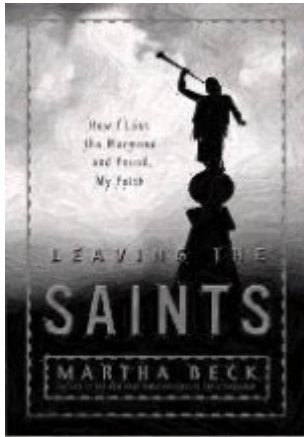


# *Silver Linings: Furors and Forgiveness*

Examining the concepts of error and forgiveness

By Kathryn Dixon



Forgiveness. At times, we all want it and seek desperately to earn it. Sometimes we move in heartfelt striving to give it, even when we think it might cost us our integrity. We offer forgiveness to others to the very best of our ability, and find that despite our fervent endeavors, the "wound" of the infraction still smarts deeply -- and often for a very long time. We all still carry our lists of the "forgiven," as well as our typically much longer lists of those from whom we seek forgiveness. Some of our most intimate connections wind up on both lists -- several times.

What is forgiveness? And why in the world is it so hard to give to others or even receive it for ourselves?



Is forgiveness long-suffering in the name of another, or the God of your faith, or the well-being of humanity? Is forgiveness the well-intended desire (or pretense) of a willingness

to bear the burden of another's transgressions, whether consciously or unconsciously provoked?



Does there exist somewhere within us a deeper kind of forgiveness that really leaves us feeling pure, complete and accepting of our own and others' humanity and innate goodness as creations of the Divine? Can you conceive of a forgiveness that frees you from the belief that transgression is even possible?

With a simple click on Google, we can put ourselves in the middle of every unforgivable act throughout history. So today, not only do we have the privileged opportunity to carry the burden of our own misdoings and victimizations, but at choice we can now labor under the relentless sufferings of mankind throughout all of recorded time. Is there any way to get beyond all of that? If there is, how do we do it?

And, is there really such a thing as an unforgivable sin? When our heart shudders in fear, be it in stark terror or mere glimmers of doubt, the answer is always "yes." When I don't feel safe, I cannot forgive -- I don't know how to. However, when I feel the invincibility of my heart and soul, it's hard to locate any sin that defies forgiveness. In those moments of grace, all consternation is completely consumed in compassion.

Many of us have been watching with compelling intrigue and open-heartedness (or outrage) a local drama unfurling as principles and precepts of spirit and faith appear to clash between one of Utah's favorite sons, Hugh Nibley, and his daughter Martha Beck, one of our nation's favorite voices, as witnessed by her bestsellers and monthly column in "O," Oprah Winfrey's magazine.

The story goes that Hugh, a most beloved and erudite scholar, historian and protector of the LDS Church allegedly had another side. According to Martha, this other side of her iconic father became a predator of her innocence when she was five years old. She also spends a fair number of chapters asking poignant questions regarding the historic origins of principles espoused by the LDS Church.

Martha courageously (or perniciously, depending on your vantage point) chronicles her memories and developing awareness in "Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons

and Found my Faith." The book spans a wide spectrum of introspection and insight, laugh-out-loud hilarity and sad and painful heartbreak.

Martha is unflinchingly honest in sharing all of her truth about her recollections of growing up in Provo. She stands naked amidst the cold, confusing and chaotic winds of the incongruities, betrayals and immutable charms of everyone in her story, including herself. I recommend this book highly.

So what does this story have to do with forgiveness? Only everything. It could be about Martha forgiving the world: her father, her family and her former church. It could be about her family forgiving Martha. It could be about Mormons forgiving non-Mormons, and vice versa as well. It could be about the Church forgiving its members who have memories and questions that would cast aspersions upon its vast shores. It could be about the Church deepening its forgiveness of the fact that we are all human, and all of us sometimes do things that can cause pain, despite fervent attempts at living as perfect creations of God. But most importantly, this book could be about our very own forgiveness of ourselves -- perhaps the only place from which any authentic forgiveness can be born. Until I can hold compassion for myself as I survey my own errors and unconscious acts in the world, how can I ever consider true forgiveness of anyone else? It's just not possible. The way I treat myself is the way I have to treat the world. As I learn how to forgive myself, it mysteriously becomes much easier to forgive you. As I forgive you, it becomes much easier to forgive me -- an astonishingly swift and upward spiral, if you will.

So, let's embark on an exploration of forgiveness right now, using self-inquiry via The Work of Byron Katie ([www.thework.org](http://www.thework.org)). The Work is a simple yet life-changing series of four questions and a "turn-around" that results in what are often radical changes of perspective -- much like walking through the looking glass -- out of pandemonium into peace.

Before we begin, I want to preface the experience by noting a vital context for effective self-inquiry, "The Three Kinds of Business." According to Byron Katie (and my personal experience bears this out without fail), there are only three kinds of business in the world:

- 1) Your business -- that is how you see the world, yourself, and truth
- 2) Other people's business -- that is how others see the world, themselves and truth
- 3) God's business -- (insert your favorite name for the Ultimate Creative Source from which you arose) That is everything else, and on a certain level includes the other two.

The only time I ever suffer in my life is when I'm out of my own business. It plays out like this: Whose business is it what Martha thinks of her father? That would be Martha's business. Whose business is it what Mormons think of Martha and her book? That would be Mormons' business. When I think I know what other people should think or feel, I leave my own business to try to change other people's impressions. It seems like your

opinion which opposes mine is the cause of my suffering, but in actuality it is my hopeless presumption that I know what's best for you that causes all of the pain and futility.

OK, let's take a look at a belief that lurks below the surface of any unforgiveness in our lives. It is pertinent to the Beck/Nibley current events in that there are opportunities for forgiveness here for anyone who is involved -- Martha, her family, Church members, non-Church members, and even anyone who relates to any of the story in any way. When we find ourselves taking a stand on one side of a fence or another, we feel the pain of separation. Hating the other side doesn't stop the pain of separation, it only hurts more and tends to move us in destructive rather than creative ways. As long as we believe there are sides to take, we may never know true freedom. And until we really understand the gift forgiveness is, we can't help but shrink from its fullness.

If you'd like some new perspectives of your own, find and apply the questions below to your personal experience of what and who you've found hard to forgive, and discover the freedom that these questions can bring.

Belief: To forgive is to sanction error.

Question 1. Can I really know that it's true?

No, even though I've often labored under that painful belief. My fear tells me that to drop my sense of self-protection, release my pain and forgive another's transgressions opens me up to even greater suffering. Best to keep my heart closed and ensure my safety -- albeit a solitary, cold and rigid safety. So I rarely if ever actually forgive. I just default to pretending it's okay and I can handle it, when in truth I am still suffering and harboring my grievances. However, after many a year employing this tactic, I'm here to report that it hasn't kept me all that safe. Thus, despite my belief that to forgive is to sanction error, I certainly wouldn't know -- I've never really tried it.

Question 2. How do I react when I believe that thought?

I feel afraid to forgive for real, afraid to let go and open up, afraid that if I don't hold on to my pain I might be left with nothing at all. I cling to my resentments and justify my unforgiveness as somehow beneficial, despite the fact that it really hurts and shuts me down. I eat or drink or act out in some fashion to distract myself and attempt to numb the pain of this cycle. I treat the "other" as though they need some sort of lesson, and it's my job to give it to them. I live in guilt over my own past errors, as well as a stifling terror of making new ones because errors warrant punishment. In short, I question the validity and wisdom of an open and compassionate heart and prefer instead to keep the world and myself in check with harsh and relentless fear-based commands.

Question 3a. Can I see a reason to drop it?

Oh yes. But my fear is that if I do, I will open myself to the idiocy of others and never

speak my truth. It seems like if I drop this belief, I will just be sugar-sweet nice while the world decays before my very eyes. (The question does arise here, isn't that decay a big part of what I see before me anyway? Is my harshness promoting less error? No, definitely not; just more fear, which inevitably turns into more errors. Interesting.)

Question 3b. Can I see any reason that is not painful to keep the belief that forgiveness sanctions error?

Not a one.

Question 4. How would I live differently without the belief?

First, my fear factor would drop considerably. I'd actually consider true forgiveness as a real option in the scheme of things. I wouldn't be afraid to forgive others or myself when we make mistakes. I would be more relaxed and kinder to myself and everyone in my world. I would be more trusting of God and an innate and inherent goodness of humanity, instead of fearing that the truth is that we are merely depraved. Errors would just be cause for awareness and correction, rather than grave sins necessitating condemnation.

OK. Time for what Byron Katie calls the "Turn-Around." This is where you play with the original statement by twirling and flipping it around here and there. The result is new and surprising twists to the original concept that turn out to be astonishingly as true, and usually even truer. A word of caution here: do not do 'turn-arounds' with any statement before plowing the field of your awareness with the first four questions. Without the prior self-inquiry, the turn-around can be yet another vehicle for self-torture, and we already have way too many of those.

TURN-AROUND from the original statement that "To forgive sanctions error."

To forgive does not sanction error.

That could certainly be true. What usually happens is that in the condemnation that follows the error, the error-maker buries himself in guilt and remorse or total denial- neither of which facilitate consciousness and healing. Forgiveness doesn't condone the error; it just allows the one erring more breathing room.

To not forgive sanctions error.

Initially that sounds counter-intuitive, but upon closer investigation this is precisely the nonworking dynamic that's been wreaking havoc for centuries on this planet. From our prison system to our marital, family and organizational dynamics, the evidence is everywhere. Healing is not an option for the unforgiven or for those who withhold forgiveness. Both sides of that fence suffer in resentment and remorse.

Please understand that the The Work does not promote leniency or complacency. Forgiveness does not mean it is okay for people to harm one another. Not at all. What self-inquiry does promote is clear awareness, and from that clarity, it also enables free speech and true communication. What happens is that instead of actions and words being fueled by fear and anger, with awareness one naturally acts and speaks from a deeper truth fueled by integrity and compassion -- true freedom.

To forgive sanctions correction.

How would I know, since I've only just discovered that what I've been calling forgiveness isn't? What I do know is that condemnation and shut-down around error results in a world filled with pain that just keeps growing. I can now look forward to trying to forgive myself the next time I do something I wish I hadn't. I will be far more likely to clean it up faster and much less likely to repeat it. That principle also logically follows with forgiving others.

Without my fearful beliefs, I am free, trusting of God, myself and all of humankind. As an added benefit, I notice I have a more open and compassionate heart -- even (maybe especially ) when the spit hits the fan.

Thank you Martha, Hugh and churches and families everywhere for the many opportunities to practice this exquisite gift of forgiveness -- with ourselves, and with one another.

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