

Forgive everyone, everything. – bumper sticker, unknown

I'm sorry. I'm sorry for losing my cool and yelling at you. I'm sorry for stealing candy from your store when I was ten. I'm sorry for remaining entitled to what has not been mine out of a sense of a-someone-owes-me-something-for-what I didn't get mindset. I'm sorry for using a disposable coffee cup every day, contributing to the demise of our planet. I'm sorry for taking advantage of so many women sexually to make myself feel better when I felt so powerless and inadequate. I'm sorry for giving up on our relationship too soon, when we could've had a lifetime together. I'm sorry for betraying you, ruining the life we built together. I'm sorry for being depressed during your childhood, loving you half-heartedly and leaving you feeling unlovable and unimportant. I'm sorry for not telling you everything that was going on with me, and how it left you feeling constantly on edge. I'm sorry for not being able to tell you who I am for years for fear of your judgement, and how that cost us a lifetime. I'm sorry for being racist, terrified of anyone other than people like me and how I have contributed to the demoralization of society. I'm sorry for breaking your heart. I'm sorry.

I forgive you. I forgive you for lying to me because you were afraid to tell me the truth. I forgive you for missing so many critical moments in my life when I needed you there. I forgive you for not coming to my aid when I got hurt as a little girl because you couldn't stand the sight of my blood. I forgive you for verbally abusing me when you were angry because you felt helpless as a parent. I forgive you for molesting me and forever changing the course of my life. I forgive you for hating yourself and how that modeled to me self-hatred that I became intimately acquainted within myself. I forgive you for running over my precious dog when he stood in your blind spot as you pulled out of the driveway. I forgive you for using masses amounts of plastic

without a thought for the planet and all the beauty and life it has so freely and forgivingly given you. I forgive you.

The Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, Fr. Greg Boyle (of Homeboy Industries), Sister Helen Prejean (of *Dead Man Walking*), Nelson Mandela, Buddha, Christ, all the gods – the message is clear – forgiveness is the way to go. As my 88-year-old wise friend and I talked about this paper she said, “Even to say the word in this world is worthwhile.” But why? And when? And is there a when not? And how? There is plenty written on the topic. Whole religious traditions hinged on the message. Google it and get 246,000,000 results. How in the world would I come up with something to say about the matter? And what place does it have within a psychoanalytic conversation?

This paper is a brief exploration of the work of forgiveness and the necessary elements involved in it. Mainly through the work of Julia Kristeva and psychoanalysis, I will talk about how hatred and bad, our feelings and our historical experiences, are all involved in the work of forgiveness, which may in fact be the hardest and most salvific relational work we have to do as human beings. In her work with analytic patients, Kristeva proposes that every patient entering analysis is seeking forgiveness, which she boldly claims is ultimately a seeking of psychical rebirth. She arrives at the notion that psychoanalytical interpretation is a postmodern pardon. Central to this humbling and grace-filled work, I will show how Kristeva illuminates the way owning one’s hatred and bad both presuppose and are embedded in the forgiveness which the patient is in need. This hatred arises out of a lack, or wound, in one’s experience, and can be conscious or unconscious. I will show how her definition of forgiveness as pardon is enhanced by the Hebrew word *Nasa’* which means to forgive, or to carry. This carrying capacity that is for

the offense and the feelings that accompany it, must be grown through the intimate, interpersonal encounter with the other, in analysis and beyond.

Beginning at six years old, I was required to go to confession every year at my school parish church. I'd sit there in the pew, my 44-pound-3-and-half-foot frame, feet still unable to touch the floor self, anticipating my turn. I hadn't yet racked up too many offenses against God at that point, and certainly hadn't yet begun to cross the ten commandments, but I desperately wanted to be good, so as any good confessor would, I came up with stuff to confess. This teetered on the brink of making sins up, which may have qualified as a sin, ironically, but I hadn't thought of that. It also didn't occur to me to get a little help from my friends – this wasn't the kind of thing you could ask others about. Hey, what sin are you asking forgiveness for? It was a given we wouldn't be swapping our God-offenses with each other. One year I remember confessing I had hit my brother earlier that week. Regardless of the sin, Fr. Nathan my childhood priest, always softened the blow by listening with a kind, soft face, no judgement, saying something like – well, don't do that anymore, (*which was somehow a tremendous relief*) and, you should say sorry to him, (*which stressed me out all get out, given that I'd have to have this confrontation with my brother without Fr. Nathan*). He'd go on to put me to task – pray the Hail Mary ten times and the Lord's Prayer five. He might've been trying to stave off boredom while all the other 6-year-olds confessed, but I took the penance seriously. All of this seemed to work magic and made me feel better. Now he knew. God knew. My brother knew. My six-year-old version of mystic Julian of Norwich's, *All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well*.

As I began working on this paper, I quickly discovered I'm not well suited to the topic. Not for the obvious reason that it's a massive topic never to be approached alone, but because I was disturbed to find I couldn't quite find myself in the story of forgiveness. Of course, I have

hurt and done people wrong, but somehow, my experiences of forgiveness all felt pathetic and disembodied as I reflected on Julia Kristeva's notion of forgiveness that offered new life. I discovered I was trying to get at something in my own experience that had felt ungrounded and unnamed. In one of her papers, Estelle Shane reminded me that any paper is truly about self-development and in the sharing of it, others might learn from it. I quickly realized this paper would be more about self-development than proposing an academic theory or clinical success story.

You need to come into contact within yourself with regret, a sense of I've done something wrong that has hurt you, your own rage at lack, a lived experience of – hated and hurting, your bad and ugly – to feel your need for forgiveness. At base, a couple key ingredients presuppose forgiveness – being bad, and feeling hatred and anger – the two things unwelcomed in my childhood. I was immersed in my family version of Catholicism which taught me a particular version of justifiably human. Raised in a heavily moralistic home where hatred and anger had no place and being good earned lovability, I became intimately acquainted with a whole tradition and human mind built on the idea that sinner is equally synonymous with human. A model where drawing lines in the sand about what is wrong and what is right, who is acceptable and who's not, good and bad, in and out, were the rules of engagement for acceptable living. This left me in pieces, terrified of doing something wrong or feeling angry, rageful feelings. I remember a time early on in my career when a colleague and I were negotiating a supervisee's breach with the law. I was overcome with anxiety. My colleague turned to me and said, 'Gabrielle, you have a superego bigger than God. Doesn't this make you mad??' This preoccupation with being good was disabling. And consequently, left me with a sickly – rather diluted and impoverished – understanding of the place and power of forgiveness in life.

What makes forgiveness hard: our feelings and historical experiences

The self-honesty and intimate connection to ourselves that makes room for all our parts, including feelings of hatred, anger, and being bad, are critical to the experience of forgiving. To apologize is hard. Forgive, even harder, depending on the offense. The problem with being human is we feel. Emotional and mental health is significantly linked to our ability to bear the full measure and range of our feelings. When we have been wronged or felt wronged by someone, we come into contact with some of the most intense difficult to bear feelings – hate, anger, betrayal, rage, murderous rage. Feelings notorious for pulling intensely for action. We get had by our feelings and take them out on one another, hurting one another in a way that equalizes the way we've been hurt. An eye for an eye. We build stone castles around ourselves to verify our wounded selves, entrenched in 'you-hurt-me-so-I'm-never-letting-you-near-me' kind of fortifications. The poet David Whyte aptly recognizes, in forgiveness, identity is at stake. The hurt is the hurt. And demands verifiable, certifiable, attention.

Our historical experiences make forgiveness hard. There's a timelessness to this being human, and the unconscious a storehouse for these time zones that is ever available to the present moment. What are we doing to each other?? My friend recently blurted out as we sat and talked about all we were navigating personally and professionally. The human landscape looked grim in that moment, people upset with people, arguing, fighting, leaving, writing one another off, all to what end?? Sometimes we act more like juries building cases against one another than vulnerable tenderhearted attachment creatures seeking understanding, connection, and love. We've all been wronged or felt wronged in our lives, often times, very early in life when we're vulnerable and helpless, unable to physically or psychically protect ourselves. Left with a wound, whether we know of it or not, that we all seek healing for. Trouble is, in our attempts to heal the wounds, we

repeat them. Recapitulation. The original crime scene in the present moment. The doing and the done to on repeat. Everything happening here and now is not always here and now, but also includes the over and done with. When we've been wronged in some way, it's not just that instance of wrongdoing we are typically working with and through but also the previous experiences that disable us from offering forgiveness or receiving forgiveness. I can't forgive you because I can't forgive my mother. I can't feel forgiven because my mother doesn't forgive me. Salman Akhtar in his 2002 paper on forgiveness says, "forgiveness is an integral element of mourning, and is therefore necessary for psychic growth. Forgiving others for their hurtful actions and forgiving oneself for having caused pain to others are crucial to moving on in life and to opening oneself for new experiences. An inability or unwillingness to forgive keeps one tied to the past and impedes development."

Psychoanalysis provides a space to bring our feelings, helps excavates our unconscious and identify our wounds, all elements of the work of forgiveness.

Julia Kristeva's Definition of Forgiveness

Julia Kristeva suggests every patient entering analysis is seeking forgiveness. In her book, *The Incredible Need to Believe*, Julia Kristeva states, "My work as an analyst has convinced me, ...that when a patient embarks upon the analytical experience, he comes to ask for a sort of pardon, not in the sense of the effacing of his misery, but in the sense of a psychic and even physical rebirth." Kristeva suggests that through the transference relationship and interpretation, an opportunity for a new beginning is offered to the patient. Through analysis, par-don (by-gift) is "to give and give oneself a new time, another self, unforeseen bonds." This "for-giving" is the gift of the self, (as analyst), in a counter cultural relationship that is absent of

judgement, mandates listening before speaking, fulfilled through love – the ontological underpinnings of the analyst self.

She further expands on this idea in her book, *Hatred and Forgiveness*, naming the centrality of hate in the journey of forgiveness, turning our natural pairing of love and forgiveness on its head. “Hatred is older than the love on top of it, and the object of hatred, (unlike the object of love), never disappoints.” We are born hating because of our lack, desire, wound, (abjection as she names it). This par-don renews the unconscious by confronting the other side of abjection which is hate. “Unlike Religious or humanist moralism, the psychoanalytical experience reveals that hatred – in its multiple variants – is coextensive to human destiny.” She points out we experience a diluted encounter of forgiveness in religion because of its denial of our hatreds. What analysis offers is a relationship where the violence of our hatred and murderous impulses can be known and spoken of rather than acted on. She says, it’s a “giving sense to the senselessness of unconscious hate.” This analytical listening that does not judge or calculate, and is “content to untangle and reconstruct,” gives this pardon it’s gravity. “Psychoanalytical interpretation, by revealing multifaceted hatreds, offers itself as the ultimate lucidity of pardon, which psychical life needs in order to continue living, quite simply, without necessarily absolutely ceasing to hate.” The analyst listens deeply and attentively to all the parts of the patient’s suffering, and hate and rage that accompany it, and then, and only then, can offer meaning to the meaningless. This welcoming and meaning making forgives the old and gives birth to the new.

Hebrew Definition of Forgiveness – A Carrying Capacity

Kristeva’s definition of forgiveness as pardon, can be substantially enhanced and more comprehensively describe what happens between analyst and patient with the help of the Hebrew

definition of forgive. After a conversation about this topic with my Old Testament Theologian friend, I learned there are two Hebrew words that define, to forgive. The first, salah (with a het, a hard h, at the end) means to pardon. The other Hebrew word, Nasa' means to carry, to carry them and carry the thing/offense. With Nasa' the recognition is that someone has to carry the offense. One makes the decision to carry the offense, including the feelings that go with that offense, rather than make the other carry it, rather than pushing it on the offender. Much of the analyst's trench work is to take what the patient brings, hold it, wait, and work to make meaning out of the experience. In the process of analysis, without judgement, with the intent to make meaning out of meaninglessness, to discover and name the wound, there is an implicit 'carrying with' the analyst does with the patient. It's along the idea of Winnicott's notion of the holding and receiving and not being destroyed by what the patient brings. Winnicott calls this the holding environment, Bion the container and contained, but these concepts don't quite do the heavy lifting that Kristeva is trying to get at in this slow, sophisticated, for-giving/love-giving, that goes on in analysis.

This capacity is not limitless – you can't carry beyond your capacity, or it will destroy you. As analysts, and human beings, we all have carrying and absorbing capacities. With this definition, in order to for-give you need a large enough capacity to carry the offense and all the feelings accompanying it. We need to cultivate our carrying capacity to be able to receive what the patient brings. We also need to lay it down, take breaks, and walk away from things, with the assistance of the frame, in order to steward and preserve our capacity to for-give. The earth might be our best teacher here. The earth is fantastically forgiving of our human abuse. But we have learned, and more than likely too late, that even the earth has a limited capacity. If she exceeds her limits, she can be destroyed.

Psychoanalytic Relationship: A Love that has Room for the Hate and Bad

The ground work of therapy. The initial freedom in therapy is that we are forgiven for our feelings. We come into therapy seeking therapy for our feelings. We feel bad for what we feel and want to a remedy for it. We hate how we feel and want to feel differently, then it is all gets turned upside down because we learn we *don't need* forgiveness for our feelings. We need to be able to welcome all of our feeling, the good, bad, and ugly. They all have a gospel to proclaim.

Desmund Tutu says, "You should never hate yourself for hating others who do terrible things: the depth of your love is shown by the extent of your anger." As human beings we hate. We fear. These are fundamental feelings that guide us in our human experience. We can't eradicate ourselves of them. Excise them out of our emotional lives. If we seek to establish personal wholeness through community wholeness, we need persons and communities in our lives, our world, who are robust enough to withstand our hate. Our fear. Psychoanalysis teaches us that knowing, naming the feelings, speaking them to one another, is the remedy to acting them out. What doesn't come out straight will come out sideways. The lesson of the unconscious mind.

Forgiveness can't be done alone. This is both obvious and profound. The interpersonal operation of forgiveness, (in contrast to the transactional model of my childhood where you confess and render payment via prayers, etc. in exchange for a clear conscience), involves a carrying/absorbing it. The real work of forgiveness is relational and better modeled in a 12-step process of making amends than the General Confession of the church. Much like the parent/child relationship, when the child feels offended by the parent, or hurt by someone else, the child batters on the chest of the parent and the parent absorbs the child's hate and anger that comes from feeling wronged, this is part of the work of parenting and, the work of the analytic

relationship. In order to give birth to our whole selves, we need a relationship where our hate, anger, rage is received and metabolized, and where we can then get in touch with our guilt and grief. Knowing our hate and its impact offers a space of self-reflection – seeing your actions and impact honestly, can clear a space for apology. Not for your feelings but for the way they can take a toll on the other. Part of our journey of becoming real includes taking a toll on the other. The “Not-me” experience that has its defined edges helps us discover a “me” and “you.” This is a violent process – how we learn who we are and who the other is. It’s critical to identity formation.

Our experience in analysis tells us that we don’t need to push our hate into the corner of our unconscious that will keep us stuck and tied to our old objects and steeped in abjection, our lack. Our hate, and all derivatives of that feeling need to be knowable, not shame prone and kept hidden. When we are taught hating is not okay, when it is unwanted or we are shamed for it, a part of us is destroyed and annihilated. And we are immediately disabled in our relationships. What psychoanalysis has a lock on is that we can experience forgiveness without having to disavow parts of ourselves. We can be fully ourselves in relationship with others, including the good, bad, and ugly. As she develops her thinking, for Kristeva there is no understanding of this forgiveness apart from an experience of love.

We need someone who believes in that part of us, the deepest core of us, our personhood that is not identified with what we do, say, or think. This is the interpersonal operation that goes on in analysis. Kristeva’s focus is not on sin that needs confession but on wounds that need to be seen, more accurately heard, in order to be healed. It’s her presupposition that the wound, which may be self-loathing or hate of the other for what the other could not provide, needs to be known. This process of naming in the analytic relationship is a kind of encounter with suffering that

includes intermittent “‘flash of forgiveness’ in a never-ending cycle within human experience that allows for glimpses of what is beautiful and just” (Kristeva 1989, p. 195).

Conclusion

Our hurt, capacity to hurt, bad, and hateful selves that are born out of our lack, presuppose forgiveness. These parts of the self, and all parts of the self are welcome in the analytic relationship. This is what analysis has a lock on. Through analysis, we have a chance to awaken all the parts of us into life and bring our whole selves into relationship. And as Kristeva so poetically and aptly recognizes, this happens through a journey of forgiveness. As we engage in this painstaking process in a robust intimate relationship, we become awake to our hurt, and our capacity to hurt, our anger and hate, making it knowable, and becoming whole in the process. We are restored to ourselves through the hard, long work of learning to know and own our wounds and the hate and anger that companion them. This sacred process makes room for a humility and realism of ourselves and is inextricably an internal and interpersonal operation. We walk out of our childhoods and have no idea we have countless opportunities ahead of us to get it right. To discover ourselves new again. To be relieved of all we carry, all our offenses and our offender’s offenses. To lighten our load and be experienced as new again.

This is the concrete immediate and mystical work of analysis. To grow our capacity to carry all that it means to be human. To not get caught up in petty immature childish plays at humanity but to do the heavy lifting involved in restoring us to ourselves and one another. This to me is a kind of incarnate fidelity. Staying faithful to our ontology – a being in loving relationship – which is, a staying faithful to forgiveness. Forgiveness allows us to stay in relationship. In the journey of forgiveness, everything blows apart then comes back together again in a new form, new identity, inside of relationship. It keeps us intact with ourselves and

one another in a way no else thing can. This is a journey towards real loving. A robust love that withstands the herculean process of mutual becoming. So, this paper is really a call to action – to grow our capacity to forgive, which is to grow our capacity to love, for the sake our patients, ourselves, and our planet.