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Forgiving... does it mean forgetting?

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Once there were two brothers who fought bitterly and parted as enemies. Shortly thereafter one brother fell seriously ill and was soon to die. On his deathbed he summoned his brother and said to him, "I am willing to forget the past, will you forgive me?" The brother tearfully replied that he would. However, within a few days, the dying brother mysteriously regained health and was soon to be discharged from hospital. When his brother visited him to enquire about his health, the soon-to-have-died brother said, "I have forgiven you, but remember, I shall never forget."

Forgiving someone who has hurt us and forgetting what that person did are quite different. We think if our forgiveness is genuine, forgetting should follow immediately. It is not necessarily so.

Without experiencing true forgiveness, forgetting can be a way to avoid dealing with the pain and hurt of being offended. By burying our hurt feelings, we prevent ourselves from true forgiveness.

Forgetting will never be possible until we first acknowledge a hurt. When people say 'Forget about it', they leave us unsure. We wonder if we have been forgiven. When people just forget, they usually sweep negative feelings under the carpet. Buried negative feelings will manifest themselves in time and certainly in some negative form.

Resolving negative feelings requires time and effort. When we confront 'unforgiving feelings,' deal with them honestly and work at them so that they gradually dissipate. Then the forgetting process commences.

We cannot programme ourselves into a set time-frame for forgetting. Each of us has a different and unique healing ability. We have to use all the mental, emotional and spiritual means to help ourselves heal and forget. The process of forgetting is a process that involves our feelings. We must respect and understand this.

While we may have no control over how we feel we certainly have control over how we act and handle our feelings. The negative feelings of anger and resentment that result from being hurt are not only normal, but would be less than human if we did not experience them. These feelings are real and they must be faced and accepted. We must confront our inability to forget, lest they aggravate our situation and cause us to feel less worthy.

Finally, we must give ourselves time to forgive. It is a human process that can be facilitated by reflection, self-awareness, prayer perhaps, and sometimes counselling.

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