

Forgiveness

1. Due Process
2. Connect with Krishna
3. May those who harm me learn through joy
4. What is my lesson? (Is this a mirror? Is there another lesson?)

My dear son, we are all brāhmaṇas and have become worshipable for the people in general because of our quality of forgiveness. It is because of this quality that Lord Brahmā, the supreme spiritual master of this universe, has achieved his post. (SB 9.15.39)

The duty of a brāhmaṇa is to culture the quality of forgiveness, which is illuminating like the sun. The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Hari, is pleased with those who are forgiving.

PURPORT: Different personalities become beautiful by possessing different qualities. Cāṇakya Paṇḍita says that the cuckoo bird, although very black, is beautiful because of its sweet voice. Similarly, a woman becomes beautiful by her chastity and faithfulness to her husband, and an ugly person becomes beautiful when he becomes a learned scholar. In the same way, brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas and sūdras become beautiful by their qualities. Brāhmaṇas are beautiful when they are forgiving, kṣatriyas when they are heroic and never retreat from fighting, vaiśyas when they enrich cultural activities and protect cows, and sūdras when they are faithful in the discharge of duties pleasing to their masters. Thus everyone becomes beautiful by his special qualities. And the special quality of the brāhmaṇa, as described here, is forgiveness. (SB 9.15.40)

My dear lord, if in some places materialists, who are already bewildered by the insurmountable illusory energy of the Supreme Godhead, sometimes commit offenses, a saintly person, with compassion, does not take this seriously. Knowing that they commit offenses because they are overpowered by the illusory energy, he does not show his prowess to counteract them.

PURPORT: It is said that the beauty of a tapasvī, or saintly person, is forgiveness. There are many instances in the spiritual history of the world in which many saintly persons, although unnecessarily harassed, did not take action, although they could have done so. (SB 4.6.48)

Kṣamā-rūpaṁ tapasvinaḥ, people is advised, especially those who are following penance and austerity, yogic principle or devotional life, they should learn to excuse. In our dealings, there are so many faulty dealings between ourselves. So if we take everything very seriously, then it is very difficult to live.

Lecture Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 12.2.1 -- San Francisco, March 18, 1968

Don't wish for anything inauspicious for others. Anyone who inflicts pains upon others suffers himself from that pain. (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.8. 17)

Mahabharata, Vana parva p. 13. Prahlada M. explains forgiveness. One day, Bali approached Prahlada and asked, "Which is actually meritorious, forgiveness or the use of strength?"

Prahlada: Neither forgiveness nor the use of prowess is meritorious in all situations. If one were to always forgive, then his servants, dependents, enemies and even strangers would disrespect him. When one always forgives, then mean-minded servants gradually steal away all of his wealth and fail to respond to his commands. On the other hand, one who simply punishes and never forgives, soon finds himself to be bereft of all friends. Indeed, everyone comes to hate such an unforgiving person, and when there is the slightest opportunity, they do something to harm him. Therefore, the conclusion is that prowess and forgiveness should be exhibited at the proper times.

My dear Bali, the following persons should be forgiven: one who has done nice service in the past, even if guilty of a grave fault; one who offends simply due to ignorance or folly; one who is a first-time offender; one who has committed some wrong against his will; and in addition, other offenders may sometimes be forgiven just to create a good public image.

The following persons should not be forgiven: one who has knowingly offended and yet claims to be innocent, even if his offense is slight; and, a second-offender, no matter how small his crime.

By James P. Conrad, Olathe, Kansas <http://www.guideposts.com/story/dear-client-from-lawyer>
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Why do people think lawyers should work for free? That's what I was asking myself on a cold January morning in 1987 as I began loading the rough oak logs onto the pickup. *Why is it that I have to come out here and cut firewood to make ends meet—just because some people won't pay their bills?*

The air was filled with the fragrance of newly cut wood, and a cold gust of wind showered snowflakes down on me from a limb overhead. But resentment continued to build inside of me as I finished loading the logs and put away the chain saw, climbed into the truck and headed home. Even though I charged reasonable rates and offered extended-pay plans, I couldn't seem to collect the \$5,000 that a number of my law clients owed me.

Many people have the impression that lawyers make a lot of money. I wasn't. I'd been in practice for about two years and still was not earning enough to make a decent living for Diana and our three children. I'd spent a decade in a variety of colleges before I finally graduated from the University of Kansas Law School in 1985, and I'd cut a lot of firewood during that time to pay the bills. My first year of law practice brought in a total of \$5,000, but expenses amounted to \$3,000, so I continued to cut wood for the Jayhawk Firewood Company.

Parking the pickup outside the house, I stripped off my heavy coat and tromped inside. Diana and I live on 10 country acres just south of Olathe, a medium-size Kansas town outside of Kansas City. We like to be away from the traffic and have lots of space for our children to play.

As I poured myself a cup of hot chocolate and sank into a soft chair to brood, Diana gave me a look of concern. "What's wrong, Jimmy?" she asked.

I shrugged. "Oh, it's those unpaid accounts."

"Why don't you turn them over to a collection agency or...or just sue them?"

I shook my head. "It's not that simple. I think that would be a bad witness for a Christian lawyer, for one thing. It also takes a lot of time and creates a peck of ill will."

She listened thoughtfully.

"Besides, it's not just the money that bothers me, it's the lack of appreciation that gets to me. I worked very hard for those people and in most cases obtained an excellent result, yet they don't even bother to call me and talk it over. They just vanish. Poof!"

As January passed and the year rolled on, I tried to put those overdue accounts out of my mind. But the resentment only seemed to fester inside me. Already more clients were running behind in their bills, and my reminders only seemed to irritate them. *How will I ever make this business go, if I can't make a profit?* I wondered.

Then one evening I was preparing to teach a Sunday school class when one verse of Scripture seemed to jump out at me. "The borrower is servant to the lender," it said in Proverbs 22:7.

All the next day I reflected on that verse, and the implications of it slowly became plain. I realized that my clients and I were in a master-slave relationship. It was a kind of bondage for both of us. No wonder I was uncomfortable. The chain that bound them to me also bound me to them.

Other Bible verses came to mind, such as the one in Matthew that says, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." By the end of the week I knew what I had to do, and I knew how I was going to do it.

Christmas was coming, so I went to the store and purchased a big box of Christmas cards and went back to my office. Thumbing through my red ledger, I made up a list of long-overdue accounts, and then began to compose a letter to them.

"Dear Client," I began, "Your bill, a copy of which is enclosed, is hereby forgiven in its entirety."

I went on to explain the biblical concept of forgiveness, and I pointed out that I was forgiving them because God had forgiven me. I ended the letter with, "I would ask two things of you. First, would you forgive me if I have ever offended you during the time I was your attorney? Second, would you during the next month forgive at least one person who owes you money or who has offended you?"

I inserted one copy of the letter in each Christmas card addressed to a debtor client. I knew that some of my clients would never even open a business envelope from me, but they would open a greeting card.

By the time I got to the post office I began to wonder, *Am I out of my mind?* With the mailing of those letters I was forever forfeiting \$5,000 that I had rightly earned. What would happen if word of this got out? I'd be an easy mark. Should I talk this over with Diana?

I was stalling and I knew it. But then I began to think about all the people who have forgiven me, and I thought about the forgiveness of God I had enjoyed ever since age 12, when I was baptized.

"Would you forgive at least one person who owes you money or who has offended you?"

Slowly, I dropped the letters, one by one, into the slot, and with each letter I felt a burden of bitterness lifting. As I strolled out of the post office, I knew for certain that I had done the right thing. The chains of unforgiveness had dropped away.

During the next year I heard nothing from most of those forgiven clients, not even a thank-you note. During the next three years I continued to forgive end-of-year debts, and still most of my clients did not acknowledge my gesture. Somehow that was unimportant to me. Forgiveness was something I had to do for my sake, not just for their sakes. If I just wrote off their accounts, they would never know that I had forgiven them in my heart.

And yet, little by little, there were clues that my letters were having an effect on people.

One man called to say, "I have forgiven someone who owed me \$100."

Another client whom I had forgiven brought his father to my office for some legal advice. "This is my father," he said, "and he will pay his bill." And he did. I was so pleased that I had kept this client's goodwill and that he had brought me new business.

A client called to say, "I wept when I read your letter of forgiveness." And he continued, "I'm grateful for your offer, but I want you to reinstate the bill. I want to pay you what I owe you."

I will never know all the effects of my forgiveness on others, but I know what forgiving did for me. Gone is the anger I used to carry around like a heavy suitcase. And gone too is the anxiety I used to feel about making a profit in my business.

"I don't depend on my clients for a living," I tell my friends, "I depend upon God." Indeed, since I started forgiving my debtors, my business has increased substantially, and I'm not aware that anyone has taken advantage of me.

Now, when I walk down the streets of Olathe, I can look people in the eye and they can look at me, knowing that we are friends, not master and slave.

I am a free man, a happy man.