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Contributed by Web Master
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The Four Paths

Welcome to the Four Paths! As long as we are human, we will all continue to make mistakes. How we respond to these mistakes holds the keys to the future: friend or foe / war or peace.

The good news is that the keys to a peaceful future is already in our grasp.

In the following pages, we will discuss and simplify the power behind the act of forgiveness and discuss why it continues to elude us.

We will explain the four paths and show how they will either lead us to forgiveness or lead us to vengeance.

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Forgiveness Overlooked

"I don't care who put the ball in the cat's litter box, you wacked your brother with the Wiffle Bat & now apologize and say 'I'm sorry'." I remember these words my mother used with my brothers and me, and the many occasions that she taught us about apology and the need to acknowledge when we were wrong. This has served me well, especially in my relationship with my wife. Thanks to my Mom, I now can say to my wife "I am sorry I shrunk (another) new sweater, would you forgive me?" Which has done little to save the sweaters in our home, but gone a long way to save the harmony of our relationship.

Apology is critical to maintaining harmony. But, in reflecting at the revenge, anguish and war in our world, I realized that apology only takes us part of the way in establishing harmony. And, in studying great texts of religion & philosophy, I came to a very surprising revelation. For all of the importance our culture puts on apology, we find more references to forgiveness than we do to apology. So & why is it that we place so much emphasis on teaching our kids to say "I'm sorry" and not how to receive an "I'm sorry"?

In the Lord's prayer, we don't say, "help us apologize for our trespasses as we expect others to apologize who trespassed against us." Instead, we pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." For the great teachers in history, forgiveness has been a core message, yet I have never heard anyone explain forgiveness.

About the only place that forgiveness is now taught is within the counseling environment, where it is taught as a method to help people regain peace within their lives. What a shame for our world that we don't place it in higher regard.

Great teachers have given their lives to share the message of forgiveness with the world, and we have hidden it behind the psychologist's door. Why was forgiveness so important to the great teachers? What is the secret they know about forgiveness that continues to elude us today? What is the hidden importance of forgiveness?

I would like to assert that forgiveness is revered by the great teachers because they understood that forgiveness and vengeance are mirror images of each other. And that the only way to achieve peace is to transform vengeance into forgiveness. And, that any moment we are not forgiving others, we are contributing to a cycle of vengeance. Forgiveness and vengeance both consist of four identical paths. Walk one way on these paths and you get harmony, walk the other way on these paths and you get vengeance. And, the paths of vengeance lead to a downward spiral that incites more vengeance and retribution, which repeats again and again - perpetuating greater and greater acts of harm. So, while the acts of vengeance may be different sizes, they are all part of the same cycle. Whether we are wacking our brother with a Wiffle Bat or waging a war, the path is the same, the size of the hurt just gets bigger.

Knowing that the paths of vengeance are identical to the paths of forgiveness, we get the "whack on the side of

the head’ revelation that Jesus, the Dalai Lala, Saint Francis and others have been trying to teach us all along – the keys to end conflict and pain have been in our hands all along. So, how do these 4 paths work?

There are two paths for the victim - one path that describes their inner dialog and the way they make sense of what happened; and one path that describes how they outwardly communicate and behave, especially toward the transgressor. Similarly, the transgressor has two paths - one path that describes their inner dialog and thinking and one path that describes their outward action and communication.

The chart below describes how these same 4 paths can either lead us toward forgiveness and peace or towards vengeance.

Towards Forgiveness
 The Victim’s
 2 Paths Towards Vengeance +++++
 Letting Go: The inward act of gracefully letting go of negative feelings to the point where they no longer have an impact on you – while fully acknowledging that you should have been treated better all along +++++
 The Victim’s
 Inner Path +++++
 Feeling Animosity: The inward act of escalating negative emotions and the build-up of anger and fearfulness that leads an ongoing accumulation of angst, frustration and anger
 Acceptance: An outward act of acceptance of the other person as they are, fully acknowledging that nobody is without fault, including ourselves
 The Victim’s
 Outward Path
 Revenge: An outward act of ill-will with intention to hurt the other party more than they hurt you

Towards Forgiveness
 The Transgressor’s
 2 Paths Towards Vengeance +++++
 Reconciliation: The inward act of gracefully letting go of feelings of shame and guilt to the point where they no longer have an impact on you – while fully acknowledging that you need to make better decisions in the future +++++
 The Transgressor’s
 Inner Path +++++
 Denial: The blockage of inner reflection and ability to stop any self-examination that might reveal weakness or wrongdoing
 Apology & Amends: The outward act of willful vulnerability to say “I am sorry, will you forgive me?” and thereby grant the other party control over the decision of whether or not to accept the apology.
 The Transgressor’s
 Outward Path
 Defying: The outward blockage of any comment or criticism that might imply your guilt or wrong-doing

By understanding that there are 4 distinct paths, we can better understand several key points:

- 1 - That forgiveness and apology are separate activities
- 2 - We must put as much emphasis on teaching forgiveness as we do on saying "I'm sorry"
- 3 - That we need a common language and commonly accepted framework around the aspects of managing conflicts, because if we don't have a common language, then we will have a much harder time resolving our differences
- 4 - That any act of vengeance is still an act of vengeance and that if we want peace in our world, we must start with our own behavior and learn how to work toward forgiveness
- 5 - That stopping conflict is achievable - the tools are already in our hands