

Forgiveness and its Impact on International Affairs

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The leftover debris of national pasts...will never get cleaned up and animosity will never drain away until forgiveness enters these relationships in some political form.

Shiver, 1995, p.4

During the past decade there has been a surge in research concerning forgiveness on an interpersonal level (Luskin, 2002; Enright 2001; Worthington, 1998). The interest in forgiveness concerning political issues has also begun to emerge (Daye, 2004; Shriver, 1995; Frost 1991). Brian Frost's (1991) comment on the role of forgiveness in social change is that a society must learn some version of forgiveness if it is to be a society for long. Getting past our past is a prerequisite for getting into our future. Frost comments that a new justice in politics is often crippled because the agents and victims of the old injustice cannot repair the breach between them. Forgiveness is about repairing that breach. The personal and societal implications of forgiveness are unquestionably profound. Forgiveness may not guarantee that we will survive each other, but without it, our capacity to bring greater pain grows ever more.

Forgiveness in the Political Arena

There have been accounts throughout history which speak of the power of forgiveness in the political arena yet there is quite a resistance in linking politics with forgiveness (Frost, 1991). For those involved with politics, assigned with the responsibility to protect its people, one needs to be strong with one's adversaries. There is no room for giving someone else the "advantage" by letting them get away with something. Yet if our thinking follows this kind of logic we become wedded to the past and doomed to repeat the same patterns once again. Without forgiveness, hurts, pain and grievances become deeper as we continue to play out hatred, bitterness, fear and mistrust

in our lives. The Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt (1958), ten years after the Holocaust, discusses the importance of forgiveness and its potential role in our public and political realm when she says:

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.

People are either agents or the victims of wrong-doing or both. Held to the consequences of the past, our lives would be chained down forever. Only through releasing each other from what we have done and a willingness to change our minds and start again can we reconstruct societies. The strength of forgiveness lies in its power to do just that. If those who hold onto grievances cannot forgive, they will never have freedom of vision to create a different society.

Hannah Arendt (1958) writes, “The power to forgive, like the power to enter into new social covenants, is an essential power for social change.” Holding on to the powerful force of revenge, hostility and resentment can tie up a society into its own past. We have the ability to condemn the actions and continue to talk to those who perpetrated the actions. This is a very significant power that builds and maintains societies. What more difficult political task is there than to build social relationships between humans who have a history of offenses against each other?”

People including those in the political community search for new relations with each other all the time. They may not talk in terms of understanding, compassion, or forgiveness, but that does not mean these virtues are not to be strived for. The question of what the global society needs to recover from past sufferings in order to reach newly shared goals is repeated often. In answer to this Hannah Arendt (1958) states that there are two primary requirements; the ability of people to make agreements to live reciprocally in new ways that contrast to the ways of the past, and the

freedom to enter into these agreements with integrity setting aside, not the memory, but the continuing hostility and need for retribution associated with the memory of the painful past. This setting aside is what Arendt calls forgiveness.

Everyday people are either victims or victimizers, creating more pain and suffering and fragmentation in our societies. We may not want to face that, but there are memories constantly being created which keep us wedded to the past. The most profound way of healing our divisions is through the way of forgiveness. Arendt (1958) believes that:

Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can humans remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new . . .

Forgiving, in other words, is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and one who is forgiven.

Forgiveness viewed in this light describes a process that facilitates social change, important to note since most social scientists would view forgiveness as a process of social integration, *not recognizing its specific role in social change*. Arendt (1958) argues exactly this: that the requirements of everyday communal life do facilitate social change. Indeed her precepts of political morality are based on this process.

According to *Webster's Third Edition*, the meaning of forgiveness is "to cease to feel resentment against on accord of wrong committed, to give up claim to requital from or retribution upon an offender." Therefore, forgiveness refers to a voluntary act in which a person makes a decision, a choice about how he or she will deal with an event concerning the past. One of these choices may be based on the belief that a person can judge events, and thus can measure the magnitude of an offense and decide that to receive an equal amount of retribution somehow

balances the account (Hope, 1987). Another choice is to practice an attitude of forgiveness. The attitude of forgiveness is founded on the understanding that one screens and creates the past through the process of judgment in the same way that one screens and creates the present through the process of perception, and that a person's judgments are subjective and unreliable (Hope, 1987). Therefore it is through our perceptual filters of judgment and perception which dictate our reality and not our deeper understanding of the actual event.

Shriver Jr. (1995) defines forgiveness within a political context as “a call for a collective turning from the past that neither overlooks justice nor reduces justice to revenge, that insists on the humanity of enemies even in their commission of dehumanizing deeds, and that values the justice that restores political community above the justice that destroys it (pp.5).” From this definition certain issues are highlighted such as the importance of justice over revenge, developing understanding and empathy and restoring relationships. It is also clear that restorative justice plays a large role in the forgiveness process on a political level and that they are not mutually exclusive. Forgiveness within this context does not require the abandonment of punishment; it requires the abandonment of revenge. Should we forget that we are human and our actions are colored by our fears and perceptions, Pope John Paul II (2002) reminds us that there can be “no peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness.” He continues to say “because human justice is always fragile and imperfect, subject as it is to the limitations and egoism of individuals and groups, it must include and, as it were, be completed by the forgiveness which heals and rebuilds troubled human relations from their foundations.”

To clear up some misconceptions, forgiveness within a political context is not about forgetting, but about remembering in a certain way which supports healing. In political situations forgiveness is not a denial of human responsibility; rather it not only addresses the needs of the

victim, but also rehumanizes the enemy, identifying their basic human needs and understanding the fears which motivated their actions while respecting the suffering of all those concerned. The thrust of forgiveness on a political level is to move beyond narrow perceptions, interests and desires in a process aided by the search for truth as well as forbearance, empathy, and the commitment to repair relationships (Shriver, 1995).

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of forgiveness within a political context is to be able to develop empathy for the enemy, specifically because we are invested in dehumanizing the enemy. In order to repair relationships we have to *change our perceptions* and recognize the humanness in others. We do this by trying to identify with their needs and fears, recognizing that if we were put in similar circumstances we too may not be acting so differently if we could understand the psychological landscape which shaped their thinking.

Brian Frost (1991) once said “to refuse to forgive is to refuse to repair a broken relationship.” To forgive is to save that relationship. Forgiveness necessitates a commitment to renew relationships. All the other aspects of forgiveness which we just talked about, truth, forbearance and empathy lay the ground work for this to happen. The challenge as Shriver (1995) eloquently states is how victims and former enemies can live side by side with each other: how do we develop *the willingness to count oneself as neighbor and fellow citizen with enemies in spite of the latter’s continuing resistance to reciprocating*. When we have achieved being neighbors to people who once victimized us then we have seen forgiveness in politics in action.

Forces Supporting Forgiveness

There are certain forces which when taking place together sets the stage for forgiveness (Shriver, 2001). It begins in societies when victims can let go of the need for revenge and perpetrators speaks the truth of what has actually happened. This is the first condition.

Unfortunately both of these issues go against the grain of what we normally want to do. For victims it is so very human to want revenge especially in the heat of anger. For perpetrators it is human nature to only see one's "innocence," hiding from themselves the "truth" of what they have done and then to fear that they now might be attacked.

History has demonstrated that victims of past wars become perpetrators of future conflicts. To ease our need for acting out revenge there are certain issues which need to be discussed, namely that of justice and fairness. We need to ask ourselves what is fair and what is just. Revenge doesn't represent real justice. To heal which is the pre-requisite to moving forward requires a justice that restores. This type of justice primarily focuses on the healing of the victim and includes the perpetrator into the healing circle that supports a process for his/her rehabilitation. All of these issues bring to light the complexity of a forgiveness process on a political level. There is something called "moral" law that is shaped by a traumatic past and hopeful future. Healing of the past is critical for the victims to move forward just as it is for societies to move toward reconciliation.

One of the greatest examples which demonstrates what can happen when victims let go of the need for revenge and perpetrators tell the truth is what took place in South Africa in 1993 with the formation of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The terms of the TRC were based on the principle that in order to have peace as Nelson Mandela (1998) once said, "we have to sit down with our enemies or we can never bring about a peaceful transformation to this country." This required a great deal of forbearance and setting up a situation such as a truth commission to break the silence of the apartheid years. Perhaps it was both these factors working together, the forbearance of revenge and the acknowledgement of the past which began to create a shift from politically sanctioned murder to working towards reconciliation.

This leads to the second condition which is that for the truth to be uncovered there needs to be the message set forth that reconciliation with the possibility of forgiveness is something sought after for the societies involved. When the African National Congress came to power in 1994, many of its leaders believed that reconciliation was the best way to begin a new democracy. Therefore Mandela made reconciliation and forgiveness as his top priorities, even above justice. Amnesty was agreed to subject to certain conditions. Within the structure of the TRC both victims and perpetrators felt safe in telling their stories precisely because the victims felt heard by the public and the perpetrators felt that there would be no revenge and that they would be granted amnesty. Revealing the truth is critical for reconciliation to occur and in the case of South Africa learning the truth about the past was far more important than punishment for the past.

Unfortunately truth telling alone does not necessarily promote forgiveness or reconciliation. Enough healing needs to take place where the victims and perpetrators can begin to view each other differently. A rehumanization process needs to take hold on both sides of the divide where people can walk. This leads to the third condition which is when revenge is not acted upon and the truth is told a process of forgiveness can be supported when empathy is developed between former enemies.

When conflict arises and people rally and take sides, a process of blaming and scapegoating begins to take hold. As relationships between the parties disintegrate even further, a dehumanization process deepens as we begin to designate each other as subhuman. All countries in time of war make use of this dynamic making it easier to kill one another. Once people systematically exclude feelings of empathy for others it is easy to torture and kill. Since World War II people have come to realize how vulnerable all of us are in doing great evil to others.

Antjie Krog (1999) a South African journalist who has written about the complexity of the South African TRC tells a story of a group of black South African boys who at the very last minute decided to apply for amnesty. They insisted on filling out the forms and taking the oath. Their application simple said “Amnesty for Apathy.” These boys felt that they along with millions of other people had simply turned a blind eye to what was happening in South Africa and decided to ask for amnesty because they had done nothing.

“But where does apathy fit into the act?” a Truth commission officer asks.

“The act says that an omission can also be a human rights violation,” explained one of them. “And that’s what we did: we neglected to take part in the liberation struggle. So, here we stand as a small group representative of millions of apathetic people who didn’t do the right thing” (Krog, 1999). In effect these boys were saying that although they did not commit a human rights violation per se, in their case what they didn’t do was wrong and for that they were sorry.

Apathy is the opposite of empathy. It moves us away from the possibilities of forgiveness. If we are going to turn the process around perpetrators must be recognized as part of humanity if victims and perpetrators are to live side by side which is the goal of a forgiveness process in political situations. Societies become fragmented and dysfunctional without a culture of mutual understanding. The forgiveness process heals this fragmentation because it helps all of us see each other in a new light.

The last condition deals with political acts of forgiveness. Political acts which portray symbolic gestures help to re-write social history and a different type of shared memory. When elected officials publicly apologize they are acknowledging a wrongful past which also becomes part of a social memory. These public acts can have a significant healing effect not only on the

survivors of these crimes but also on their descendents. Public acts begin to set the stage for the possibility of forgiveness and for the development of a new political community.

Forces Which Prevent Forgiveness

Since the beginning of recorded time people have sought revenge, yet since the dissolution of the Cold War where the superpowers kept certain conflicts in check, revenge has found a greater audience. These spirals of conflict, often rooted in historic animosities, have at its core forces which prevent forgiveness from ever happening.

The nature of conflict has changed dramatically since the Cold War. What fuels most violence currently are identity-based conflicts, such as religious, racial or ethnic identity. These are the most intractable sources of conflict and impossible to resolve by diplomatic means alone. Conflicts of this nature unleash certain forces which make forgiveness impossible. This includes the acting out of revenge, holding on to distorted memories, being stuck in the role of victim and having no societal structures which support a culture of forgiveness.

We know all too well about the negative power of resentment and hatred which leads to a kind of thinking needing to settle the score. Revenge is a destructive force in society. Distorted memories help to fuel the cycle of revenge. When people believe that protracted conflict which has deep historical roots can not be resolved they are testifying to the power of collective memory.

Memories that have a great impact on us are the memory of wounds. Clearly there are times when holding on to distorted memories are lethal, yet trying to forget also hinders the necessary healing process which could take people down the road of forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness is not about forgetting any more than it is about holding onto distorted memories. It is about healing emotional wounds by seeing situations differently and working together to create new memories to chart a new history. Distorted memories or “mytho-history”

reinforces the distorted recollection of atrocities and plays into people holding on to the victim role as well as truly distorting history. In the process of making their mytho-history, victimized groups typically “forget” aspects of their own history that do not conform to images of victimization and might actually fit the profile of an aggressor. The truth of what has actually happened is never known because of the distortion in people’s minds.

What is also forgotten, an historical amnesia or denial can be as consequential as what is remembered. An example of this is reflected in the reconciliation process that took place in Chile. In Chile, amnesia was institutionalized with an amnesty law that allowed the Pinochet regime in effect to forgive itself for the political crimes of the military junta in the 1970’s (Kritz, 1995). Although a truth commission was set up in the post-Pinochet years and many of the atrocities were documented none of this was recorded in the final report. Fortunately South Africa learned lessons from Chile’s reconciliation process and their Truth and Reconciliation Commission adopted stricter rules making it extremely difficult for the accused to achieve amnesty through amnesia. In spite of this, in both countries the lack of authentic memory presented many roadblocks to healing and forgiveness.

There are other reasons why it is so important to effectively work with collective memories. Part of the healing process involves a collective mourning. For forgiveness to take place groups need to acknowledge each other’s losses in a mutual mourning process. Gopin (2000) a rabbi and conflict resolution practitioner has commented that many Jews have never been able to or invited to mourn the destruction of European Jewry which he believes accounts for an “obsession with Jewish survival” and Israeli security in particular. Gopin’s point is well taken. Memory can be a double edged sword.

Another complex issue which arises out of a history of distorted memories deals with victimhood. Victimhood is different from victimization in the respect that a sense of victimhood develops over time and that either group during the course of intergroup conflict can see themselves as an historically grieved party. This happens when victims become perpetrators and perpetrators become victims caught in cycles of revenge. People lash out and blame others, not taking responsibility for their behavior and actions. Unfortunately this leads to a group or part of society that loses its ability to practice compassion and express empathy. We can observe this dynamic getting played out in any protracted conflict we may be witness to. Victimhood becomes the primary identity of these groups where people become very self-righteous, actively nurturing grievances instead of seeking ways to resolve the conflict.

Olga Botcharova (2001) has identified what she terms “stages of victim development.” These stages hold true whether it is a community conflict, ethnic conflict or international conflict although the intensity will vary depending on the circumstances. The first stage begins with the injury and then the shock, pain and denial which follow. When we first experience a painful situation very often we go into shock which is in a way a protective mechanism giving us time to slowly absorb what may have just happened. As the shock begins to wear off we tend to go into denial which temporarily also protects us from the initial shock as an initial attempt to avoid facing the ugly gaping wound caused by severe loss.

Eventually the victim moves to the second stage and begins to realize their loss. Many times victims are overwhelmed by the horrible truth of what has just happened. Because of this, we continue to deny and distance ourselves from this new reality. This leads to the third stage, suppression of grief and fear.

Our feelings of grief and fear can be so overwhelming that we sometimes shut down as a way of attempting to deal with these emotions. Suppression of grief is also a way of hiding from shame, a factor which negatively affects one's self image and sense of identity. Regrettably during times of trauma people may not be able to grieve for their survival requires that they be strong in order to take action to prevent further tragedy. Suppressing our emotions may be helpful during the initial stages of dealing with tragedy but this becomes a double edge sword because people need to grieve in order to heal and move forward in a more integrated way.

Suppression leads to the fourth stage of heightened feelings of anger. In many respects this is justifiable. No one deserves to suffer and be caught up in unjust situations which bring pain and possibly death. Yet suppressed anger needs to go somewhere and is usually projected on the perpetrator and any one or thing associated with the perpetrator. Sometimes anger is expressed in the question "Why me?" Within that question lies the blame of the abuser, feelings of pain and despair, the assertion of our own innocence and a need for justice. This is where the sense of victimhood takes hold. As the anger builds the victim begins to think that healing can come about once the perpetrator and everything associated with that is destroyed. Revenge, healing, punishment and justice become one and the same leading the victim to the fifth stage, the need to destroy.

The need to destroy is what motivates victims to seek revenge. They feel that an "eye for an eye" will help them heal their pain. Even when revenge is carried out or retributive justice is achieved, it never seems like enough to the degree of the victims suffering. The reason for this lies in the fact that these mechanisms fail to provide the healing due to the pain of loss. Yet the revenge cycle is perpetuated in the attempt to fill the gapping hole created by the woundedness. This hole is filled by creating the "Mytho-History."

Before many seek revenge they not only need to feel that it is right within themselves, they also need to “strengthen” this rightness in the eyes of others. They have to reinforce their “innocence” and they do this by repeating their stories. Victims do this is to deprive the perpetrator of any possibility of being human. This reinforces the “us and them” mentality which excludes any possibility of hearing other voices. Even when engaging in acts of revenge the victim preserves the image of suffering. The victim although unaware of this behavior becomes more manipulative. Under these conditions the demands for justice are reinforced, a view of history is developed and its myths, legends and heroes are created. During this time if any doubts emerge in the mind of the victim and he or she begins to view the perpetrator differently, revenge is usually not acted out. But if the demands for justice are carried forward the victim sees these acts as “justified aggression” which becomes the last stage in this process.

Once we come to this part of the cycle the roles of victim/perpetrator have now reversed. The aggressor now feels victimized, seeks revenge and demands that justice be done. The former “innocent” victim is now in the place of power. Roles can continually change over the course of the conflict sometimes confusing who is on the defense and who is one the offense with both sides feeling extremely victimized by the other.

The psychological dynamics just described are not only typical among groups but can be seen between individuals as well. Without the acknowledgement of harm, a place to express anger, the mourning of losses and the grappling with the issues of justice there can be no coming together of any community, which can be devastating if communities must live side by side with each other.

The essence of the forgiveness process played out on the political stage is the role of changing perceptions and the way we think. In changing the way we thing we can change how we

interpret the world. This new interpretation helps us to recognize a basic goodness within each of us. That universal goodness is what gives us the ability to love and to recognize the interconnectedness with all of humanity. Tapping into this inner spiritual resource enables us to view the world with greater understanding. When we can't hear our inner voice our world becomes more frightening and appears to have great power over us. Our fear drives us to violence. Therefore part of our work in healing the wounds of war is to help people get in touch with themselves at a deeper level. Forgiveness is the process which gets us there. When we choose to understand the psychological landscape of the "other" and see their experiences from their perspective, events causing *us* so much pain are seen with a different meaning and purpose. When victims can view their experience from the wisdom of their inner voice they are ready to heal through the work of forgiveness.

Before anyone can introduce the concept of forgiveness in breaking the cycle of revenge we have to look at what happens to the victim after he or she acted out their revenge. Momentarily people may feel better but shortly thereafter feelings of pain resurface, fears of how to cope with loss are still there and the anger continues to burn. Feelings of emptiness fill that momentary feeling of relief. People have lost their sense of identity because of their acting out with no past to hold on to. The challenge is to develop a sense of self different from that which was destroyed. Yet instead of taking the responsibility for our pain and grief, we think revenge will do the job for us. Unfortunately an outside factor can never provide the inner healing and spiritual growth which is desperately needed. The only way healing comes is to understand the meaning of the event from a spiritual perspective and to take responsibly for our emotional and behavioral reactions.

Forgiveness becomes a means by which the victim can let go of the sense of victimhood and release the painful past. This entails a reframing of how we view the tragedy we experienced,

and how we view suffering. It also includes a mourning process. Mourning opens the process of identifying and confronting our fears. Expressing these emotions will help the victim to release the anger which is often just underneath the surface of the fears. Giving ourselves time to mourn helps us to begin a reintegration process for a new life.

After we have worked through our anger and fear can we take the next step, re-humanizing the enemy. This difficult step is usually met with a great deal of resistance. As victims people are invested in seeing the other as “nonhuman.” To think of an enemy’s motives as being deeply rooted in his or her own fears would mean that we would have to understand something about them making them more like us. If we begin to ask “Why them?” what led them to do these terrible things, understanding their pain would probably disarm our anger. This begins a re-humanization process. Although the act of aggression is seen for what it is, the person who committed the act is seen as someone who is acting out of their woundedness. At this point the victim is beginning to separate out the person from the act committed. Viewing someone who is struggling with their own pain lessens the need for revenge.

After we have some understanding of who the perpetrator is we are at the point where we can begin to entertain the thought of forgiveness. More than anything else forgiveness is a conscious choice, a decision. You can not skip any steps to get there but you can clear the way to make that decision. Forgiveness is not about letting someone else off the hook. It is about the victim’s inner healing which will eventually allow them to see the past differently and help them move into a brighter future. Forgiveness is the *victim’s* ultimate freedom.

For those who have been able to forgive, they view justice in a different way. The purpose of justice is not retribution but of restoration. Forgiveness provides a different imperative for seeking justice – integration not of the way things were but in a way that reintegrates the

relationship of the victim and perpetrator in a safe and productive manner built by both sides. This shines a light on one of the mysteries of forgiveness. As the victim opens him or herself up to the process of forgiveness they begin to experience something which deeply transforms them.

Something very mystical usually takes place. People experience this in very different ways but it is usually described as feeling the power of love. As we get connected to the essence of who we are, a shift takes place in our thinking where we are now able to see the world through the eyes of forgiveness. It is through these eyes and the wisdom that has been gained that people are able to view justice and make decisions about what restorative justice should look like based on this new experience.

Finally when people accept responsibility for the past and begin to work together to create something new they can begin to build a secure future. This can be a long and painful process. Only then can a reconciliation process begin and address the practical issues of restoring relationships and changing the structures of the sociopolitical environment which will in turn support forces of forgiveness.

Building Political Frameworks

Can we develop a political framework which supports the development of a culture of forgiveness? At the Woodstock Colloquium on “*Forgiveness in Conflict Resolution*” Rev. Andrew Christiansen, S.J. (1996) addressed what he considers to be the foundation for such cultures to develop. To develop a culture of forgiveness we need 1) a public philosophy which supports ideas on forgiveness; 2) a supportive culture which makes it possible to think and do acts of forgiveness; 3) social and civic institutions which help institutionalize the thinking of forgiveness and 4) a political structure which does not undercut the plausibility of forgiveness by accusing others and

making demands of others while at the same time not being allowed to make space for acceptance and love for others.

A public philosophy sets the stage to foster the social conditions which promotes forgiveness and reconciliation. It requires that the citizens of that society are willing to discuss new approaches to political life. Unfortunately most citizens are unaware of the public philosophies that they are unwittingly supporting. For example the “cultural wars” in America, the struggle for the control of culture, the battle over controversial issues such as abortion, affirmative action or the separation of church and state are creating cultural division antithetical to setting the conditions for forgiveness. We are supporting a culture of attack, blame and scapegoating creating a hardening of the heart towards one another which eventually leads people down the path of violence. Societies lose their moral compass and equilibrium between justice and forgiveness. To shift this tide and prepare the groundwork for forgiveness society needs to converse in a public forum where people are willing to seriously listen to one another so there can be a coming together instead of a fragmentation of society. Within that conversation people can begin to build on common ground setting forth ideas of reconciliation. This is where ideas of forgiveness can be introduced and public opinion shaped. Unless we are willing to talk about the role of forgiveness in society, we will miss opportunities when they do arise and only hear the voices of hostility and skepticism. We have to build a platform to help the general public be receptive to these new ideas. The more people are involved in a public discourse about an empathetic and compassionate society, the more it gives people permission to act in that way.

How can culture predispose its citizens towards forgiveness? Culture as a body of learned behavior common to a given society shapes behavior and consciousness within that society. Culture provides a system of meaning using symbols and symbolic acts to express some of that

meaning. These symbols can be manipulated to flame the passions of people leading them towards violence, or create an environment which supports the qualities and values which represent forgiveness. Symbolic acts are one type of apology which helps the communities involved heal from the wounds of destruction and begin a new history. These symbol acts serve as healing agents.

Once we have a public philosophy and culture which supports the conditions for forgiveness then it becomes easier for our social institutions to do the same. Our social institutions structure our society whether they are our churches, educational institutions, trade unions or the Red Cross. All of our institutions have a specific function which creates certain opportunities that can support the forces of forgiveness. The majority of conflicts which the world faces today can not be resolved by governments alone because of the issues and psychological healing involved. This has given way for other kinds of institutions and situations to emerge which are more equipped to work with the conflicts at hand in a transformative capacity. Educational institutions, human rights and religious groups, and other organizations which make up civil society can participate together in building a different kind of future and take up the important role in resolving the long term protracted conflicts we find ourselves in. To do this we need a transformation to take place in our thinking, within our culture and in our institutions if we want to bring about the changes which will make forgiveness possible. All of these components are necessary to create the environment for forgiveness to occur on a political level. Without this forgiveness on a political level becomes virtually impossible.

A Final Thought

It may seem impossible to go beyond the actions of evil to thinking about its sources in the way human beings are programmed to think, but our survival depends on this. Wise leaders have

cautioned us about the need for a fundamental shift in our thinking and perception. In an address to a joint session of the United States Congress in 1990 former President of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel said that “without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, a more humane society will not emerge.” Einstein warned that without a fundamental change in our thinking, humanity will drift towards catastrophe. Stopping the cycles of anger, hatred, and fear that fuel so many ethnic, racial and religious conflicts requires a radical change in our thinking. If we are honestly committed to creating peace, then we will recognize that the true peacemakers are those who are not afraid to look within, to change the way they think, and heal the pain of their heart. Forgiveness supports this kind of healing transformation that creates fundamental change in how we think and feel about one another and how we chose to create peace.

The vast increase in economic, social and environmental global interdependence necessitates an evolutionary shift of mind. We are caught up in a mindset that perpetuates violence and creates more separation and fear. Fear motivates our behavior. The current global threats to human survival and well-being are actually symptoms of *our individual and shared states of mind*. Healing lies with the recognition that within our minds we have a part of ourselves that can be found in every other mind. The transformative work of forgiveness demonstrates this.

We have created our own world and our reality, but this creation has been done largely on an unconscious level. The challenges we face globally are so severe that we may have to undergo nothing less than a transformation of consciousness if we want to overcome what is before us. How these changes will play themselves out will be of great interest. Forgiveness is the pivotal point in this transformation. If we can do this then there truly will be peace on earth. Let this be our legacy for our children and grandchildren and for all future generations.

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