate leads us back to love. The most important thing that can be said about anger, resentment, aggression, and hate, is that they are at bottom a desperate struggle to wring love out of people. They arise out of deep feelings of being rejected, neglected, undervalued, unwanted, forsaken. They aim either to extort love or else to keep going without it. . .*In the end it is only love that casts out fear. . . love is the ultimate fundamental fact in existence. . .*"
Harry Guntrip, psychoanalyst

"The problems of life do not wear us out; it is the shortage of love that does. . .The essence of love is that, while it may be obscured and almost deadened, it can also be stirred from its arrest, by the simplicity of a word or a glimpse of hope. . .When it is rekindled, when we comprehend the need of another human being, the vague, the wavering, regain focus; the incomprehensible becomes clear. . .A loving attitude is not an escape hatch from realities; it is a pathway back to ourselves."
Matthew Ies Spetter, Ethical Culture Leader

"I know of only one duty, and that is to love."
Albert Camus, philosopher

POEMS

"The Quarrel" by Stanley Kunitz

The word I spoke in anger
weighs less than a parsley seed,
but a road runs through it
that leads to my grave,
that bought-and-paid-for lot
on a salt-sprayed hill in Truro
where the scrub pines
overlook the bay.
Half-way I'm dead enough,
strayed from my own nature
and my fierce hold on life.
If I could cry, I'd cry,
but I'm too old to be
anybody's child.
Leibchen,
with whom should I quarrel
except in the hiss of love,
that harsh, irregular flame?

Light breaks from the
faces that I love.
I cannot live
Out of that sun.
Marge Piercy

"My Old Body" by Jean Valentine

My old body:
a ladder of sunlight,
mercury dust floating through -

My forgiveness,
how you have learned to love me in my sleep.

"While We Were Arguing" by Jane Kenyon

The first snow fell - or should I say
it flew slantwise, so it seemed
to be the house
that moved so heedlessly through space.

Tears splashed and beaded on your sweater.
Then for long moments you did not speak.
No pleasure in the cups of tea I made
distractedly at four.

The sky grew dark. I heard the paper come
and went out. The moon looked down
between disintegrating clouds. I said
aloud: "You see, we have done harm."

"Confessions" by Kathleen Raine

Wanting to know all
I overlooked each particle
Containing the whole
Unknowable.

*

Intent on one great love, perfect,
Requited and for ever,
I missed love's everywhere
Small presence, thousand-guised.

*

And lifelong have been reading
Book after book, searching
For wisdom, but bringing
Only my own understanding.

*

Forgive me, forgiver,
Whether you be infinite omniscient
Or some unnoticed other
My existence has hurt.

*

Being what I am
What could I do but wrong?
Yet love can bring
To heart healing
To chaos meaning.

"Torn Sash" by Carl Phillips

To each his colors: mauve, and yellow. And

cruelty, at most, only what we thought it was:
perhaps not unnecessary - there's nothing
useless - cruelty as a means of understanding,
if not absolutely, then more forcefully than not,
love's conditions - not clear,

but clearer. Stars,
but only if refracted first, reassembled into lit
beadwork, a net veiling the faceless water's
veiled face, what the waves, like a memory of

waves - like memory - keep at once refusing,
and never quite let go of . . . Let a silence be

configured around what hurts most; around
that, a style pitched subtly between distraction
and an indifference, cool, ambitious, by which
the events of story rise steadily,

now history,
soon a legend that - forever, it seems - both
revises itself and is itself revised: *They agreed*
to swear to have remembered nothing - and this
was true, or it was for one of them, though to

all appearances equally each forgave the other.

"Autobiography in Five Short Chapters" by Portia Nelson

I.

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I fall in.
I am lost . . . I am helpless . . . It isn't my fault.
It takes forever to find a way out.

II.

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place again, but it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

III.

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in . . . it's a habit.
My eyes are open . . . I know where I am . . .It is my fault.
I get out immediately.

IV.

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

V.

I walk down another street.

WHAT FORGIVENESS IS ***NOT***:

- It is *not* forgetting.

We do not erase painful past experiences from our memory when we forgive. Nothing, and no one, can turn back the clock. We can learn from those experiences, even with the pain they caused. Once we *have* forgiven, however, we are freed to forget, because we have been healed.

- It is *not* condoning or excusing.

We forgive people for things we *blame* them for. By forgiving, we are not saying that what was done to us was acceptable or unimportant. Indeed, it has made a great difference in our lives.

- It is *not* absolution.

That is not what we are expected to do when we forgive. We do not absolve people who hurt us of the responsibility for their actions.

- It is *not* a form of self-sacrifice.

Forgiveness does not mean playing the martyr and hiding our true feelings. We either forgive or we don't, wholeheartedly and honestly. Forgiveness happens in our heart of hearts or not at all.

- It is *not* a clear-cut, one-time decision.

No matter how much you want to let go of the past and move on with your life, it is a struggle that takes time, often a lot of time.

WHAT FORGIVENESS *IS*:

- It is a by-product of an ongoing process. You may have been taught that forgiveness was an act or an attitude. If you could not forgive, then you just weren't trying hard enough. But what keeps us from forgiving is that we haven't yet healed from the wounds we suffered. Forgiveness always happens inside a storm of complex emotions.

- It is an *internal* process. We can again feel well, free and accepting as long as we want to heal and we are willing to try.

- It is a sign of positive self-esteem. Rather than building an identity around something that happened to us, we can put the past into its proper perspective. Traditional religion often posits forgiveness as our moral obligation rather than our moral *right* to stop being hurt by past injuries and injustices.

- It is letting go of the intense emotions attached to incidents from our past. We do not forget, but we can feel less intensely angry, frightened, bitter or resentful.

- It is recognizing that we no longer *need* our grudges and resentments, our hatred and self-pity. We are more than a victim of injury and injustice and do not need an excuse for getting less out of life.

- It is no longer wanting to punish people who hurt us and accepting that nothing we do to punish *them* will heal *us*. Vengeance is a passion to get even, but we cannot get even, not ever, not if we try for a million years. Pain given and received never balance out; no two people weigh pain on the same scale.

- It is freeing up and putting to better use the energy once consumed by holding grudges, harboring resentments, and nursing unhealed wounds. When we break the cycle of pain and abuse, refusing to create new victims by hurting others as we were hurt, we rediscover strengths we always had and the capacity to understand and accept other people and ourselves.

- It is moving on. Forgiveness is recognizing that we have better things to do our life and then doing them.

(adapted from *Forgiveness: How to Make Peace With Your Past and Get on With Your Life* by Dr. Sidney B. Simon and Suzanne Simon)

STAGES OF FORGIVENESS

1) **HURT:** When someone causes you pain so deep, unfair and personal that you cannot forget it; when you experience a pain that can only be healed by forgiving the one who has wounded you.

This hurt is not to be confused with an annoyance, a slight, a disappointment, or a coming-in-second.

Three examples of hurt are disloyalty, where a relationship based on promise and trust has been violated, and you are treated like a stranger; betrayal, where you are treated like an enemy; and brutality when one is violated to one's core, when a person is reduced to something "less than human excellence."

2) **HATE:** You cannot shake the memory of how much you were hurt, and you cannot wish your enemy well. You sometimes want the person who hurt you to suffer as much as you do.

This is not to be confused with anger: anger is a sign that we are alive and well; hate is a sign that we are sick and need to be healed. What makes it so hard to cure are: hating *people*, instead of the evil they do; aiming our hatred at people who are closest to us - we get angry at strangers, but hatred is intimate; and hating those whom we blame.

3) **HEALING:** As we forgive people, we gradually come to see the deeper truth about them - and ourselves. If you cannot free people from their wrongs and see them as the needy people they are, you tie yourself to your own painful past. Forgiving is an honest release within the forgiver's heart. You will know forgiveness has begun when you recall who hurt you and feel the power to wish them well.

4) **RECONCILIATION**: You can invite the person who hurt you back into your life. If he or she comes honestly, love can move you both toward a new and healed relationship. This depends on the person you forgive as much as it depends on you. If he or she doesn't come back, you have to be healed alone.

(adapted from Lewis B. Smedes' book, *Forgive & Forget*)

STEPS TO SEEKING FORGIVENESS

Phase 1: Acknowledge wrong-doing

Clarify why a certain behavior was hurtful. Without understanding the harmful effects of your behavior, it will be difficult to change. Attempt to understand the hurt or pain from the point of view of those who have been hurt, and try to understand the harmful effect on yourself.

Acknowledge to yourself and others that the behavior was a mistake. Being able to acknowledge the mistake verbally is an important first step if the relationship is to be healed.

Express genuine sorrow to all those involved for the mistake you have made. When you understand the harmful effects of your behavior, and can express that with true feelings of sorrow, you open up possibilities for change and for healing.

Phase 2: Make amends

Act out of a deep sense of honoring yourself and the other party involved. Don't cater to postures of narrow defensiveness. It is courageous to face up to the harm you have done. Take the first step toward healing by being generous and proactive in your attempts to reconcile.

Find a "stroke" that is equal to your "blow." Do this by asking the party that is hurt what you can do that is equally positive to balance the negative. This is ultimately only symbolic, since we cannot undo past harm. But it is a critical sign of goodwill and true remorse.

Make amends in a timely manner. The longer you delay, the more wounds will fester. So act as swiftly as the processing of your feelings will allow.

Phase 3: Commit to change

Make a clear commitment to change your harmful patterns of behavior. This may involve clarifying what kinds of events trigger your destructive responses, and finding ways to avoid such situations or training yourself to respond differently.

Act visibly on your commitment. Change involves not only words, but actions, such as: appropriate counseling, courses in relationship skills, publicly asking for help in identifying your harmful patterns and support in your not acting on them.

Respect the process of change. Acknowledge to yourself and others that it is hard to change, and that behaviors deeply imbedded do not disappear quickly. Don't condemn yourself for slipping, and don't condone your old ways or trivialize their harmfulness. Rather, accept the actual without losing sight of the ideal.

"Every kind of [morally hurtful act] is an attempt in some fashion to live at the expense of other life. The spiritual principle is: live in the life of others, in the energy expended to promote the essential life in others. Moral badness is self-isolation, detachment. Spirituality is consciousness of infinite interrelatedness."

"The most effectual aid [to forgiveness] is faith in the better nature of the wrongdoer."

from "The Meaning of Forgiveness," a chapter in Felix Adler's book *An Ethical Philosophy of Life*

Guideposts for Forgiving

PHASE 1 - Uncovering Your Anger

- How have you avoided dealing with anger?
- Have you faced your anger?
- Are you afraid to expose your shame or guilt?
- Has your anger affected your health?
- Have you been obsessed about the injury or the offender?
- Do you compare your situation with that of the offender?
- Has the inquiry caused a permanent change in your life?
- Has the injury changed your worldview?

PHASE 2 - Deciding to Forgive

- Decide that what you have been doing hasn't worked.
- Be willing to begin the forgiveness process.
- Decide to forgive.

PHASE 3 - Working on Forgiveness

- Work toward understanding.
- Work toward compassion.
- Accept the pain.
- Give the offender a gift.

PHASE 4 - Discovery and Release from Emotional Prison

- Discover the meaning of suffering.
- Discover your need for forgiveness.
- Discover that you are not alone.
- Discover the purpose of your life.
- Discover the freedom of forgiveness.

Guideposts for Wanting To Be Forgiven

PHASE 1 - Uncovering Guilt and Shame

- Have you denied your guilt or pretended that what you did wasn't all that harmful?
- Have you allowed yourself to feel guilt, remorse, or sadness for what you have done?
- Are you ashamed of what you have done?
- Have you lied to cover up what you have done because of shame?
- Has your guilt or shame led to physical or mental exhaustion?
- Do you go over and over the event in your mind?
- Do you constantly compare yourself to the person you hurt or to others whom you consider innocent?
- Has your life been permanently changed by what you did?
- Is your sense of who you are altered by what you did?

PHASE 2 - Deciding to Seek Forgiveness

- Recognize that when you wrong another person, you should ask for forgiveness.
- Recognize that when another person offers forgiveness, you should be willing to accept that gift.
- Decide to humbly accept forgiveness when it is offered.

PHASE 3 - Working on Receiving Forgiveness

- Work toward understanding what the other has gone through.
- Work toward gratitude.
- Work toward reconciliation.
- Accept the humiliation.

PHASE 4 - Discovering

- Find meaning in your personal failure.
- Recognize that you are stronger because of what you experienced.
- Realize that you are not alone.
- Make a decision to change.
- Experience the freedom from guilt and remorse.

From *Forgiveness Is a Choice: A Step-By-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope* by Robert D. Enright, Ph.D.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Adler, Felix, *An Ethical Philosophy of Life*, NY: Ethica Press, 1906.

Enright, Robert D. and Joanna North, editors, *Exploring Forgiveness*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.

Karen, Robert, *The Forgiving Self: the Road from Resentment to Connection*, NY: Anchor Books, 2003.

Kellerman, Lois, Don Montagna and Jone Johnson Lewis, "Steps to Seeking Forgiveness," www.aeu.org.

Simon, Dr. Sidney B. and Suzanne Simon, *Forgiveness: How to Make Peace with Your Past and Get on With Your Life*, NY: Warner Books, 1990.

Smedes, Lewis, *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*, San Francisco: Harper, 1996.

Spetter, Matthew Ies, *Man - the Reluctant Brother: An Exploration of Human Courage*, NY: The Fieldston Press, 1967.

Tutu, Desmond, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, NY: Doubleday, 1999.

Wiesenthal, Simon, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, NY: Schocken Books, Inc., 1997.

Websites

Campaign for Forgiveness Research: www.forgiving.org

The Forgiveness Web: listing of research projects around the world on forgiveness www.forgivenessweb.com

International Forgiveness Institute, established in 1994 as a private, non-profit organization, was an outgrowth of the social scientific research done at the University of Wisconsin - Madison since 1985 by Robert Enright and his colleagues: www.forgiveness-institute.org