~ Religions for Peace

Forgiveness at the Roots of Faiths – How Understanding the Science of Forgiveness Can Better Heal and Restore Communities of Faith

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FOREWORD

In a world increasingly divided by conflict, misunderstanding, and historical grievances, the journey toward forgiveness and reconciliation stands as a beacon of hope and healing. The ability to forgive is not only a profound act of personal liberation but also a cornerstone for building resilient communities that can thrive despite past wounds. The toolkit you hold in your hands is a testament to the transformative power of forgiveness, an essential practice deeply embedded in the core of all faith, ethnic, and indigenous traditions.

This project led by *Religions for Peace* with the invaluable support from the Templeton World Charity Foundation, seeks to bridge the ancient wisdom of forgiveness with the contemporary science of reconciliation. By doing so, it offers a holistic approach to healing that is urgently needed in communities ravaged by protracted violence and conflict. This toolkit is more than a collection of materials; it is a roadmap for fostering true restoration through the careful application of science-backed forgiveness practices grounded on faith and spirituality.

The initiative behind this toolkit is driven by a compelling question: How can the science of forgiveness and reconciliation be more holistically applied and practiced within faith, ethnic, and indigenous communities to allow true healing and restoration? Through the innovative adaptation of existing materials, this toolkit aims to provide comprehensive resources that address the deep-seated trauma and lack of reconciliatory and restorative practices that plague many communities.

Religions for Peace aims not only to contribute to a change in narratives about forgiveness and reconciliation, but to create a shift in how forgiveness is perceived and practiced. By incorporating these tools into peacebuilding efforts worldwide, Religions for Peace envisions a future where forgiveness is not an afterthought but an integral part of conflict resolution and community rebuilding. This toolkit, developed within the context of Africa, is designed to be replicable and scalable, ensuring that its impact can be felt across diverse regions and cultures.

We, therefore, offer this toolkit as a resource with a lot of humility and reflection, and hope that it will be valuable to anyone committed to the difficult yet rewarding journey of forgiveness and reconciliation. Whether you are a community leader, a faith practitioner, or a peacebuilder, may this toolkit inspire you to integrate forgiveness into your work and, in doing so, contribute to a more peaceful and just world.

In service,

Dr. Francis Kuria,

Secretary General

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Forgiveness at the Roots of Faiths –

How Understanding the Science of Forgiveness Can

Better Heal and Restore Communities of Faith

Forgiveness is a key practice, teaching, and principle across the world's diverse faith communities, embodying a profound and universally acknowledged principle that transcends doctrinal boundaries. This section delves into theological reflections on forgiveness, highlighting its significance as a shared value among different religious communities. By exploring the common teachings and spiritual insights from various faiths, we aim to highlight the collective wisdom that underscores the practice of forgiveness. This exploration not only fosters multi-religious and multifaith understanding but also emphasises the transformative power of forgiveness as a spiritual and moral imperative that unites humanity in its quest for healing and reconciliation.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Christian Perspective on Forgiveness

Forgiveness

क्षमा

Atonement

प्रायोश्चत

Rev. Dr. Lydia Mwaniki (Ph.D.): Director of Gender and Women, All Africa Council of Churches

Forgiveness is a cornerstone of the Christian faith, deeply embedded in its

teachings and exemplified through the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Repentance In a world fraught पश्चाताप with pain, betrayal, and injustice, the call to forgive can seem daunting and, at times. insurmountable. However, the act of forgiveness is not

merely a suggestion but

a commandment from Jesus.

underscoring its vital importance in our spiritual journey. This principle of forgiveness is not only about moral obedience but also about the profound spiritual strength it provides, enabling us to live fuller, more harmonious lives. Through various biblical stories and teachings, we can glean valuable insights into the process and power of forgiveness, helping us navigate the complexities of human relationships with grace and compassion.

As Christians, we are encouraged to forgive, a principle emphasised repeatedly in the Bible. Forgiveness provides spiritual strength, complementing the strength we derive from the scriptures¹. Several biblical stories illustrate the principles of forgiveness.

The story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) demonstrates soul-searching and asking for forgiveness, while the father exemplifies the willingness to forgive, showing sincere repentance and forgiveness. Similarly, the context of post-genocide Rwanda, Rose Nyirimana and Jonathan Draper highlight how Mary's intervention at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12) serves as a model for peacebuilding. She reaches out to the servants and brings the issue to Jesus, transforming a crisis into a celebration, and showcasing the potential influence of women in fostering peace². Another example is the slave girl in 2 Kings 5:1-19, who connects Naaman with Prophet Elisha, symbolising reconciliation between Israel and Syria, and demonstrating the pivotal role of women in peace-making.

Life is not always fair; everyone experiences pain and suffering. As Christians, we are called to forgive even in the face of significant wrongs. Jesus commands us to forgive in Matthew 6:14-15:

"For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." Forgiveness is essential in our Christian Walk.

Forgiving someone who has caused us pain is challenging, but several practices can help. First, we need to look up and reflect on Jesus' ultimate

¹ Martin, W. F. (2020). Four Steps to Forgiveness. Vermont: Inner Traditions.

² Nyirimana, R., & Draper, J. (2013). Mary as a Peacebuilder: A Rwandan Post-Genocide Perspective.

act of forgiveness on the cross. Understanding that we are also recipients of grace helps us extend forgiveness to others. Second, we should look within and examine our hearts and motives, recognising and addressing any anger or bitterness. The parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18) reminds us not to forget the grace we have received, thus enabling us to forgive others. Third, we must look around and love others as we love ourselves, including those who have wronged us. Forgiveness frees us from anger and bitterness, fostering healing and restoration.

Forgiveness is a divine command, requiring mercy and grace. It's not about forgetting or minimising the pain but choosing to let go of negative emotions. Sometimes, we may not receive an apology, but forgiveness is about freeing ourselves. It is a transformative act that heals relationships and restores peace. Forgiveness is a continuous process that requires time, effort, and sometimes professional help. It's about acknowledging pain, releasing anger, and moving forward positively. By looking up to Jesus, examining ourselves, and loving others, we can embrace forgiveness as a powerful tool for healing and grace.

Forgiveness in Hinduism - A story from the Ramayana

Professor Dr. Anantanand Rambachan, Co-President – Religions for Peace and Professor Emeritus, St. Olaf College

The Ramayana, perhaps the most popular Hindu epic, tells the life-story of Rama. It was first written in Sanskrit by the poet Valmiki (8th-4th B.C.E.). Since Valmiki, the life of Rama has been retold in the various vernacular languages of India. One of the most popular is the Ramacharitamanas, written in the fifteenth century by the religious poet, Tulsidas. He wrote his version of Rama's life in a local dialect of Hindi and used rhyming verses to enhance its appeal and facilitate recitation. In this essay, I will draw from the version of Tulsidas.

Rama was born in the north-Indian city of Ayodhya. His birth and that of his three brothers were a source of great joy to his father, King Dasarath, and his wives. Rama was the eldest of the four brothers. When he came of age, and his father announced him as his successor to lead the kingdom, his stepmother, Kaikeyi, demanded that her son, Bharata, be appointed instead of Rama. She chose the occasion to redeem two boons promised to her by the king after she had saved his life on the battlefield and nursed him back to health. She asked for Bharata to be installed on the throne of Ayodhya and for the banishment of Rama to the forest for fourteen years. Rama complied to fulfil the promise of his father and, with his wife, Sita, and younger brother, Lakshman, spent fourteen years living a very ascetic life without the luxuries of his royal status.

When Rama returned to the city of Ayodhya, there was great rejoicing. Rama's family and the citizens came out to greet him. He was embraced on the street with great affection by all the queens, including Kaikeyi, although the text described her as having a heart that was troubled and uneasy.

When Rama met Kaikeyi on the street, he clearly sensed her embarrassment and troubled state of mind. Surrounded by family, friends, and citizens, however, he could not speak to her or express his feelings about his banishment. The time and place were not appropriate. After the ceremonies of welcome in the street, Rama made his way into the palace and Tulsidas describes his actions.

Rama knew that Kaikeyi was ashamed, and he went to her apartment first. After reassuring her and making her happy, he moved on to his own palace.

The Ramayana does not reconstruct the conversation that ensued between Rama and Kaikeyi but tells us that Rama comforted and reassured Kaikeyi and this gave her great happiness. We can only speculate about the nature of the discussion. Kaikeyi's feelings of shame and guilt were caused by her being the instrument of Rama's exile and suffering in the forest. She was fearful of his reaction towards her since she felt that he had good reasons for being bitter and even rejecting her altogether. Whatever the specific words Rama spoke to her, these were words of forgiveness that lifted the sorrow from her heart and brought her joy.

The example of Rama is very important for the Hindu community since he is venerated as God incarnate. This, however, is not the only occasion in the Ramayana when we see Rama expressing and demonstrating the value of forgiveness. Another significant instance occurs after the death of Ravana, who had abducted Sita and imprisoned her in his island home of Lanka. Ravana's brother, Vibhishana, refused to perform his funeral ritual. He was bitter towards Ravana and could not forgive him for his cruelty. "I cannot perform the funeral rites," argued Vibhishana, "for one who failed to fulfil his responsibilities and his vows, who was cruel, ruthless, and disloyal. Under the guise of a brother, he was my enemy and took pleasure in inflicting injury; Ravana does not deserve this homage. The world may say of me 'he was a barbarian,' but when they learn of Ravana's wicked deeds, everyone will approve of my conduct." Rama agreed that Ravana was cruel and unjust but noted that there was no need to hold feelings of enmity. He even offered to help Vibhishana perform Ravana's funeral rites.

The Sanskrit word for "forgiveness" is kshama, which comes from the root ksham, meaning to be patient. In the Bhagavadgita (13:7-11), forgiveness is listed among the twenty virtues. In chapter 10:34, Krishna, also honoured by Hindus as God incarnate, speaks of himself as the quality of forgiveness in all beings and identifies it (16:3) as a quality possessed by one who has a divine disposition. A person with a forgiving heart, says Krishna (12:13-14) is dear to God.

Mahatma Gandhi, one of the great practitioners of forgiveness in modern times, wrote in his autobiography, about its meaning for him. "Man and his deed," according to Gandhi, "are two distinct things. Whereas a good deed should call forth approbation and a wicked deed disapprobation, the doer of the deed, whether good or wicked, always deserves respect or pity as the case may be. 'Hate the sin and not the sinner' is a precept which, though easy enough to understand, is rarely practiced, and that is why the poison of hatred spreads in the world."

Forgiveness does not mean giving approval to the behaviour or absolving the person from

responsibility. Each one is responsible for his or her thoughts, words, and actions. Forgiveness means that in any situation where another's behaviour hurts us, we do not behave like the other. We respond based on our deeply held values. The ability to be in control of our response, to deal justly with those who treat us unjustly, to love those who hate us, and to speak the truth in the face of falsehood are the distinguishing characteristics, in Hinduism, of a life centred on God.

At the heart of forgiveness is freeing oneself from hate, anger, bitterness, and the desire to inflict pain on the other. Forgiveness frees us from self-destructive emotions and enables us to maintain an inward composure and peace. Without it, we will be at constant war with others and with ourselves.

On the night of his return to Ayodhya, Rama gave us a powerful example of the meaning of forgiveness in his treatment of Kaikeyi. Rama celebrated his return to Ayodhya with an act of forgiveness. His example inspires us to practice forgiveness and reconciliation in our relationships.

"I'm a Savage and I Like It", an Indigenous Faith Perspective

Testimony of Grandfather Dominique (T8aminik) Rankin, Co-President, Religions for Peace and Hereditary Chief and Anishinabe Medicine Man from Canada (Text by Grandmother Marie-Josée Tardif)

I was born in a tepee in 1947, in the forests of northwestern Quebec, Canada. My family had managed to preserve the nomadic lifestyle of my Anishinabe (Algonquin) ancestors. It was a fabulous existence, where freedom, humanism and a perfect symbiosis with nature reigned supreme. At the age of seven and a half, however, my life was turned upside down the day the Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers came to take me, along with five of my brothers and sisters, away from our family. Without warning and against our parents' wishes, we were placed in a closed institution.

During this dark period in Canada's history, we were considered "savages". Wanting to turn us into "good little white boys and girls",

our government, with the help of religious communities, chose to uproot 150,000 indigenous children like me. In the words of one infamous government official, it was a matter of "killing the Indian in the child". With the advent of the Canadian residential schools' system, indigenous children were forced overnight to leave their families, no longer speak their language, adopt a way of life unfamiliar to them, denigrate their origins, convert to another religion, and suffer sometimes extreme physical and, unfortunately, sexual violence.

My hell in the Amos Residential School lasted six years, but my road to healing was much longer. Before I could forgive, I had to work on the issue of judgment and blame. In that school, I was abused. I was lied to and judged. That's where I learned to become violent, to lie, and to judge in turn. I learned not to love myself. How could I then love others? By this time, I had dropped all the knowledge my father (a wonderful hereditary chief and medicine man) had passed on to me. I no longer believed in him or our philosophy.

Acceptance is key

After leaving boarding school at the age of 14, my father took me to meet our elders so that I could find the light again, thanks to the powerful Matato ritual. My father often told me about Matato, commonly known as a sweat lodge. For thousands of years, my people have practiced this extraordinary method of healing. There have been several other Matatos in my life, but the one when I was 14 was certainly the most significant. In the depths of this hut, where it's so dark and so hot that you can't run away from yourself, the elders ended up asking me a very important question: "Who raped you?" I shouted back: "It's the whites, the priests, the nuns, the government!" Each of my accusations didn't satisfy them. Then, at some point, they finally gave me an answer that would change everything in my life. With their strength and wisdom, the elders made it clear: "Those who raped you, my boy, were not the white men, nor the missionaries, nor the governments. It was the sick man and the sick woman. That's all there was to it." From that moment on, I began to put an end to judgments and to better understand

who I was. I learned to love myself and to be proud of where I came from.

In this Matato, the elders had invited me to sit in the West direction. For us, the teaching of this cardinal point is one of letting go, acceptance and forgiveness. But the interesting thing is that in the Anishinabe language, there is no equivalent to the word forgiveness. In our language, we simply mean acceptance. We see a trap in the idea of forgiveness. It's all very well when I ask forgiveness of someone I've hurt. However, if someone has hurt me and I'm waiting for that person to ask for forgiveness before I feel better, I may be waiting a long time, even my whole life! So many people wait for forgiveness from the person who hurt them in the hope of feeling better. In doing so, they place their healing power in the hands of someone else. If I accept, all is in my own hands. I don't remain powerless. In truth, when the elders urged me to accept the abuse I'd suffered at residential school, they were setting me free.

When we embark on a journey related to the teachings of the West, the great cleansing takes place. Even if we suffer, life pushes us towards reconciliation and transformation. My father always said that everything that happens to us is a teaching, even negative experiences. When I take responsibility for my life's trials, I must ask myself what life is trying to teach me. I then set in motion a tremendous process of transformation. In this process, we are always supported by Kitchi Manito, the Great Spirit.

The Path, Not the Destination

Today, I feel free. However, I have let go of my long-held goal of healing. Healing is not a goal. It's a path. I walk next to my personal story and take care of my scars. Most of the time, I feel the past far behind, but sometimes it catches up with me. About two years ago, new technologies made it possible to detect the anonymous graves of thousands of Indigenous children who had lost their lives in residential schools and had been buried in secret. This made me fall back. Suddenly, I was seven and a half again. For several weeks, I gave myself the right to cry, to let the pain pass without refusing it. I remembered the teachings of the elders who had once pointed

out to me that Grandfather Sun always shines above the clouds. The light always wins.

For us, the teachings of animals are very important, because they help us learn to live in the moment and move forward. Have you ever seen a bear retreat? An eagle fly backwards? Or a salmon swim in reverse? Only humans go backward, giving full power to their past. Thanks to the wisdom of the ancestors, I've come to understand that being savage is good for me because it means we're free inside. Free from judgment, blame, lies, past and future... Today, I have no university degree. My school is the forest. My diplomas are the seven sacred pipes I received, my eagle feathers, and my drums. That's why I'm happy to be who I am, and why you won't offend me anymore if you call me "savage". On the contrary, I consider it a compliment.

Forgiveness in Islam

Sheikh Dr. Ssali Ebraheem. Executive Secretary, Africa Forum for Muslim Councils

The virtue of forgiveness holds a revered place within both the principles and practices of Islam. Rooted in the very meaning of Islam, which translates to "Peace", and embodied by those who submit to the will of Allah, forgiveness is central to finding peace within oneself. The foundational texts of Islam, the Qur'an, and the Hadith literature, reverberate with exhortations to forgive. Islam not only teaches forgiveness but also underscores its significance, particularly when sought sincerely by the offender. As narrated by Almuhari, the Prophet Muhammad,

him, proclaimed: "Whoever suffers injury to his body by someone in any way and he leaves it for the sake of Allah, it will be an expiation for him" (Musnad Ahmad 23494). In Islamic ethos, forgiveness intertwines with reconciliation; the former

without the latter remains

peace and blessings be upon

incomplete. It entails transcending personal ego for a loftier purpose, seeking the pleasure of Allah. Thus, forgiveness in Islam signifies making peace even when desires remain unfulfilled. This section provides a concise overview of how the Qur'an addresses the concept of forgiveness.

Theological Reflection

An infamous incident from the time of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) involved the slander of his wife, Aishah (RA), known as the "Incident of Ifk." The term 'Ifk' stems from the Arabic root "afika", signifying a deliberate deviation from the righteous path. It took nearly three weeks for Allah to vindicate Aishah (RA) through the revelation of Surah an-Nur.

Amid this turmoil, Abu Bakr Siddig (RA), Aisha's father and a respected companion of the Prophet (PBUH), found himself confronted with a dilemma. One of his relatives whom he had been supporting was implicated in spreading the slander against Aishah (RA). This betrayal deeply wounded Abu Bakr (RA), prompting him to swear off any further assistance to this relative. However, Allah intervened, reminding Abu Bakr (RA) of the importance of forgiveness through a revelation: "And let not those among you who are good, and wealthy swear not to give (any sort of help) to their relatives, those in need, and those who have left their homes for Allah's cause, let them pardon and forgive. Do you not love that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is oft- Forgiving Most Merciful." (24.22).

This divine message led Abu Bakr (RA) to reassess his stance, realising that seeking forgiveness from Allah outweighed his grievances. He resumed his support for the relative, understanding that forgiveness holds greater reward than retaliation.

In Islam, forgiveness is not merely an act of kindness but a means to seek Allah's mercy and pardon. By forgiving others, believers demonstrate their submission to Allah's will. Dr. Fred Luskin, in his work "Forgive for Good", emphasises the transformative power of forgiveness, stating that it offers resolution in the face of loss or grief. Accepting Allah's decree is integral to this process, as the Quran affirms:

"No disaster strikes except by the permission of Allah. And whoever believes in Allah - He will guide his heart. And Allah is knowing of all things." (Quran 64:11). Furthermore, the Quran emphasises the principle that the reward of an evil deed is its equivalent, but whoever pardons and seeks reconciliation, their reward is with Allah. "He certainly does not like the wrongdoers." (Surah 42: 40).

Forgiveness in Judaism

By Rabbi Rachel Rosenbluth, Member -Religions for Peace Standing Commission on Championing Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion

Forgiveness holds a central place in many religious and philosophical traditions. For Judaism, it is a concept imbued with rich depth and complexity. Rooted in millennia-old teachings, Jewish perspectives, and practices of forgiveness offer insights into human relationships and the spiritual power of transformation. Forgiveness is an essential part of the human experience, and, particularly, of sustaining relationships, and healing conflict. The Jewish perspective recognises the complexities of human relationships, the realities of pain and harm, and the thorough process that enables forgiveness. This reflection explores the theological, ritual, and interpersonal expressions of forgiveness within Judaism.

Theological Interpretation

In Judaism, forgiveness has theological foundations, which are emulated in the

interpersonal sphere. Forgiveness

is a Divine quality. In the Torah and the liturgy, G-d's attributes of mercy, grace, compassion, and forgiveness, are evoked as G-d recognises the inherent imperfection in human beings, forgives, and grants the capacity for



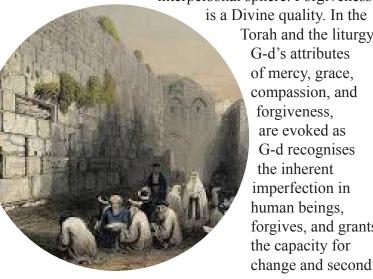
Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, is a communal ritual day dedicated to forgiveness. Rooted in the biblical scene in which G-d exercises forgiveness in the face of the Israelites' sin with the golden calf (thanks to Moses' advocacy), the people get a second chance, a second set of tablets, and another chance to be in Sacred relationship.

Yom Kippur has existed for centuries, practiced first in Temple worship with a physical ritual sacrificial offering for forgiving and cleansing the community (a literal scapegoat and devotional practice by the High Priest). After the destruction of the Temple, it was reimagined in the Synagogue as a day of Kaparah, atonement via prayers, when the community collectively comes before G-d to take accountability for their sins. In doing so, they are met with the Divine gift of forgiveness, Selichah. The community is cleansed (Tahara), giving the people a new year, and the chance to become who they want to become, without being defined forever by their imperfections. G-d models forgiveness and compassion, for us to mirror.

Jewish law, however, distinguishes between offenses against God and offenses against fellow human beings. As described in the Mishna, Yoma Chapter 8, offenses against God can be atoned for through repentance and seeking forgiveness from G-d. Offences against people, by contrast, require not only repentance but also a deeper process of accountability, restitution, and seeking forgiveness directly from the injured party (meaning, a real relationship). In some ways, human forgiveness is the more difficult venture, yet the most profound in its potential for repair. The Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 58) suggests that atonement with G-d means nothing, if there is not sincere restitution and justice amongst the human community first.

Interpersonal Forgiveness

For Judaism, interpersonal forgiveness is not simply a spiritual technology to release guilt. It is not achieved by dismissing or sublimating the harm that was caused. Forgiveness is not forgetting, nor does it abdicate responsibility for harm caused. Rather, forgiveness requires



a genuine relational process. Judaism values remembering, and justice. Impact and trauma from harm are honoured as real and even remembered in ritual. Forgiveness begins with ownership by the perpetrator. For repair to be possible, the sages are clear that forgiveness, Mechila, requires the person seeking it be sincere, remorseful, and demonstrate having learnt from their error. For this reason, forgiveness is neither obligatory nor always appropriate nor always possible. Contemporary Jewish thinker Dr. Elliott Malamet says: "The tradition encourages forgiving, but not mindlessly." Forgiveness requires Teshuva, meaning, sincere accountability, repentance, responsibility, awareness, remorse, and behaviour change. The moral imagination required for forgiveness is dependent on those proper conditions. That is the spiritual technology that allows life to continue to grow from and around a wound that occurred and enables a just process toward reconciliation.

Forgiveness as a Gift

Forgiveness may be hard to do. Yet, there is profound alchemy in a sincere and tempered process of Teshuva and forgiveness. Scholar and post-modern thinker, Rav Shagar in HaShelicha v'haChemla said: "The one who forgives is liberated no less than the one who receives pardon." Forgiveness, even without a genuine repair process, can be beneficial in liberating a person from anger, resentment or holding a grudge. Sometimes, unprompted forgiveness can be a great act of self- care.

Forgiveness is not an obligation, rather it is a gift; a gift with the most profound power - that of healing and transformation. It is that gift that transforms Yom Kippur, the most trepidatious day of the year, into what the sages in the Talmud Taanit call the "happiest day of the year!" It is a gift that can sow a vision of reconciliation and repair amongst divided families, communities, or nations who may have never thought it possible.

The ancient liturgy service in Judaism, called Selichot (literary meaning forgiveness), sheds light on the power of forgiveness. Selichot is about reflection, repentance, calling upon G-d's mercy and trusting that forgiveness will be granted. While the words are powerful, "Aneinu!

He will answer us!", it is the tone that reveals the true essence of the ritual. Waking up before dawn for approximately 40 or seven days before the High Holidays, people gather and humble themselves, praying as a Klal, a collective: We are human, it is messy, and we are in it together. The introspection and humility are met with profound Emuna, faith that G-d is indeed compassionate; forgiveness is thereby possible! That potential for forgiveness, for release, is what unleashes the human capacity for growth. We are not chained by our actions but have the power for liberation, for healing, for connection.

This Transformative Power of Forgiveness is a Gift Worthy of Celebration

Yishai Ribbo sings: "Happy is a people for whom this forgiveness is their lot!" Forgiveness is nuanced, difficult, but most importantly, possible. And this is what we celebrate: the gift of G-d's forgiveness; human dynamism, making amends, and repair; vulnerability, understanding, and reconciliation; the imagination of futures better than the present; the power to liberate ourselves and each other from our pasts; the capacity to remember hardship, and oppression, while living in resilience and joy. Forgiveness is a celebration of renewal and healing. Perhaps there is no greater gift than that.

Perspectives on Forgiveness from the Sikh Dharam

Bhai Sahib, Prof. Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia, Chairman, Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha; Co-President, Religions for Peace

The Rare and Sacred Quality of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a quality, a capacity, a potential, a power, that is latent in every human being. Like all Divine virtues, forgiveness is the jewel, that brings us true beauty, and the priceless asset, that brings true wealth. It empowers us with goodness, resilience, and loving strength. By dissolving the unseen grip of vengeance, fear, despair, or arrogance, it renews and transforms us. Yet, out of all the qualities we can unearth from within us, forgiveness lies the deepest. As such, it is the most difficult quality to summon, yet it is the hallmark of that sublime inward state, where God's presence is ignited within us.

Overarching Perspectives from the Sikh Dharam

These reflections on forgiveness come from the religious heritage that is known as the Sikh dharam, or Sikhism. This path for spiritual and social flourishing was founded by the ten Sikh Gurus in northern India, as the world moved between medieval and modern times. Its perspectives are profoundly God-conscious, yet they are not just theological. They are driven by questions about our human existence and purpose, yet they are more than a philosophy. They offer us methodologies, to self-reflect, to research, apply, refine, and improve – yet they are more than technological. Although they examine the mind, they are not purely psychological. They bring renewed hope for transforming and uplifting families, communities, and societies, whilst recognising that we are all kith and kin within one human family - diverse children of a common Divine Parent³. Thus, the teachings and life examples of the Sikh Gurus spur us towards ways of bridging religion and science, theory and practice, spirituality and politics, love and justice – and building dialogue and cooperation between cultures and faiths.

Historical Context and Global Significance

From the seeds first sown by Guru Nanak, then cultivated by his nine successors, between 1469 and 1708, the Sikh dharam was formed in Mughal India through changing times of peace and conflict. This long gestation led to the birth of the Khalsa, the collective of initiated disciples, and the Guruship of the scripture, our revered, ever-living Guru, Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji⁴. Following decades of war, unrest, and persecution, a period of stability came when a Sikh ruler formed and led a multireligious Punjab kingdom. Then a tumultuous century of British colonial rule ended with a violent partition that cut through Punjab. With a shared and partly forgotten history of upheaval, disruption, displacement, and migration across the globe, as Sikhs we lack closure on various internal issues, while also seeking passionately

to serve the common good, spurred by teachings to recognise our interconnectedness with God and all creation.

Teachings on Forgiveness

1. God as the Divine Source of Forgiveness

God is the root (mool) of all existence and root of our soul or spirit; a Oneness that interconnects all creation⁵. This Divine presence is free of fear (nirbhau) and free of vengeance (nirvair), sustaining the universe through compassion (daya) and contentment (santokh). God's presence is latent in everything, like an unseen light (jyot) and unstruck vibration or resonant wisdom (naam or shabad). When we kindle the Divine presence within us and resonate with its harmony, we live 'in God's image'. Forgiveness is the very epitome of God. Hence when forgiveness emerges within us, we 'merge' with God, both in this life and the hereafter.

Oh, Kabira, look deep within yourself:

Where wisdom flourishes, there is virtuous and responsible living. Where falsehood holds power, there is wrongdoing and spiritual decay. Where greed prevails, there is death, poverty and scarcity.

And where forgiveness emerges, God's own Divine presence is ignited within⁶.

2. Forgiveness and the Mind – Detaching from Vice, Cultivating Virtue

Forgiveness illuminates the compassionate path of one's life, as we learn to overcome the pull of haumai, the ego. This ego gives us our self-identity, but when it enslaves the mind, we are held captive by vices such as self-absorbed lust, vengeance, greed, possessiveness, and arrogance, which take over when we lose a sense of connection to the Creator and creation. Sometimes, we cling to these traits, even without our conscious awareness. To forgive is the ultimate act of selfless giving when our mind can fully detach from them. Forgiveness leads us to examine the mind's tendencies and

³ There is only One Giver for all people; may I never forget our One All-embracing Creator! (GGSJ, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Ang

⁴ Consider the whole human race as one global family. (Guru Gobind Singh Ji).; Every copy of the Guru Granth Sahib Ji (GGSJ) is identical, with 1430 pages which are lovingly referred to as Ang, or limbs of the Guru.

⁵ Ik Oankar - One Source of existence, resonating, generating and interconnecting. (The opening of the GGSJ. Guru Nanak Dev Ji). ⁶ GGSJ, Bhagat Kabir Ji, Ang 1372.

vulnerabilities⁷. When we build our capacity to forgive, it aids and supports the fostering of related virtues, such as humility, compassion and respect, that transform how we speak to and engage with others⁸.

3. Forgiveness and Acceptance

The call to forgive, and the path to forgive, tests us as never before. It involves confronting circumstances beyond our control, things we regret or cannot accept. For forgiveness to occur, we have to accept reality as it is and bow to a greater Divine will or hukam⁹. This surrender marks a turning point in our spiritual growth, for the path of faith involves obeying and accepting the Divine will. Just as we are called to comply with secular legislation to live as good, lawabiding citizens, forgiveness forms part of intrinsic spiritual legislation for us to live by as good human beings. As such, forgiveness is not an option on the spiritual path, but a requirement for each of us to rise to.

4. Forgiveness Marking the Soul's True Beauty, Wealth and Power

In a worldly sense, people strive for material beauty, wealth, and power. In Sikh teachings, when the inner jewel of forgiveness adorns our soul, we evoke the love of the Beloved Creator. We grow

in spiritual richness. Through forgiveness, the inner self finds true sovereignty, liberated as never before from the ego. Forgiveness thus marks a breakthrough in learning to live in harmony with the True Sovereign. It requires courage and strength. We become lesser human beings without it.

5. Lived Examples of Forgiveness

Sikh history and teachings¹⁰ are rich with accounts of the power of forgiveness. Touched by Guru Nanak's presence, many people were drawn to repent and seek forgiveness, marking a turning point in their lives, after many years of entrenched wrongdoing. Incarcerated and tortured by a hostile Mughal emperor, the fifth Guru is remembered for accepting the 'sweetness of the Divine will'¹¹. Expounding that even those torturing him belonged to God, he harboured no animosity and forbade even the renowned Muslim saint, Pir Mian Mir, to intercede for his release. In the life of the third

Guru, Guru Amardas Ji, and the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, when long-beloved disciples turned against them, they demonstrated an attitude of forgiveness and love. When the tenth Guru led defensive battles, justifying them only as a last resort, he praised the soldiers who, beyond the needs of battle, saw the light of God in all, and remembered that ultimately, 'none is a stranger, nor an enemy.'

⁷O my mind, you are the embodiment of the Divine Light, recognise your own origin. (GGSJ, Guru Amar Das Ji, Ang 440).

⁸ When God grants Divine forgiveness, the human body finds lasting peace. (GGSJ, Guru Amar Das Ji, Ang 38); Anger has been dispelled, I have grasped hold of forgiveness. (GGSJ, Guru Amardas Ji, Ang 232); Fareed, if someone is bad, respond with goodness; do not fill your mind with anger. Your body shall not suffer from any disease, and you shall obtain everything. (GGSJ, Bhagat Fareed Ji, Ang 1381).

⁹ Obeying the Divine will, one becomes acceptable, and enters the mansion of God's presence. (GGSJ, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Ang 471); Offer your entire body, mind and possessions to the Guru; obey the Divine will and you will reach and earn Divine grace. (GGSJ, Guru Amar Das Ji, Ang 917).

¹⁰ To practice forgiveness is the true fast, the mark of good conduct and contentment. (GGSJ, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Ang 223); Adopting an attitude of forgiveness, gather truth, partake the ambrosial nectar of the Divine Name. (GGSJ, Guru Arjan Dev Ji, Ang 261); Fareed, do not turn around and strike those who strike you with their fists. Kiss their feet, and return to your own home. (GGSJ, Bhagat Fareed Ji, Ang 1378); Eat less and sleep less, cherish mercy and forgiveness. (Guru Gobind Singh Ji, Dasam Bani.)

¹¹ Your doings seem sweet to me, Creator and Doer of all. Nanak craves for the wealth of the Divine Name. (GGSJ, Guru Arjan Dev Ji, Ang 394); For me there is no enemy, nobody is a stranger or alien - they all are mine as sparks from the same Divine source. (GGSJ, Guru Arjan Dev Ji, Ang 1299).

Conclusion

From these brief reflections, what can we take home—and take forward—both as Sikhs, and as members of one human family? We can practice forgiveness by turning our minds to God, accepting the Divine will, and emulating the Divine attributes of wisdom and virtue, where forgiveness is the hallmark. And to see that, when we are brave and humble enough to sacrifice our ego, take the plunge and overcome any reluctance we may harbour¹², we can create a space for forgiveness. We can empower the mind with love, wisdom, and optimism; and by radiating our soul's beauty, evoke Divine grace.

¹² Why do you waver, O mortal being? The infinite Creator is your ultimate protector. (GGSJ, Guru Arjan Dev Ji, Ang 724).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

The practice of forgiveness is rooted in all faith, ethnic, and indigenous traditions. The question we seek to answer for this project is: *How can the science of forgiveness and reconciliation be applied and practiced more holistically within faith, ethnic, and indigenous communities, to allow true healing and restoration?*

Religions for Peace has developed this multireligious tool kit by readapting existing materials that will examine the science of forgiveness within communities that experience protracted violence and conflict due to the lasting effects of unaddressed trauma and lack of reconciliatory and restorative practices. It aspires to ensure that this project leads to new and innovative ways to change existing narratives that continue to impede upon a true and honest practice of forgiveness. The hope is that these tools will enable Religions for Peace to replicate and scale the success of this project within our network around the world. Religions for Peace recognises that this aspiration is not only needed in communities that have experienced violence, conflict, and trauma but more, that these practices of forgiveness should be expected and automatically integrated into all peacebuilding work carried out in the regions where Religions for Peace is present.

Description

Religions for Peace operates through several multi-collaborative, multi-religious agencies that address all areas of peace and security, human rights, integral human development, and protection of the earth. Within conflict regions (which includes a history of ethnic violence, both during and especially post-violence/conflict), forgiveness and reconciliation are key aspects to the success of rebuilding trust and peaceful communities that understand the value of restorative practices that lead to healing, as well as contributing to relearning how to peacefully coexist.

As a strategy for increasing the practice of forgiveness, this advocacy project will enable

existing and scientifically validated forgiveness tools to be promoted. This will allow Religions for Peace's leaders to investigate and further advocate the science of forgiveness within their communities, as well as allow Religions for Peace to expand through multi-religious and multi-collaborative efforts that are imperative to sustained peacebuilding efforts.

This project also aligns with the mission of the Templeton World Charity Foundation (TWCF) mission in combating the polarisation caused by the lack of forgiveness and understanding and more, to posit that the far-reaching benefits of practicing forgiveness defeat dehumanisation and instead, allow for healing and reconciliation where needed.

Religions for Peace has adapted an existing toolkit for this project, by developing a multireligious perspective that would complement the toolkit we have selected for adaptation. Also, in continuance of ensuring that Religions for Peace stays in alignment with TWCF's mission, we have incorporated other science of forgiveness tools, including Robert Enright's and Everett Worthington's models of forgiveness.

The Place of Science in Religion and Forgiveness

Science is an integral part of our religious journey and of forgiveness. This toolkit incorporates elements of science and how it may assist religion to ensure balance. Science (reason) as described by Pope John Paul II, is one of the wings toward acquiring truth (God) and faith is the other. "Reason cannot eliminate the mystery of love which the Cross represents, while the Cross can give to reason the ultimate answer which it seeks." Forgiveness is based on the message of the Cross which love and science have demonstrated through numerous research that forgiveness, on top of the spiritual benefits, has the physical health benefit of healing.

Religion, therefore, cannot ignore the benefit of science in playing a part in nurturing healthy people. Africa has seen rampant wars and

¹³ John Paul, Fides et Ratio, Papal encyclical, 1998.

conflicts, some of which may be addressed through the forgiveness of historical harm that has continued to feed the conflicts that seem unending in several parts of the continent. In Africa, individual hurt and harm are considered communal harm. For total healing, the entire community must be involved, which oftentimes is complicated and sometimes includes rituals. A healed community experiences peace and love, and justice prevails in such a community. The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, while addressing the Muslim fraternity, encourages the community to be vessels for the "significance of spreading peace, love, and justice among people in the East and West."14 These would only arise in a community that takes forgiveness and reconciliation seriously. The message and practice of forgiveness and reconciliation are, therefore, owned by every individual.

Benefits of Forgiveness: A Field Guide

The recent Handbook of Forgiveness, 2nd ed. (Routledge) has collected over thirty reviews or meta- analyses of subfields. Researchers have increased their attention to the context of transgressions, their aftermath, the behaviours and communications around transgressions, and the intertwined behaviours of offender and forgiver. Rather than emphasise only the experience of the forgiver, it pays attention to the entire set of experiences surrounding transgressions. This means that although forgiveness of others is still the dominant research focus, researchers are also studying forgiveness of oneself, intergroup forgiveness, and feeling as if one is forgiven by God or a higher power.

Forgiving itself is also seen as more nuanced than it was fifteen years ago. Rather than treating forgiveness as a generic process, many researchers are differentiating the decision to forgive from emotional forgiveness. A decision to forgive is primarily a decision to try to act differently toward the offender and not seek payback, as well as treat the person as a valuable and valued person. Many people struggle with

deciding to forgive, but once the decision is made, it can, and many times does bring relief and inner peace. On the other hand, emotional forgiveness is, usually, the gradual replacement of unforgiving emotions like resentment, bitterness, or anger with positive other-oriented emotions like empathy or compassion for the offender. Emotional forgiveness means that anger and resentment gradually lessen until neutrality is reached. Then, with a valuable relationship, one might continue to generate more positive emotions until a net positive feeling is restored.

One paradox that has been often noted is that most people highly value forgiveness. Religions advocate for it, and talk-show hosts advise it. Yet, despite all this positive attention, most people struggle to forgive. The good news is that there are two well-established, research-supported programmes to promote forgiveness—and there are many others that have less research support, but the limited support is still positive. The two most supported methods are Robert Enright's Process Model of Forgiveness and Everett Worthington's REACH Forgiveness Approach, both of which will be referenced and used in this toolkit.¹⁵

Religion and the Concept of Forgiveness and Reconciliation

It is certainly often the case that motives other than religion, such as the desperation of economically disenfranchised people, as well as political aspirations, are central to conflict. However, religious language and symbolism are critical ways in which human beings interpret reality.16 It is essential to be schooled in how the variety of myths, laws, or metaphysical assumptions are felt in the minds of believers, including their deepest feelings. This enables empathy with the forces on all sides of the conflict, to interact dynamically within the spiritual language of frustration and anger that leads to violence, and ultimately grappling with the difficulty of practicing forgiveness. Thus, even if the roots of the conflict are economic

¹⁴ World Organization of Al-Azhar Graduates, Sayings of the Grand Imam https://waag-azhar.org/en/sayings-of-the- grand-imam/accessed on 09/01/2024.

¹⁵ John Templeton Foundation, Forgiveness, https://www.templeton.org/discoveries/forgiveness. Accessed June 2023.

¹⁶ Clifford Geertz, the Interpretation of Cultures (New York basic Books, 1973) Part 3.

discontent, the revolt against the status quo may express itself in religious terms.¹⁷ This requires an intervention strategy that can acknowledge and utilise the role of religion.

It is important to understand not only the relevant texts of religious systems but also the actual practitioners themselves. There is a complex array of contributing influences beyond religious instruction or orientation, and it is valuable to examine several overtly identifiable aspects of such choices. For example, which sacred phenomena--texts, rituals, or images of God or gods--emerge most often in the minds of believers who are prone to violence, as opposed to those who advocate conciliatory approaches? This information can help inform a useful framework of reference for forgiveness, creating a bridge to the unique cultural expression of a particular conflict or issue, although more experimentation in the field will tell us how this might work, or not work, as well.

It is expected that this toolkit will help inspire religious leaders and communities, as well as create a hunger for knowledge, advocacy for forgiveness, and motivation for communities to seek restoration and reconciliation over retaliation and more harm.

Who Can Use the Toolkit

This toolkit can be used as a handbook, and it is a good resource that contains both conceptual and practical tools to help fill the peace practitioner's resource hamper. The toolkit introduces several concepts around forgiveness (including the science of forgiveness), reconciliation, and multi-religious approaches to this work. This toolkit is designed to provide religious leaders, peace educators, and staff with flexible training steps and materials to support and enhance efforts in multi-religious peace education and conflict transformation.

Beginning the Training Workshop Ice Breakers/Climate Setting

Depending on the level and orientation of the

participants, choose games or activities that will offer added value to the training. Ensure that the context is not offensive, particularly the diverse people's origins, their various backgrounds, and especially different faith traditions. Use this opportunity to quickly clarify misconceptions that may arise from the various backgrounds, if any. Note that jokes at this point must be very general and should not be stereotyped-based, since these may offend others.

Note that participants often do not know each other before they arrive. Icebreakers are exercises or games that introduce participants and help build a comfortable environment in which to share and contribute. These exercises can include content to help set parameters for the workshop and identify what participants hope to get out of the training. The more these are localised, the better. If the participants are from a wider background, and may not have a localised game or activity, the facilitator needs to know that you can come up with one or use one provided in this toolkit.

Choose whatever icebreakers work within the context of your training and what you are most familiar, and comfortable with. After the icebreakers, offer the pre-survey form to be filled out.

Expectations, Boundaries, and Ground Rules

When participants receive their invitation notices, they often form various expectations in their minds. At the end of the training, when these expectations are not met, participants often feel bad and consider their time a waste. To ensure that this does not happen, the trainer should harvest all the expectations of the participants, write them down, and harmonise these with the workshop objectives. Ensure everyone's expectations are considered and that no one feels left out. After writing them down, see to it that all the expectations can be met within the training objective. If there is any expectation that is outside the objectives, try to find out from the floor how they feel and how this can be

¹⁷ An example of the complex interplay of economics and religious extremism might be the comparative status of the Shiite community in the Middle East and the popularity of the Iranian revolution among them, or the economic scenario of Iran just prior to the revolution.

achieved. If it is outside the workshop mandate, then diplomatically expunge it.

You may ask participants ahead of time to send their expectations. Review and prepare yourself adequately to meet expectations but pay attention to the objectives of the training. Do not give hope or raise any suggestion that you can meet some need if it is outside the training objectives. As the facilitator, you are empowered to ensure that boundaries are set, and expectations are not an entitlement in disguise. These actions will ensure that you have a balanced time on the floor and command the respect needed throughout the training.

Exercises: Participants' Expectations, Ground Rules and Trust-building

Exercise 1: Distribute pieces of paper to the participants to write down their expectations (20-30 minutes)

Ground Rules

Ground rules establish guides for participant interaction during the training and build trust amongst participants. When participants trust the trainers and other participants, they feel more comfortable sharing their observations and learning from each other. Ground rules are particularly important for longer training, and when participants discuss controversial subjects, such as analysing sources of conflict, or sharing personal information. Ground rules need to be agreed upon before the start of the training for a smooth workshop.

Exercise 1.3: Setting Ground Rules (20-30 Mins)

Trust-building

As noted, for participants to fully share their ideas and inspirations, they need some level of trust. Trust-building exercises encourage participants to get to know one another and lower their inhibitions. Trust-building exercises in combination with agreed ground rules for discussion are particularly important if participants come from groups on opposite sides of the conflict. Discussing forgiveness,

reconciliation processes, causes of conflict, and possible programming directions, requires participants to share personal experiences. Participants should feel they can share their thoughts and opinions openly, so the conversations thrive with rich or insightful sharing.

Exercise 3: Help the participants to get into deeper description of themselves by giving a short story of their encounter with conflict in their community.

Let them follow the following format.

- a. Their name.
- b. Position in the family.
- c. Their experience with conflict.

CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is one of the key elements of coexistence that despite being perceived as a religious concept, applies to anyone, everywhere. Forgiveness seems to lack an all-fitting definition, with different scholars considering it in context and thus conceptualising it under different typologies. According to Lijo¹⁸, forgiveness is the freedom from an adverse attachment to the source that has wronged a person. In such a scenario, a person goes against what is naturally human to be riend the said wrongdoer, by treating them with compassion and love. This is much in line with the Golden Rule which is adapted in different religions. The Jewish expression of this rule states, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is a commentary." The rule supersedes basic guidelines of abstract religion to the simple rule of being humanly good to others. The Islamic version is more direct because it states that a person's belief is null and void until they wish others what they wish for themselves. In a forgiveness context, the offended does what an offender failed in.

Robert Enright and Catherine Coyle (1998) have distinguished forgiveness with related concepts such as pardoning, condoning, excusing, forgetting, and denial. In such contexts, the offended retain their status quo – a situation that is devoid of humility. True forgiveness, therefore, consists in self-abandonment and going against

the natural inclinations for the greater good of harmony individuals between (and nature). The fruits forgiveness are only enioved by humans but all creatures. That is why in Jainism, the Golden Rule states that one should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated¹⁹. This is a clear

indication that apart from asking for forgiveness from each other, in the times we transgress against nature, we should ask for forgiveness. We can, therefore, define forgiveness as an altruistic act of morality, using goodness to overcome injustice among humans and nature as well. Ultimately, forgiveness becomes a positive change that takes place in the mind and emotions of a victim toward the offender, to maintain human and natural harmony.

This section engages participants in in-depth discussions of forgiveness. It includes the dilemmas of forgiveness, multi-religious and scientific dimensions of forgiveness, and programmatic considerations.

The section concludes with a segment on spirituality and reconciliation. The purpose of this chapter is to understand the complexity of forgiveness, to catalyse discussions that get close to the core of forgiveness practices, and to engage in more mindful, all-encompassing practices of forgiveness, restoration, and reconciliation.

Multi-Religious Perspectives on Forgiveness – Self Reflection and Theological Discourse

Discussion on Faith Traditions

- Forgiveness is a concept that is well understood in different settings and all faith and Indigenous traditions.
- Ensure trainers have read the theological reflections on forgiveness from the front of this toolkit and then ask them to reflect on those perspectives first with the entire group.
 - 1. Native/Indigenous view of forgiveness.
 - 2. Hindu view of forgiveness.
 - 3. Jewish perspective on forgiveness.
 - 4. Christian perspective on forgiveness
 - 5. Islamic perspective on forgiveness
 - 6. Sikh perspective on forgiveness

¹⁸Lijo, K.J. "Forgiveness: Definitions, Perspectives, Contexts, and Correlates." *Journal of Psychology and Psychotherapy* 8, no. 3, 2018.

¹⁹ Scaboro Missions. Golden Rule. https://www.scarboromissions.ca/golden-rule/the-golden-rule-poster-a-history. Accessed February 2023.

Exercise: Break the group into several smaller groups and let the trainers then discuss among themselves what forgiveness means in their tradition. *Ask them to remain in their groups for this next session as well.*

Next, ask them to consider the Scientific Perspectives on Forgiveness (Reading this next section aloud)

Forgiveness is a term that is deeply entrenched in contexts of faith. It is a crucial term in all sacred texts that outlines a relationship between horizontally (within community members) and vertically (with God, the Earth, etc). From a historical perspective, forgiveness was left for pastors and religious leaders who have identified the powerful healing benefits that are derived from it. Forgiveness can transform lives because hope takes away guilt, anger, loneliness, and fear²⁰. This is just from a religious perspective and science has permeated this realm and much research has been conducted in this area. According to Lijo²¹, people adopt a variety of responses in the face of interpersonal transgressions such as active or passive retaliation, holding grudges, and denying the seriousness of the offence. The unforgiving responses to wrongdoing are likely habitual tendencies. The negative reaction to a wrongdoer and resistance to forgive are learned as part of the survival or power needs of human beings. But human beings can overcome this 'habitual barrier' through compassion and forgiveness. From the humanistic angle, letting go or forgiveness is a quality of a growth-seeking individual. In other words, human beings can choose forgiveness, instead of focusing on the negative reaction toward the person who caused the harm.

Scholars in behavioural science have identified the personal and interpersonal benefits of forgiveness and the cognitive, emotional, motivational, and social dimensions of forgiveness. Robert Enright states that forgiveness alleviates the desire for revenge against the offender, as well as the motivation to avoid the offender, which leads to a heightened desire for reconciliation and reduces the chances of causing more harm, in the name of harm.

Activity

- Ask each group to come up with a traditional symbol/image that represents peace and forgiveness in their religion, culture/community.
- Once done, ask them to describe the meaning of the symbol or image chosen and discuss any learnings from this section.

²⁰ Meek, K. The science of Forgiveness, 90

²¹ Lijo, K.J. Forgiveness: Definitions, perspectives, contexts ad corelates

CHAPTER 3: CONFLICT, TRAUMA AND FORGIVENESS

Conflict, whether intrapersonal, interpersonal, or communal, has the potential to leave deep emotional and psychological wounds that can last for long periods. These wounds, or trauma, can hinder individuals and communities from moving forward, hence the significance of forgiveness in healing and letting go.

This chapter examines how trauma influences one's ability to forgive, and conversely, how the act of forgiveness can serve as a powerful catalyst for healing from trauma. We will explore the psychological and physiological effects of trauma, the role of memory and emotional responses, and how forgiveness can facilitate recovery and reconciliation. Additionally, the chapter will address strategies for fostering forgiveness in the aftermath of conflict, emphasising the importance of empathy, acknowledgment of harm, and the willingness to rebuild trust. Through this exploration, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the transformative power of forgiveness in overcoming the scars of conflict and trauma.

Understanding Conflict

FORGIVE

Conflict, many times, is caused by miscommunication, but more often it is about other issues, such as values, beliefs, and perceptions. A common definition of conflict comes from sociologist Lewis Coser who defines social conflict as, "A struggle over values and

resources."²² This definition highlights possible causes of conflict, values,

beliefs, power, or resources. Another definition of conflict refers to "any situation in which two or more social entities or 'parties' ... perceive that they possess mutually

incompatible goals."²³
Most scholars agree that

conflict does not just erupt suddenly, but grows gradually, giving signals that many times parties in conflict do not pay attention to. These are called early warning signs.

Early Warning and Early Response Mechanisms

Conflict early warning refers to the ability of peace stakeholders or individuals to generate timely, accurate, and reliable information that warns of the likelihood of the conflict erupting. The goal of early warning is to prevent conflict before it becomes unbearable, costly, or deadly. It is a mechanism of anticipating conflict well before it occurs and developing or generating possible conflict scenarios based on the anticipations. It can also be described as warning people, organisations, faith leaders, or governments based on:

- a) Signs of conflicts.
- b) Symptoms of conflict.
- c) Likelihood of conflicts.

The thrust of conflict early warning is to avoid or minimise the effect of conflict in society by "nipping it in the bud," through early preventive mechanisms. As medics always say, it is easier to prevent to treat an ailment, and that is why conflict early warning is regarded as more important than mitigating the effects of war.

A conflict early warning system should be designed in such a way that it promptly collects information from the field, analyses it, and generates warning messages and scenarios, including identifying unstable peace (latent and low-level conflict). An established early warning system should be able to identify factors driving instability in society, providing a basis from which to assess likely future scenarios and recommend appropriate options for local and international policy markers oriented towards preventive action.

²² Coser, L. A. (1956). The Functions of Social Conflict. London: Routledge

²³ Mitchell, C. R. (1981), The Structure of international Conflict. London: Macmillan

Objectives of Conflict Early Warning and Early Response

The objective of conflict early warning is to warn those in positions of authority or communities to:

- a. Prevent conflict from occurring.
- b. Prevent escalation once it has occurred.
- c. Minimise the intensity or effect of the conflict.
- d. Generate conflict analysis and scenarios for possible interventions.
- e. Provide a framework, basis, or known trends for assessing the future likelihood of eruption of conflict.

Methods of Conflict Early Warning

There are various methods of conflict early warning, ranging from formal reports to informal traditional methods.

- Formal: These are modern-day conflict early warning systems that rely mainly on interpretation reports like situational reports, alerts, assessment reports, contingency reports, and so on, depending on the agency. These reports rely on specific indicators which vary from location to location and from one conflict context to another. Such indicators may include unexplained or unusual movement of people, increased buying, as well as stocking of food, buying of weapons, and movement of livestock to safer places. Agencies charged with conflict early warning normally have personnel who collect data, (sometimes very specific data like livestock migration patterns in the case of pastoralists), analyse the data, generate alerts and possible scenarios, and inform the relevant authorities. There are several early warning systems all over the world, but for Africa, the classical example is the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD).
- Informal Traditional Conflict Early Warning Systems: These are based on indigenous common knowledge and technology. It is in the public domain that each traditional or rural community

has its ways of generating early warning information. People with certain skills interpret events that are responsible for warning the community before an enemy strikes. Some of the traditional methods include:

- Reading and interpreting livestock intestines, mainly among the Karamoja cluster communities in Uganda.
- Observation of certain behaviours of birds and livestock.
- Interpreting milk or honey.
- Dreaming (special dreams with supernatural powers).

The traditional systems of early warning signs of conflict should not be despised because some of them are very reliable. A few of these could include youth constantly singing war songs during ceremonies, periodic disappearances of men and boys without clear reasons, and paying attention to known routines that precede conflict such as passage rites and observation of cosmic warnings that need interpretation. In all conflicts, early warnings have a range of actors that are involved in gathering and collecting early warning information. These may include experts, civil society, interfaith networks, government agencies, and research institutions. The credibility of any early warning system depends on the source of the information and verification mechanisms

CULTURE AND CONFLICT

Cultural Adaptations and Context

Culture is a key component and driver of conflict. Culture influences the process of conflict-how it unfolds, what events trigger violence-and the interpretation of events and messages. Culture also affects how we perceive events and is part of the context for communication, as explained in Chapter 6 (Communication). Culture's influence on our behaviour and worldview often only becomes obvious when it is not shared. For example, when you travel to a new country, what people eat and how they interact in public may be different from what is common or acceptable in your own country or culture. When we share the same cultural contexts, we take for granted most norms and assumptions of how we communicate and approach conflict.

Kevin Avruch, an anthropologist who studies culture and conflict, defines culture as a "derivative of individual experience, something learned or created by individuals themselves or passed on to them socially by contemporaries or ancestors."²⁴ He likens it to the soil in which everything else grows. Culture is learned and passed down from generation to generation. It affects everything we do and how we see the world around us. Therefore, not only does conflict happen within a particular cultural context, but every culture has its ways of resolving conflict.

Several of the exercises in this chapter are useful in

about the cultural values and norms of the participants, especially about conflict. You, as a trainer, should also reflect on your cultural assumptions and values, and how

they influence the way you interact with participants

and the way you think about conflict and peacebuilding.

Questions for reflection about culture and conflict are:

- 1. A visitor to my community would typically see ...
- 2. We welcome newcomers by ...
- 3. We deal with conflict by ...
- 4. You will know you have violated our expectations/norms when ...
- 5. What is a strength that you have gained from being a part of a community to which you belong?
- 6. What is one thing about your community that you would like to change?
- 7. What is one thing that you never want to hear said again about your community?

Trainer notes: When in debriefing exercises, it is useful to elicit from participants how culture colours their responses or actions. Raising the issue of culture repeatedly throughout the training sessions highlights the importance of culture in peacebuilding activities and programming. An energiser that you can use to discuss cultural differences at any point in the training is countdown. In this energiser, participants are given questions to answer within set periods. A timer is then set and keeps beeping after every second and participants are compelled to be quick and under pressure to answer. This helps to decompress tension on questions that could be emoting and introduces a level of fun as the facilitator drives the process.

Have participants talk about the process of forgiveness and reconciliation and all that is involved and how each of them views forgiveness depending on how the conflict or issues have been explained to them from their community perspective and understanding:

- Fear/dehumanisation
- Harmful act/violence/conflict
- Trauma
- Harmful feelings and actions in response to trauma

²⁴ Kevin Avruch. (1998) Culture and Conflict Resolution. Washington: United States Institute of Peace

Processes of addressing forgiveness – of self, others, collective:

- Self-forgiveness
- Forgiveness of others
- Collective forgiveness
- Reconciliation
- Restoration
- Healing
- Transformation

Conflict and Forgiveness

Conflict can be both a catalyst for the need for forgiveness and a barrier to its realisation. Understanding the complex interplay between conflict and forgiveness is crucial for navigating the challenges of interpersonal relationships. The two trigger intense emotions, such as anger, resentment, and hurt. These emotional states can create a recognition of the need for forgiveness as a means to alleviate emotional distress and restore inner peace.²⁵

Conflict and forgiveness share a reciprocal relationship. Conflict is inherent in human relationships and arises from differences in opinions, values, and perspectives, leaving emotional scars. Forgiveness, on the other hand, holds transformative power, serving as a healing balm to mend fractures caused by conflict. The journey toward forgiveness is a profound exploration of empathy and understanding. It acknowledges shared humanity and invites rising above past wounds. Forgiveness, an act of self-love, frees one from resentment, fostering personal growth and collective harmony. It transforms conflict into profound connection and understanding.²⁶

Conflict and forgiveness dance together in the human experience. Forgiveness is both a process and a choice and may be both intrapersonal and interpersonal. It is a complex and enigmatic concept, hard to pin down because it can be applied in different ways to diverse situations; not everyone experiences it in the same manner. For some, it may result in reducing a personal hurt that makes life easier; for others, it may mean reconciling with an enemy and being able to live side by side again.²⁷

The Challenges of Forgiveness

Our society encourages forgiveness between individuals because this can bear numerous benefits which may be social, psychological, and physiological. Nevertheless, the victims of violence face various challenges in forgiving others, just like the others face blockages that deter them from encouraging the victims to forgive. Raj and Wiltermuth²⁸ highlight two types of barriers that prevent people from seeking forgiveness. The first set of barriers prevents the perpetrators from seeking forgiveness. Here, a perpetrator may imagine that seeking forgiveness is self-serving because the victim receives nothing in return. Also, transgressors may face the challenge of admitting their culpability in the offence. The second set of barriers are third parties. This is because of their concern that they may provide the victim with incorrect advice. They may also think that the victim will view them as taking the transgressors' side. Lastly, the belief that forgiveness is undeserved may prevent third parties from encouraging the victim to grant forgiveness.

TRAUMA

People who have experienced conflict may develop trauma, which may affect their daily functioning. The word trauma originates from the Greek word traumatikos which means a wound, which may be physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual. Trauma is, therefore, a deep wound that arises from abnormally shocking, painful, or harmful occurrences that make us feel overwhelmed and under threat. Mostly, and in the context of this toolkit, trauma is used to mean emotional wounds.

Conflict-related trauma can have long-term

²⁵ Jeffrey Blustein. (2010). Forgiveness, Commemoration and Restorative Justice: The Role of Moral Emotions: Oxford: Blackwell

²⁶ Christopher Leschber. (2023). The Transformative power of Forgiveness: Healing, Restoration and Embracing a New Chapter. https://www.romans-12two.org/the-transformative-power-of-forgiveness-healing-restoration-and-embracing-a-new-chapter

²⁷ Community Toolbox. (2023) Forgiveness and Reconciliation. https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/spirituality- and-community-building/forgiveness-and-reconciliation/main

²⁸ Medha Raj & Scott, S.W. Barriers to forgiveness. Wiley, DOI 10.1111/spc3.12290

impacts on individuals and communities, as victims of violence often risk experiencing trauma-related symptoms. If left unresolved, trauma can perpetuate a cycle of violence, hamper reconciliation efforts, and hinder the establishment of sustainable peace. This is because most people who experience some form of trauma can develop a desire for vengeance to cope with their hurt, making them vulnerable and driving them to embrace violent extremism.²⁹

Recognisable Effects of Trauma

People who have experienced trauma may present with the following symptoms:

• Re-experiencing the Events

People who have experienced trauma may consistently re-experience it in many ways such as recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event like images; and thoughts or perceptions and repetitive play themes in children that are reminiscent of the traumatic event. Recurring dreams of the event may be experienced by the victims. Sometimes the victims may feel as if the traumatic event was recurring, and physiological symptoms may surface with exposure to internal and external triggers reminiscent of the traumatic event.

Avoidance

Victims of trauma may tend to avoid anything that reminds them of the traumatic event such as thoughts, feelings, or conversations of that nature. They may also shy away from activities, places, and/or people that remind them of the trauma, and in other cases, they forget important information about the trauma.

Hyperarousal

The victims of trauma may have persistent symptoms of extreme arousal that may not have been there before the trauma and they include inability to fall asleep, irritability, poor concentration, heightened vigilance, and overly startled responses. Among these responses may be any of the following: flashbacks, panic

attacks, dissociation, sleep problems, low selfesteem, grief, self-harm, suicide ideation, and alcohol and substance misuse.

The Epigenetics of Trauma

Epigenetics is the study of how trauma and harm are both passed down from one generation to another through the genes of the descendants of those who first experienced harm. Certain individuals are more susceptible to stress and trauma, as well as the physical and mental health consequences following such exposure, including the risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This differing vulnerability is likely to be influenced by genetic predisposition and specific characteristics of the stress itself (nature, intensity, and duration), as well as epigenetic mechanisms.³⁰

The brain is a very specialised organ endowed with the unique ability to respond to the environment, reshaping its connections according to what it has experienced. The brain's development is influenced not only by the relatively stable in-utero environment but, more importantly, by its extended postnatal growth and development, lasting some twenty years in humans during a time of instability in an ever-changing social environment. Since the making and consolidation of neural connections is activity-dependent, the kind of environment that creates this activity has an impact on the connections and their consolidation of strengths through epigenetic regulation of gene transcription.

One can imagine that living with ongoing conflict or violence or having grandparents or parents who experienced violence and harm, the stories of terror and trauma are passed down to future generations. This does not occur to cause harm, but instead, to warn them, help them understand how conflict ravages humanity, and serve as a life lesson to not let it happen in the generations

²⁹ Muriel. M. Kinkoh (2023). Adressing Conflict Related Trauma in Cameroun: A Pathway to Conflict Prevention and Sustainable Peace. https://onpolicy.org/addressing-conflict-related-trauma-in-cameroon-a-pathway-to-conflict-prevention-and-sustainable-peace/

³⁰ Joanne Ryane. (2016). Biological Underpinnings of Trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder: Focusing on Genetics and Epigenetics. Future Medicine. https://www.futuremedicine.com/doi/full/10.2217/epi-2016-0083

Hudnall, B.Stamm (1995). Secondary Traumatic Stress: Self-care Issues for Clinicians, Researchers, and Educators (The Sidran Press)

to come. However, as studies have shown, it is clear that perhaps the trauma experienced is not just passed down through narratives and storytelling, but also imprinted on the genes of future family members.

It is very important to understand that this dependence on adaptive epigenetic changes for normal brain development, can also and may also produce dysfunction if the environment is prone to be chronically stressful or in conflict. Most of these experiences are transient and can be overcome with compassionate and mindfulness work. Other experiences are long-lasting, especially those that are a consequence of warfare and/or extreme violence at the time of brain development, which are subject to epigenetic development and modification.

Effects of Ignored Trauma

When people work with trauma, the trauma can begin to work on them, go after their wounds or be internalised. The result is what is known as secondary trauma or compassion fatigue. Some of the symptoms include high levels of stress; chronic fatigue; diminished level of self-care; and somatic (physical) complaints like headaches, muscle aches, and the like (Stamm, 1995). Behavioural changes may also occur as part of secondary trauma. They include withdrawal from social contacts and pleasurable activities; increased levels of work and self-sacrifice; inability to be refreshed by sleep and recreation; drug and alcohol abuse; putting oneself unduly in high-risk situations; and increased levels of cynicism, anger, and aggression.

those experiencing it and can put others at risk because of the sufferer's risk-taking behaviour. Co-

Chronic levels of secondary

trauma are harmful to

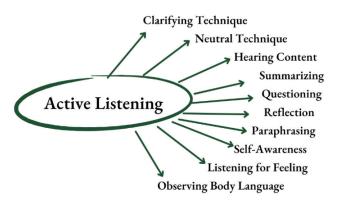
behaviour. Coworkers should help identify the presence of these symptoms.

Those suffering from secondary trauma need to withdraw from stressful

situations and seek rest and reorientation (please see additional resources in the references).

Workers in the field of reconciliation and peacebuilding need to be clear about what kind of framework sustains them to prevent or limit secondary trauma, whether it is their worldview, a religious commitment, or a commitment to humanity in general. Maintaining spiritual and mental health is an important part of being an effective support to victims of trauma and violent conflict. Below are several things that peacebuilders can do to maintain their mental and spiritual health.

Active Listening



Active listening also plays a crucial role in promoting open and constructive communication. By creating a safe space for dialogue, individuals can express their grievances, concerns, and needs more freely. This open communication fosters transparency and trust, essential ingredients for resolving conflicts and rebuilding fractured relationships.

Furthermore, in the context of forgiveness, listening becomes instrumental in facilitating healing and reconciliation. By listening to the perspectives and stories of those affected by conflict, individuals demonstrate a genuine willingness to acknowledge the harm caused and show respect for the experiences of others. This act of attentive listening can contribute to rebuilding trust and repairing damaged relationships, laying the foundation for forgiveness and reconciliation to occur. In essence, listening is a cornerstone of conflict resolution and forgiveness, enabling individuals

to gain understanding, cultivate empathy, promote communication, and ultimately, foster healing and reconciliation in the aftermath of conflict.

As a group, discuss active listening.

- What are the benefits of active listening?
- What are the difficulties of active listening?
- Why is active listening important?

Do you practice active listening with your family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances?

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

The reconciliation praxis, comprising truthtelling, restitution, the promise of non-repetition, and the preservation of memorabilia, converges with the profound concept of forgiveness, creating a comprehensive framework for healing and rebuilding communities torn apart by conflict. Truth- telling, as an essential step in the reconciliation process, sets the stage for forgiveness by fostering transparency and understanding. The acknowledgment of painful truths provides a foundation for empathy, allowing individuals and communities to navigate the intricate path toward forgiveness. Restitution. a pivotal element reconciliation praxis, aligns closely with the transformative power of forgiveness. Material and symbolic gestures of restitution signify a genuine commitment to rectifying past wrongs, paving the way for forgiveness to flourish. In the act of forgiving, individuals release the grip of resentment and allow room for the restoration of trust, further facilitated by sincere efforts toward restitution.

The promise of non-repetition, an integral aspect of the reconciliation praxis, intertwines with forgiveness by forging a commitment to change and growth. Forgiveness is not merely about letting go of the past; it is also a forward-looking endeavour. The promise to break the cycle of conflict and prevent its recurrence aligns seamlessly with the ethos of forgiveness, emphasising the transformative potential inherent in both concepts.

Preserving memorabilia, the final thread in the reconciliation praxis, after undergoing a painful experience, individuals and community members would love to settle on specific symbols that echo their resilience and give them the power to move past the pain and bitterness of the past. The curated memories encapsulated in memorabilia become not only a testament to resilience but also a source of collective wisdom, guiding societies towards a future infused with forgiveness and understanding.

Appreciative Inquiry

You have learned that active listening is a process where one seeks to listen and understand the 'complete message' being conveyed by the participant by piecing together their verbal and non- verbal cues. Appreciative inquiry, on the other hand, is a way of engaging groups based on their strengths to instil change. It utilises the available rather than the absent strengths and it leads people to mutually plan their future.

Appreciative Inquiry

Demonstrate a desire to understand where your participant is coming from and what they hope to achieve.

Do not filter what you hear. Be aware of all information being provided to you by the participant (i.e., facts, feelings, emotions, and ideas).

Remain neutral and non-judgmental.

Maintain positive posture, tone, and wording when engaged in dialogue with a participant. Provide participants with adequate time to explore their thoughts and feelings.

Refrain from interjecting conversations with questions and comments any time there is a pause in the conversation.

Demonstrate understanding by paraphrasing what the participant has said.

Ask relevant questions that help the participant build upon and/or clarify what they have said.

Summarise progress of the conversation from time to time.

Appreciative Inquiry Exercise

This exercise requires that the individual asks positive questions, that lead to discovering the ideal core of the person. Break into pairs and ask these questions of each other.

How can I bring out the best in myself?

Do I have a model in my life like a saint, leader, or colleague who does the productive things?

How can I make that person come out clearly in me?

In what ways does my culture support me to be a better person?

In what ways does my religion or belief support me to be a better person?

What is it that replenishes me to find strength in relating well with all people?

If everything was working well, what would I have discovered that made things work well?

What made you thrive during conflict?

What is a positive thing that keeps you grounded?

CHAPTER 4: FORGIVENESS AND ACHIEVING WHOLENESS: CONNECTING MULTI- RELIGIOUS APPROACHES TO THE SCIENCE OF FORGIVENES

Mindfulness expert Jon Kabat-Zinn explains how we need to understand that our thoughts and feelings are different from facts and how this affects our behaviour and reactions in his book, Mindfulness for Beginners. "We tend to experience our feelings and our thoughts as facts, as the absolute reality of things, even when we know someplace deep within us that is not entirely the case." Kabat-Zinn also states that our narratives are our egos; they are selfcentred and self- occupied. "While they may contain elements of truth, these narratives are not the entire truth of who we are. Who you actually are is far bigger than the narrative you construct about who you are."

Kabat-Zinn reminds us that we have control. We can choose to let our anger cause harm and debilitate us and our communities, or we can choose to view the issue with a different lens. We can choose to not let the harm we have experienced rule our every movement and we can choose to respect ourselves, more than focus on what we have endured. This is not diminishing whatever our experience is and was. It is instead reframing it to allow freedom from the harmful and destructive views we carry of what has happened to us. "In the face of even the most unthinkably terrifying situations, we

> to hold whatever it is – even terror, despair, and rage in awareness and carry it differently... As humans, we can meet and carry our our anger, hurt, and our fear in new ways that can be deeply restorative

have a powerful innate capacity

healing.³¹ "Mindfulness provides incredible freedom because

it means we don't have to believe every passing thought or emotion as real and true."32

Mindfulness, therefore, as asserted by Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj is simply watching, witnessing, or being attentive to whatever comes, and a person does not require any reaction. You just become yourself by witnessing your mind or whatever that comes in.33

Mindfulness Activity

Let participants sit down quietly.

Ask them to close their eyes, two feet on the floor, arms resting at their sides.

Ask them to listen to the different sounds/ noises in the space.

Guide them on paying attention to their inner world (thoughts or feelings) and not be distracted by outside noises.

Call on them to pay attention to breathing and different parts of the body - what are they feeling?

Offer at least five or six minutes of silence After six minutes, direct them to start to wander back to paying attention to where their mind wants to wander, move their bodies, slowly open their eyes, sit still in that space, move their minds back into the room, present and alert.

Ask for any volunteers to express how this meditative experience was for them and remind them that there is no right or wrong response.

Activity 4.2: Mindfulness Activity (5-10 mintes)

Some Mindful Information on How Science and Religion, Together, can Encourage

and

³¹ Jon Kabat-Zinn, Mindfulness for Beginners (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, Inc. 2016), 43, 67, 96.

³² Kristin Neff, Self-Compassion (New York: William Morrow, 2015), 95.

³³ Shreya Wagh-Gumaste, Influence of Hindu Spiritual Teachers on Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) of Jon Kabat-Zinn (International Journal of South Asian Studies, 12

³⁴ Loren, L. Toussaint, D.R. Williams, National Survey Results for Protestant, Catholic, and Nonreligious Experiences of Eking Forgiveness and of Forgiveness of Self, of others and by God. Journal of Psychology and Christianity, 120-25...

Forgiveness

Sometimes, science and religion seem to be opposed to each other. However, a lot can be drawn from the two working together. Loren Toussaint and D.R. Williams³⁴ argue that studies in molecular biology and neuropsychology demonstrate the benefits of being forgiving and also forgiving. Furthermore, combined with mindfulness practices, religious people tend to show more forgiving tendencies compared to nonreligious, which may have physical, social, and psychological benefits. Conflicts and violence are some of the key causes of unforgiveness because of the trauma from such experiences. Religious forgiveness can only be conceived according to sacred texts. It is thus important to define some key concepts under this subsection.

Protracted Conflicts and Violence

These are conflicts that have existed for a long time, and which have persisted despite negotiations. They can be episodic, cyclical, or sustained for a very long time. Different places across the world have experienced protracted conflicts such as Israel and Palestine, Nagorno-Kabarakh in Afghanistan, Syria, and Yemen, among other places. Communal violence in India can also be classified as protracted.

Impact on Communities

Protracted conflicts not only affect human communities but also their dwellings like cities, villages, and so on. Once a city, for example, has been impacted, deterioration of essential services is felt, and then this trickles down to other sectors such as education, healthcare, political infrastructure, as well as hygiene care. The most vulnerable of the victims in such conflicts are children and persons living with disabilities.

During such conflicts, civilians may find themselves trapped between warring parties, leading to significant hardships. Many civilians suffer from illness, injury, or captivity, with a considerable number being taken captive or subjected to indefinite detention. These situations often result in a range of psychological challenges, compounding the trauma experienced by those affected

Sacred Texts on Religion and Forgiveness Reflection Exercise

Ask for volunteers to read each forgiveness sacred text below and then reflect as a group on the similarities to their traditions, the differences, if these texts speak to them differently than their own.

Baha'i:

Forgive all, consider the whole of humanity as our own family, the whole earth as our own country, be sympathetic with all suffering, nurse the sick, offer shelter to the exiled, help the poor and those in need, dress all wounds and share the happiness of each one. Divine Philosophy

Buddhism:

Better than a thousand useless verses is one useful verse, hearing which one attains peace. The Dhammapada: The Sayings of the Buddha, verse 100-101

Christianity:

Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven. Luke 6:37

Hinduism:

From Me [God] alone arise the varieties of qualities in humans, such as intellect, knowledge, clarity of thought, forgiveness, truthfulness, control over the senses and mind, joy and sorrow, birth and death, fear and courage, non-violence, equanimity, contentment, austerity, charity, fame, and infamy. Bhagavad-Gita 10-4 **Islam:**

And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it, but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation – his reward is [due] from Allah. Indeed, He does not like wrongdoers. Quran 42:40

Jain:

"By begging forgiveness, he obtains happiness of mind; thereby he acquires a kind disposition towards all kinds of living beings; by this kind disposition he obtains purity of character and freedom from fear." Twenty-ninth Lecture; The Exertion in Righteousness – 17

Judaism:

It is forbidden for a person to be cruel and refuse to be appeased. Rather, he should be easily pacified, but hard to anger. When the person who wronged him asks for forgiveness, he should forgive him with a complete heart and a willing spirit. Even if he aggravated and wronged him severely, he should not seek revenge or bear a grudge. This is the path of the seed of Israel and their upright spirit. In contrast, the insensitive gentiles do not act in this manner. Rather, their wrath is preserved forever. Mishneh Torah, Repentance 2:10 (Mishnah Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah "Laws of Repentance")

Māori, Indigenous Peoples of New Zealand:

"Western culture and Māoritanga have different perspectives on forgiveness. In the Western culture, forgiveness is largely seen as something that we can do on our own and if we can achieve it, we are then good and virtuous. Māori frame forgiveness as a collective act with less emphasis on it being a goal in itself. Rather forgiveness may or may not be the outcome of taking action to 'restore balance' due to the harm done. ... Perhaps more prominent than aiming for forgiveness is the notion of utu; a means of restoring harmony and balance through the reciprocal obligations that exist between individuals and groups. These obligations might include kind deeds as well as retribution or revenge. And because Māori place relationships within the sacred realm, they enter into such processes with an openness and willingness to restore, heal and preserve." Western culture, māoritonga and forgiveness

Native American:

"Forgiveness is the answer, however, to simply forgive for the sake of going through the motions is senseless. For an entity to be fully capable of being forgiven there must be activity on the part of that entity displaying moral, intellectual, and spiritual advancement regarding their understanding of the impact of the forgiveness. In other words that entity must first acknowledge the activity that needs forgiveness and then undertake positive corrective action that would earn that entity forgiveness." Native American Wisdom

Sikh:

Whoever overpowers the five sense organs, is blessed with forgiveness, patience, and contentment, through the Guru's Teachings. Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, Ang 1334 (2)

Examining the Science of Forgiveness with a Multi-Religious Lens

Attitude toward Self-Scale

As participants engage in these exercises, it is crucial to approach them not only within the context of their faith but also through a multi-religious lens. This approach enriches the personal experience by fostering a deeper understanding of forgiveness as a universal concept that transcends individual religious boundaries. The use of tools like the Robert Enright Self- Forgiveness Inventory provides a structured way to reflect on and measure one's journey toward self-forgiveness. This inventory encourages participants to consider the role of forgiveness in their own lives while appreciating its diverse expressions and significance across various religious traditions. This chapter, "Examining the Science of Forgiveness with a Multi-Religious Lens," explores these themes, offering insights into how scientific understanding and religious teachings can converge to enhance the practice of forgiveness.

Na	ime:
Da	te:
ou to yo	e sometimes violate our sense of justice and subsequently develop resentment or hatred toward reselves. We will call that violation of one's sense of justice "self-offence". We ask you now think of the most recent experience of self-offence that made you regret and disappointed in urself. For a few moments, visualise in your mind that specific self-offence. Try to remember nat you did and experience what happened.
an	response to the questionnaire below, take into consideration what your faith/religion teaches d also your feelings and emotions about your inner experiences towards the offence that was rpetrated against you.
1.	How serious was the self-offence that you committed? (circle one)
2	Not serious at all A little serious Somewhat serious Very serious Gravely serious
2.	Did the self-offence involve another person? Yes () No () If you answered "Yes" go to item 3; if you answered "No" skip to item 5.
3	Please specify that person without giving his/her name.
٥.	(e.g., spouse, parent, employer, friend, God, colleague, etc.)
4.	Is the person alive?
	Yes () No ()
5.	How long ago was the self-offence? (Please write in the number of days, weeks, etc.) days ago
	weeks ago
	months ago
	years ago
6.	Please briefly describe what you did when you were offended yourself.

Now, please answer a series of questions about your current attitudes towards yourself. We do not want your rating of past attitudes. All responses are confidential so please answer honestly. This set of items deals with your current <u>feelings</u> or <u>emotions</u> toward yourself. Try to assess your actual **feelings** on each item. For each item, please check the appropriate number matching your level of agreement that best describes your current feeling. Please do not skip any item.

I feel _____ toward myself. (Place each word in the blank when answering each item.)

I feel Strongly

I feel	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1 Warm	1	2	3	4	5	6
2 Kindness	1	2	3	4	5	6
3 Нарру	1	2	3	4	5	6
4 Positive	1	2	3	4	5	6
5 Unloving	1	2	3	4	5	6
6 Repulsed	1	2	3	4	5	6
7 Resentment	1	2	3	4	5	6
8 Dislike	1	2	3	4	5	6
9 Caring	1	2	3	4	5	6
10 Bitter	1	2	3	4	5	6

This next set of items deals with your current <u>behaviour</u> toward yourself. Consider how you **act** or **would act** toward yourself in answering the questions. For each item, please check the appropriate number matching your level of agreement that **best** describes your current behaviour or probable behaviour. Please do not skip any item.

Regarding my behaviour toward myself, **I do or would** _____. (Place each word in the blank when answering each item.)

I do or would	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
11 Keep Good Hygiene	1	2	3	4	5	6
12 Avoid Health Risks	1	2	3	4	5	6
13 Eat Irresponsibly	1	2	3	4	5	6
14 Try To Stay Physically Fit	1	2	3	4	5	6
15 Ignore Personal Needs	1	2	3	4	5	6
16 Pay Attention To Stress	1	2	3	4	5	6
17 Treat Poorly	1	2	3	4	5	6
18 Care For Own Well-Being	1	2	3	4	5	6
19 Punish	1	2	3	4	5	6
20 Hurt	1	2	3	4	5	6

This set of items deals with how you currently **think** about yourself. Think about the kinds of thoughts that occupy your **mind** right **now** regarding who you are. For each item, please check the appropriate number matching your level of agreement that **best** describes your current thinking. Please do not skip any item.

I think I am _____.

(Place each word or phrase in the blank when answering each item).

I think I am	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
21 Wretched	1	2	3	4	5	6
22 Evil	1	2	3	4	5	6
23 Horrible	1	2	3	4	5	6
24 Of Good Quality	1	2	3	4	5	6
25 Worthy Of Respect	1	2	3	4	5	6
26 Dreadful	1	2	3	4	5	6
27 Loving	1	2	3	4	5	6
28 Worthless	1	2	3	4	5	6
29 Nice	1	2	3	4	5	6
30 A Good Person	1	2	3	4	5	6

Finally, in thinking through your attitudes toward yourself and self-offence, please consider the following statements:

I think I am	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
31 There really was no problem	1	2	3	4	5	6
32 I was never bothered by it.	1	2	3	4	5	6
33 I do not feel responsible for what I did.	1	2	3	4	5	6
34 I did not feel any remorse.	1	2	3	4	5	6
35 What I did was fair, and no justice was violated.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Mindfulness, Breath and Movement Break... 10-15 minutes

The Everett Worthington REACH Forgiveness Model (Moving Towards Reconciliation)

The Everett Worthington REACH Forgiveness Model is a structured approach designed to guide individuals through the complex process of forgiveness, moving towards reconciliation and emotional healing. The acronym REACH stands for Recall, Empathise, Altruistic Gift, Commit, and Hold, representing the key steps in this model. This method encourages individuals to actively recall the hurtful event, empathise with the offender, offer forgiveness as an altruistic gift, commit to the forgiveness experience, and hold on to forgiveness even in the face of doubt. By following these steps, the REACH model provides a comprehensive framework that helps individuals overcome resentment and anger, fostering a deeper sense of peace and readiness for reconciliation. This chapter explores the nuances of the REACH model, highlighting its application across various interpersonal and community conflicts, and its effectiveness in promoting lasting forgiveness and healing.

Before you move to REACH, gather participants for an in-depth and honest discussion of retribution, revenge and retaliation

- Guide them through the meaning of each action and how they are natural for those who are harmed.
- Ask questions such as:
 - Why are these acts so much easier than forgiving?
 - Where do we learn retaliation, revenge, and retribution?
 - Are there other ways of being and learning? How?
 - What does holy scripture say about an "eye for an eye?"

Activity: Leading participants through the REACH forgiveness model (small groups suggested)

Everett Worthington's REACH forgiveness model defines five steps to follow in the process of forgiveness, which is also a therapeutic rather than a theory of what naturally occurs. REACH

is an acrostic or acronym that cues three key steps to forgiving others and oneself. The model begins by asking people to identify the most difficult thing they ever successfully forgave. It helps people see that there are physical, health, psychological, relational, and spiritual benefits to forgiving but that forgiving is but one alternative for dealing successfully with injustices. Thus, the forgiveness intervention is for people who wish to forgive. No one should ever be forced or coerced to forgive. People are shown that forgiveness involves both a decision to forgive and an emotional transformation. First people are led through the REACH Forgiveness five steps.

NOTE: In response to the questionnaire below, take into consideration what your faith/religion teaches and also your feelings and emotions about your inner experiences toward the offence that was perpetrated against you or your community.

REACH Model of Forgiveness R = **Recall the hurt.**

To heal, you have to face the fact that you've been hurt. Make up your mind to not be snarky (i.e., nasty, and hurtful), not to treat yourself like a victim, and not to treat the other person as cruel. Decide to forgive and that you are not going to pursue payback, and you will treat the person as a valuable human being.

E = Empathise with your partner.

Empathy is putting yourself in the other person's chair. Pretend that the other person is in an empty chair across from you. Talk to them. Pour your heart out. Then, when you have had your say, sit in their chair. Talk back to the imaginary you in a way that helps you see why the other person might have wronged you. This builds empathy, and even if you cannot empathise, you might feel more sympathy, compassion, or love, which helps you heal from the hurt. This allows you to give up on some or all of the conditions you might want the perpetrator to meet in order to feel a relief.

A = Altruistic gift.

Give forgiveness as an unselfish, altruistic

gift. We all can remember when we wronged someone—maybe a parent, teacher, or friend—and the person forgave us. We felt light and free. And we did not want to disappoint that person by doing wrong again. By forgiving unselfishly, you can give that same gift to someone who hurt you.

C = Commit.

Once you have forgiven, write a note to yourself—something as simple as, "Today, I forgave [person's name] for hurting me." This helps your forgiveness last.

H = Hold onto forgiveness.

We write notes of commitment because we will almost surely be tempted to doubt that we forgave. We can re-read our notes. We did forgive.

Six Steps to Forgiving Yourself

If you are feeling guilt, shame, and remorse, you can apply these ideas to forgive yourself. But forgive yourself responsibly. To deal with your self-blame because you feel you did something wrong or did not live up to your standards, follow these three steps.

Step 1: Receive Forgiveness from a Higher Being or Power.

First, make things right with what you consider sacred. For many, that will be with God. But others might feel they have offended humanity or nature.

Step 2: Repair Relationships.

If you have hurt people, try to pick up the pieces. Even if you have done what feels like unrepairable damage, you can pay it forward so that perhaps others will not experience fallout from your acts.

Step 3: Rethink Ruminations.

Sometimes regret and remorse dominate us because we feel a bit perfectionistic. We can rethink those unrealistic assumptions.

Then, to create more personal peace, follow these three steps.

Step 4: REACH Emotional Self-Forgiveness. Apply to yourself the steps to <u>REACH Forgiveness</u>.

Step 5: Rebuild Self-Acceptance.

Accept yourself as someone flawed but precious. Often talking with someone is the key.

Step 6: Resolve to Live Virtuously.

Make up your mind not to repeat the same mistakes.

From the Forgiveness Intervention Workbook³⁵

Exercise 1:

Ask yourself: Why Forgive?

- Describe a time when you successfully forgave someone.
- What were the benefits?

Exercise 2:

Identifying the Benefits of Forgiving Often, Unforgiveness and Revenge are Seen as Legitimate Alternatives to Forgiveness.

- Below, list as many benefits of choosing forgiving as you can.
 - Include benefits to the physical health, mental health, relationship, and any other aspect of life (such as spiritual).
 - Once Exercise 2 below is completed and shared with their small groups, bring the group back together to discuss in a larger context.

Physical Health

Mental Health

Relationship

Other

³⁵ Everett Worthington, Forgiveness Intervention Workbook, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/518a85e9e4b04323d507813b/t/533c6be2e4b0cf4885e38a3a/139646870631 4/the-path-to-forgiveness-six-practical-sections-for-becoming-a-more-forgiving-person.pdf. Accessed June 1, 2023.

More Individual REACH Work - Assessing the Hurts (Once everyone answers these individually, give time for open reflection)

Think about the time that someone hurt you. Try to get back into how you felt around that period of your life, so you can remember vividly how you reacted to the hurt.

Describe your feelings when you [experienced] these hurtful actions.

(Write at least three sentences about your feelings)

Nurturing the hurt - Answer the following three questions:

- 1. Are there any ways that you are possibly nurturing the hurt in your mind now? Can you think of any ways that you think about the events that happened to you that may serve to continue your pain?
- 2. What are some of the [benefits] of nurturing your hurt?
- 3. What are some of the [consequences] of nurturing your hurt?

CHAPTER 5: WOMEN AS RECONCILERS

Overview

In the previous chapter, you learned about the challenges of forgiveness and the processes involved in forgiveness. You have also learned the effects of trauma, especially if it is ignored. You have also examined and explored several exercises of forgiving yourself and others. We now turn to the role of gender in facilitating reconciliation by focusing on women as reconcilers in this chapter. What is the role of women and girls in the reconciliation process? Women, through groups, activism, and empowerment programmes, can serve important roles in ensuring enduring peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

International actions in peacebuilding are increasingly recognising the role of women in peace and reconciliation. This is because the experiences of women and men in conflict differ significantly. After all, women are often vulnerable to gender-based violence, including mass rape, forced pregnancy, disease, and sexual slavery. They are also excluded or confined to a marginal role in conflict resolution and reconciliation efforts. Their limited access to education and the general cultural belief that women are too soft to be good leaders undermines their participation in peace processes, which in turn increases their vulnerability to violence³⁶.

Men and women can also perceive reconciliation differently.

Women and girls may be perceived to be too weak to participate in peace and reconciliation dialogue, which assumes the role of men to do better and must be included in the process. At the same time, since women are supposed to take care of children as men go out to seek out peace, women may

also model the same behaviours

in girls. However, women have proven to be efficient in peace and reconciliation as they have applied both formal and informal methods to bring about lasting effects on communities.

(If available, view here the film, Pray the Devil Back to Hell and then discuss)

Gender and Conflict

Men and women usually experience violent conflict and war differently. Understanding these differences is the first step to designing programmes that adequately take into account the different needs of women, men and children in conflict and post-conflict zones.

The role of women in conflict is mediated by cultural norms and what is expected of women, although these expectations change under conditions of great stress. In violent conflict, women are often the victims of violent war crimes, such as rape, which is sometimes used as a tool of warfare to humiliate and terrorise groups. In wars, women, like men, can be both the perpetrators of violence and victims³⁷ (Kumar, 2000).

Although women are the ones who remain at home during violent conflict, and they are expected to take care of and keep the children, home, and community together, there are other times when they can be perpetrators of violence. As women take on these greater responsibilities, their roles become redefined, and this can lead to tension in the community with men after they return when the conflict is over. If fighting enters home villages and communities, women, with their children and families, are displaced and must flee. Women and children thus become the largest groups of internally displaced or refugees. Under all of these conditions, women experience a great deal of fear, stress, and trauma.

³⁶ United Nations Development Progamme, Assessment on the Role of Women in Peace and Reconciliation in Oromia and Somali Regional States, 3, 4.

³⁷ Krishna, Kumar, Women and Women's Organizations in Post-Conflict Societies: The Role of International Assistance, Centre for Development Information and Evaluation, US Agency for International Development, Washington, DC, 2000. Available at http://www.genderreach.com/updates/1101conference.htm]

Men are both perpetrators and also victims of violence in war and civil conflicts. Men are usually the ones recruited, often forcibly, or "volunteered" to join as soldiers and fight in military combat and experience violence directly. If they survive, they are often left with major physical and mental wounds. Many may have amputated limbs, struggle with memories, and have difficulties coping with trauma, stress, and fear. When these men return home, they often find their homes and communities are reorganised and they are outside their former roles, which can contribute to increased alcoholism, violence in the home, and abuse toward loved ones and community amongst returning veterans.

Children experience violent conflict in very different ways as well. Girls, like women, are more likely to be victims of violence and rape while young boys are more likely to be forcibly recruited into fighting units. In some cases, young girls and boys are abducted and forced to travel with military groups. In these cases, girls are often abused and used as sex slaves, while boys are subjected to physical and psychological abuse to ensure they become brutal fighters. Drug dependency, and psychological and physical violence are commonly used to ensure that the children obey. During conflict, like normal times, children require food, safe water, and protection against disease, and more if they have special needs. On top of these needs, they require care if they are unaccompanied, physical, and mental healing of the war wounds, and a welcoming environment in the community if they are restarting school.

By identifying how conflicts impact women and men and girls and boys differently, we can develop programmes that better address their particular needs and concerns, as well as the underlying issues of injustice that may be present in structures and systems. Some questions for reflection on gender, children, and conflict for individual regions are:

Let participants reflect on the following questions:

How did women in your community experience conflict? What happened to them? What was expected of them?

How did children in your community experience the conflict? What happened to boys? What happened to girls? What was expected of them?

How did men in your community experience the conflict? What happened to them? What was expected of them?

How were the elderly men and women in your community affected by conflict?

What are the problems for men when they return home? What adjustments are required?

What are the problems for women when soldiers return home? What adjustments are required?

What are the problems for children when the conflict ends?

In traditional Africa, the role of women and girls in reconciliation was both active and passive. Some communities like the Igbo of Nigeria would offer a girl to the victims' family as a blood pact aimed at ending conflict between two warring clans³⁸. In recent years, women have taken other roles as educators, mediators, peace envoys, activists, and even combatants. Of course, the last role may not be accepted as a conventional way of reconciliation because it involves violence, which works against the peace process. It is, however, a way of recognising that even women aggressors may need forgiveness of self and even from others who are victims of combat or aggression. Nevertheless, it would be important to isolate and give examples of roles that women may need to take up as an initiative for peace (Here we shall need to read more on the roles of women as highlighted by Atuhaire³⁹. An excerpt is provided in the appendices to better understand.)

By identifying how reconciliation processes occur among women and girls and how they perceive these processes, it may be possible to develop programmes that can reinforce their existing roles.

³⁸ Atuhaire, A.P. the Role of Women in the Peace and Security Processes, 3, 2014

Some questions that may help us reflect on the role of women and girls in reconciliation are listed in the exercise below.

Group exercise: After reading the different roles of women as highlighted by Atuhaire (2014, p.3), let participants identify how women play/played a role their conflict.

Women as mothers Women as educators Women as mediators Women as activists Women as combatants

Exercise: Roles of Women in Reconciliation

The role of women in reconciliation can never be underrated. Across the world, different women have proven that just like their male counterparts, they too, can spearhead dialogues that lead to reconciliation. Let us read the story of how Liberian women changed the course of conflict and realised lasting peace and also how Ugandan women who were once child soldiers have been at the forefront of leading peace.

The Story of Liberian Women and the Quest for Peace

During the brutal civil war in Liberia, which lasted from 1989 to 2003, the country was engulfed in violence and suffering. Amidst the chaos and destruction, a group of courageous Liberian women, led by social worker Leymah Gbowee, organised a grassroots movement that would eventually change the course of the conflict and bring about lasting peace.

In 2002, Gbowee and a group of women from various Christian and Muslim backgrounds formed the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace. They united across religious and ethnic lines, recognising the common suffering of their communities and the shared goal of ending the violence. Dressed in white as a symbol of peace, these women organised daily sit-ins, peaceful protests, and prayers, demanding an end to the war. Their movement gained momentum, drawing international attention and support.

One of their most remarkable actions was the

"sex strike," where women refused to have sex with their partners until they committed to peace. This bold move highlighted the desperate desire for peace and the unique power of nonviolent resistance. The women's relentless pressure eventually led to the negotiation of a peace agreement in 2003, ending the civil war.

The Liberian women's movement played a crucial role in electing Africa's first female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, in 2005. Their efforts not only ended the war but also paved the way for women's greater involvement in politics and peacebuilding. Leymah Gbowee and her fellow activists demonstrated the power of unity, nonviolence, and determination in achieving peace, earning Gbowee the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 alongside Sirleaf and Yemeni activist Tawakkol Karman.

The Story of Ugandan Women and Their Journey from Child Soldiers to Peace Leaders

Uganda's northern region suffered for decades under the terror of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group notorious for abducting children and forcing them into soldiering. Among these abductees were many young girls, who were subjected to violence and forced marriages within the rebel ranks. As the conflict subsided, these women faced immense challenges in reintegrating into society, burdened by trauma and stigmatization.

Despite these hardships, many former child soldiers, especially women, emerged as powerful advocates for peace and reconciliation. One such group is the Women's Advocacy Network (WAN), founded by Grace Acan, herself a former abductee. WAN provides a platform for women to share their stories, support each other, and advocate for justice and reparations. Through storytelling and advocacy, they raise awareness about the unique challenges faced by women who were child soldiers, including stigmatisation, lack of access to education, and economic hardships. These women have been at the forefront of community-based initiatives to promote peace and reconciliation. They work tirelessly to heal the wounds of war, not only for themselves but also for their communities.

By participating in dialogue sessions, peace education, and trauma healing workshops, they contribute to rebuilding trust and social cohesion in regions still recovering from conflict.

Their efforts have also focused on advocating for the rights of war-affected women and children, pushing for government policies that address their specific needs. Through their leadership and resilience, these Ugandan women have transformed their painful experiences into a powerful force for peace, demonstrating the critical role of women in post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding. Both stories highlight the transformative impact of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, showcasing their resilience, courage, and leadership in the face of immense adversity.

Reflection questions specific to the participant's community – break into groups, discuss the questions below for 45 minutes, and then have them come back to share the most poignant narratives that were shared.

- 1. How were women involved in reconciliation processes in your community? What happened to them? What was expected of them?
- 2. How did girls participate in the reconciliation process and peace? What happened to them? What was expected of them?
- 3. What happened to women/girls after the reconciliation process?
- 4. What problems affected the participation of women in reconciliation process? How did the community adjust?
- 5. How did your faith community either encourage or discourage women's participation in reconciliation processes?
- 6. What roles do women in your community play in reconciliation? What are the challenges?
- 7. Are girls taught from an early age that their voices are needed and valued? Why or why not?

Reconciliation:

This refers to the improvement of relations

between parties who were formerly in dispute with one another and whose aim is oriented toward peaceful and just future relations against a background of injustices of the past.

Restoration:

This is a collaborative way of solving conflicts in which the concerned parties are allowed to be heard, understood, and respected. The relationship may be restored or transformed altogether.

Transformation:

The process in which conflicting parties move from a conflict-centred system to a peace- centred system.

Healing:

This is the process of preventing conflict between parties from escalating, stopping the evolution of violence, and dealing with the repercussions of violence.

Forgiveness:

An intentional decision to let go of resentment and anger.

Exercise:

- Write these five practices on a board or easel paper, in whatever order you choose.
- 2. Break the group into small groups and have them order these practices as they see fit.
- 3. Bring everyone back together, discuss these five practices, and ask the group to discuss which order these practices should be in, and discuss why they chose that order.

Perspectives on Reconciliation – Is Forgiveness the Same as Reconciliation?

Forgiving Means Reconciled?

Forgiveness is a different process from reconciliation, although it is related. There are different interpretations of the relationship between the two concepts. For some, forgiveness means the survivor was able to let go of the

resentment. It does not mean that the relationship is reconciled or back to "normal." In this case, forgiveness can come before reconciliation. For others, the process is the reverse: reconciliation comes before forgiveness. Cultural and religious contexts are very important in shaping this relationship as well.

Challenges of Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a process that involves many layers of meaning, recovering lost spaces, and addressing the dimensions identified above. Often people are afraid of reconciliation because they are afraid they will lose their rightful claim as victims of great injustice, or that they will be asked to forget the act that caused them pain, or lose the hurt that has become so familiar and even comforting. To get beyond these fears, and contemplate reconciliation, we need to first examine some of the dilemmas that reconciliation poses for us.⁴⁰

Forgive and Remember

For some, forgetting is important to move forward, and for others, remembering is critical. In peacebuilding, a common assumption exists that remembering is essential for true forgiveness. Denial is a common response to great injustice, and often survivors are told to "forgive and forget," which undermines their ability to tell their story and in doing so, regain their human dignity. Supporters must learn to stay through the pain and encourage survivors as they learn to live with memories of their experiences. It is also important for offenders to remember that to recover their human dignity, they must take responsibility for their actions and recognise the effect they have on the victims and survivors.

Does Forgiving Mean Accepting?

Frequently reconciliation has been misconstrued as only accepting and moving on without naming the injustice committed and seeking redress. Naming the offence as harmful and unacceptable is a crucial part of forgiveness and reconciliation. Survivors need to acknowledge their injury before they can let go of the resentment they feel because of the injury. How

the injury is acknowledged can be very different across cultures, as a comparison of sulh, or other traditional rituals and the Western legal system indicates.

Sulh is an Arabic term that translates to "reconciliation" or "settlement" and is commonly used in Islamic and Arabic-speaking cultures to describe the process of resolving disputes amicably. Sulh emphasises the restoration of peace and harmony between conflicting parties, often through negotiation, compromise, and mutual understanding. The concept is deeply rooted in Islamic jurisprudence and cultural practices, promoting the idea that resolving conflicts through peaceful means is preferable to prolonging disputes or engaging in adversarial legal battles.

Sustaining Reconciliation Work

When people work with those who have suffered trauma, the trauma can begin to affect them, listening to stories of pain and encountering victims of trauma during therapy begins to affect the helper since they are also human. The result is what is known as secondary trauma or compassion fatigue. Some of the symptoms include high levels of stress, chronic fatigue, diminished levels of self-care, somatic (physical) complaints like headaches, muscle aches, and more. Behavioural changes may also occur as part of secondary trauma. They include withdrawal from social contacts and pleasurable activities; increased levels of work and self-sacrifice; inability to be refreshed by sleep and recreation; drug and alcohol abuse; putting oneself unduly in high-risk situations; and increased levels of cynicism, anger, and aggression.

Workers in reconciliation and peacebuilding need to be clear about what kind of framework sustains them to prevent or limit secondary trauma, whether it is their worldview, a religious commitment, or a commitment to humanity in general. Maintaining spiritual and mental health is an important part of being an effective support to victims of trauma and violent conflict. Below are several things that peacebuilders can do to

⁴⁰ Adapted from Caritas Sierra Leone, 1996, (p. 241-244).

maintain their mental and spiritual health.

Becoming a More Forgiving Person

Forgiveness is a virtue that needs to be nurtured and cultivated for it to thrive. There are several ways a person can enliven this practice. Let us look at some of these practices.

• Active and Mindful Listening

Listening provides the opportunity to get in touch with who you are at the core. Listening can be done through meditation, prayer, or regular journaling. By listening to your inner voice, you can learn from your experiences, reconnect your peacebuilding efforts with your personal beliefs, be inspired, and renew your inner strength.

• Prayer and Meditation

Introspective prayer comes out of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, but other religions and faiths have aspects of prayer and learning to wait on God, through inward reflection. One does not always hear something in contemplation, but that does not negate the practice. The discipline of coming to stillness helps keep perspective amidst trauma and often overly busy schedules.

Meditation and prayer can help prevent overload from experiencing failure and witnessing suffering. For further ideas on contemplative prayer and meditation, seek examples from participants on what they practice. Record these and ask them to seek answers from other sources that can be useful to reconciliation.

Storytelling

Stories allow us to share our common humanity. Telling and listening to stories can affirm who we are and how we relate to those around us. By sharing stories, we connect at a more personal level with those with whom we are interacting. When we share with others who have experienced similar things, we develop networks of support that can sustain us through stressful experiences and trauma. Sharing stories can also help us work through personal stress and trauma and be part of a healing process.

Ritual

Performing rituals is another rich way of tapping our feelings and beliefs without necessarily articulating them. Rituals can be powerful in helping us deal with issues and find inner peace. As discussed above, rituals help us recognise important events, and permit us to connect and something larger than ourselves in ways that go beyond the constraints of words. Some examples of rituals include sulh, communion, fasting, and funerals, among many others.

Toward Wholeness: Restoration, Healing and Transformation

Bringing together parties who have experienced conflict and listening to their stories gives room for each to be understood. When one is listened to, it is easy to hear their part of the story without judging them and their feelings. It allows for respect because each one feels hurt by a conflict just like the other. In restoration, both parties are made to understand that the other also sustained harm from the conflict and it creates room for accepting one's role in the conflict and also to ask for forgiveness. Restoration can both repair a relationship or even transform it, fully and wholly, for a new experience.

Another way of ending conflict is looking for a means that takes away the resentment that fuels conflict. Communities cannot just end the conflict by mere cessation of it. A lot must happen in the background where the communities face their ghosts of bitterness and aggression toward the other who is perceived as a perpetrator. Dehumanisation must cease. One way of reaching this point is through forgiveness where the parties give up their right to resentment and embrace their offender with compassion and empathy.

Communities that have been reconciled from conflict tend to look for a way to sustain a newly found peace. In the Jewish tradition, the Teshuva has been adopted in many cases because it provides steps for reconciliation. The steps for reconciliation and transformation include acknowledging wrongdoing, confessing to God and the community, having deep public remorse, denouncement of sin, repaying what was lost

and requesting forgiveness three or more times where necessary, avoiding the conditions for the offence and finally repentance comes to be – where a person commits not to repeat an offence and then changes their habits⁴¹.

Teaching nonviolent communication methods of conflict resolution to communities can be also a useful transformative practice. Other practices may include truth and reconciliation commissions as was in post-apartheid South Africa and conflict transformation workshops, where participants are equipped with skills and insights for addressing conflict. Mediation may also be useful. The goal of such practices is summarised in Native Spirituality "We are as much alive as we keep the earth alive." The earth would be dead if everyone were to seek revenge. Maintaining peace gives peace to the world

Two Religious Perspectives on Forgiveness

Split into groups and ask them to read to each other what is below and then do the exercise that follows. Once they are done, bring them back together to discuss.

Christianity: Understanding how reconciliation occurs varies across Christian groups. For example, Catholicism highlights the role of the victim in initiating reconciliation and offering forgiveness based on a restored relationship with God from a Catholic perspective, whereas a Protestant perspective emphasises that the process needs to start with the offender asking for forgiveness. Another way to understand reconciliation within Christianity is to focus on restoring relationships. Hizkias Assefa (2001) identifies four dimensions of relationships in which reconciliation occurs: spiritual, personal, social, and ecological. Each dimension must be addressed to achieve full reconciliation.

Christian Perspectives on Forgiveness and Reconciliation

In Christianity, the concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation are central to the faith, with varying interpretations and emphases across different denominations. These differences highlight the diverse ways in which Christian communities understand the process of healing broken relationships and restoring peace.

In Catholicism, the sacrament of reconciliation underscores the importance of the victim in initiating the process of forgiveness. This perspective is rooted in the belief that forgiveness and reconciliation are not merely interpersonal acts but are deeply connected to one's relationship with God. The act of forgiveness is seen as a reflection of God's grace, which Catholics believe is received through the sacraments. In this context, the victim's willingness to forgive mirrors God's forgiveness of humanity, a fundamental aspect of the Christian narrative of redemption and salvation. The focus is on the transformative power of forgiveness to restore both the individual's relationship with God and with others.

On the other hand, many Protestant traditions emphasise that the process of forgiveness often begins with the offender's acknowledgment of wrongdoing and their request for forgiveness. This perspective places a strong emphasis on personal responsibility and repentance, viewing the offender's contrition as a necessary first step toward reconciliation. In this framework, forgiveness is a two-way street that requires both the offender's genuine repentance and the victim's willingness to forgive. This approach highlights the moral and ethical responsibilities of both parties in the reconciliation process.

Beyond these denominational differences, reconciliation in Christianity can also be understood through a broader framework that encompasses multiple dimensions of relationships. According to Hizkias Assefa (2001), there are four key dimensions in which reconciliation should occur to achieve complete healing: spiritual, personal, social, and ecological.

⁴¹ David Steele, J.Patton & T. Massarani. Religion and Reconciliation: Action Guide. 2023

Spiritual Dimension: This involves the individual's relationship with God. Reconciliation in this dimension focuses on spiritual healing and restoration, acknowledging that human relationships are influenced by one's relationship with the divine. This spiritual renewal is seen as foundational for the other dimensions of reconciliation.

Personal Dimension: This refers to the interpersonal relationships between individuals. In this dimension, reconciliation involves addressing personal grievances, misunderstandings, and injuries. The goal is to restore trust, communication, and mutual respect between individuals.

Social Dimension: This involves the larger community and societal relationships. Reconciliation at this level addresses social injustices, systemic issues, and collective traumas. It often includes efforts to heal communal divisions, promote social justice, and build a more inclusive and harmonious community.

Ecological dimension Dimension: This recognises the interdependence between humans and the natural world. Reconciliation here involves acknowledging and rectifying environmental harm and fostering a more sustainable relationship with the environment. This aspect of reconciliation is increasingly relevant in Christian discussions about stewardship and care for creation.

Each of these dimensions plays a crucial role in the comprehensive process of reconciliation in Christianity. By addressing all four areas, individuals and communities can work towards a holistic restoration that honours the interconnectedness of all aspects of life. This multidimensional approach reflects the Christian belief in the unity of body, mind, and spirit, and the interconnectedness of personal, social, and environmental well-being.

Islam: Reconciliation and forgiveness are also explored by Islam in the *Qur'an*. One of the most powerful uses of reconciliation in Islam is linked to two rituals: *sulh*, or settlement; and

musalaha, or reconciliation.

Sulh is a ritual that consists of three stages, which incorporate musalaha. In the first stage, the families of the victim and offender choose respected mediators (muslihs). In the process, they publicly acknowledge that a crime was committed.

The second stage is the reconciliation or *musala-ha* itself. Here, the mediators work to produce a pardon and settlement. In the process, the honour and dignity of both parties need to be upheld and restored. This is a form of modern-day *restorative justice*. Both parties must retain respect within the community even while a crime is acknowledged – this is particularly important because large groups of the community are involved, not just individuals as often is the case in Western, individualistic cultures.

In the third stage, a public ritual is held, which brings the community together as the main guarantor of forgiveness. The public ceremony of *sulh* includes four major stages:

- 1. The act of reconciliation,
- 2. The parties shaking hands under the supervision of the mediators.
- 3. The family of the offender visiting the home of the victim to drink a cup of bitter coffee.
- 4. The offender's family hosting a meal.

The ritual of sulh does not necessarily emphasise either the victim or offender's role in initiating the process but does underscore using a third party to help facilitate the process. In this way, community relations are maintained, and honour is preserved for both parties. Rituals, such as *sulh*, can be very powerful for acknowledging and resolving a grievance, and allow the victim, offender, and their families to resume some kind of relationship. "They will not there hear any vain discourse, but only salutations of Peace: and they will not have therein sustenance, morning and evening." (Surah 19:62)

Traditional African Religion and Reconciliation: Community life is very important in Africa, and an injury to one is

an injury to all. That is why people would say "we have been killed" if one member of their community was killed. If this corporate community is thus injured, the whole corporate community must be reconciled and is, therefore, involved in the reconciliation between (seemingly) only two members of the community. For the same reason, the offender is not the only one held responsible for the injury and he or she will not be punished as if he or she acted alone. The whole community takes responsibility for the deed⁴² (Mbiti, 2005:1).

Faith and Reflection Exercise

Divide participants in groups and ask them to share how forgiveness happens traditionally in their culture, through rituals, symbols, processes, and gatherings.

Once done, reflect and prepare participants for the final practical exercise below.

Final Practical Exercise: Build and Create Your Own Multi-Religious Science of Forgiveness Statement (two hours for this last exercise are needed)

- Read aloud and reflect on Annex I –
 The Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation.
- 2. Either break into groups or, work with the entire group and have them draw up their own Multi-Religious Science of Forgiveness Statement based on the Charter
- This doesn't have to be as in-depth as the example Charter (one to two pages, ensuring it has all the main components mentioned:
 - i. Multi-religious approaches to forgiveness.
 - ii. Science of forgiveness approaches

- to forgiveness.
- iii. Use of mindfulness, understanding of trauma, and all the practices of forgiveness, including reconciliation, healing, restoration, and transformation.
- iv. Ensure focus on women, girls, and youth.
- This is a process to begin empowering participants to understand all that they have learned and apply the information in a constructive way that empowers them to have agency and enable change in their communities.
- Share the final statement and encourage the participants to continue the work.

⁴² John, S. Mbiti, Africans Religion and Philosophy. Oxford: Heineman, 1969

CHAPTER 6: ESSENTIAL SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES – TRAINING THE TRAINERS (TOT)

Overview

The Training of the Trainer (ToT) chapter on Forgiveness and Reconciliation provides an in-depth exploration of the essential skills and knowledge necessary for fostering healing and restoration within communities. This chapter outlines a structured programme aimed at equipping trainers with a comprehensive understanding of forgiveness, both from a scientific perspective and within various religious traditions. The ToT sessions focus on building trust, addressing trauma, and understanding the role of forgiveness in conflict resolution. Through a blend of theoretical insights, practical exercises, and case studies, this chapter serves as a foundational guide for those looking to lead and inspire transformative practices in diverse cultural and social contexts.

In this section, we learn that forgiveness and reconciliation are not an individual affair. It encompasses an entire community, state, country, and ultimately, the world. In this section, we will outline the training methods that the team will employ to identify key trainers, who will play a crucial role in promoting forgiveness and reconciliation during conflict resolution. Additionally, we will identify the individuals who will be instrumental in training these peace trainers.

Among the people to identify here are:

• Religious Leaders (including women of faith and youth)

Teachers

Local government administrative leaders

Community group leaders

Materials, references, and exercises are provided to give

exercises are provided to give trainers background information as well as to provide the building blocks for

a challenging and creative learning environment for participants. The trainers will be expected to be familiar with the participants they are training, be sensitive to cultural and religious differences, and be aware of the potential context in which participants are operating when training new peacebuilders.

Throughout the world, there are numerous conflicts. It will be important to note that some of the participants might have experienced the same kind of conflict and, therefore, examples from countries that have experienced conflict, should be used with utmost reservation and if possible, a disclaimer or trigger warning should be offered by the trainers.

Planning a Workshop

For a successful workshop, it is important to analyse the participants, the context, their expectations, and specific details about the location of the training and materials that must be considered. This workshop can be divided into four parts: pre-workshop planning, design, actual workshop, and evaluation of the workshop. The trainer will be informed of the following guidelines to ensure the workshop is effective.

Pre-workshop Planning

Pre-planning the workshop helps mitigate most hurdles and allows the trainer to ask the right questions. Issues to be addressed are:

- Identifying the objective and long-term goal of the workshop (training trainers for peacebuilding).
- Identifying the participants (this will factor in the partners with interests in peacebuilding and reconciliation. The ideal group will be composed of 20-25 people).
- The trainer shall also gather information about the needs, concerns, and expectations of the participants and analyse the information provided by the participants.
 - o This can be done with the pre-survey.
- Planning the workshop logistics that is identifying a suitable place for holding the workshop, the required staff, and the length of time the workshop will take.

o At least four days are needed for this particular workshop.

Workshop Design

Once the trainer gathers and analyses the country's/region's programme vision for the training and the participants' needs, concerns, and hopes, the workshop can be designed to meet those needs. Some basic considerations for training design include:

- Allowing participants to get to know each other and feel comfortable within the group (see Chapter 1).
- Using several training methods to meet a variety of learning styles especially note if there are any who identify as abled differently (visually or hearing impaired, etc.).
- Incorporating a common experience or several, depending on the length of the workshop – that participants can draw on and link to their previous experiences and wisdom.
 - Common experiences provide something concrete that all the participants can relate to and engage in energetic discussions about.
 - If participants come from the same programme, they already have common experiences from which you can ask them to draw from.
 - If participants don't know each other, case studies, role-plays, parables, narratives, or other group activities inside and outside the workshop setting, create common experiences and cohesiveness.
- Allowing time for participants to share information, either during plenary or group work.
- Giving participants ample opportunity to reflect on their experience.
- Giving participants time to plan future action.

Case Studies

There are several case studies and excerpts that you can incorporate at your discretion. Some are specifically mentioned in the exercises, and others are there for consideration. These can be found under Annexes at the back of this toolkit.

Carrying Out the Workshop

- The purpose of all the planning is to run an effective and fruitful workshop from which participants leave feeling energised, and hopeful, and carry new ideas for effective multi- religious forgiveness and peacebuilding programming.
- Following a relationship-centred and participatory model of training means that the training should focus on participants and elicit their knowledge, generate analysis, and plans for future action.
- Check on logistical details before the workshop starts. These details can range from snacks, lunch, water, coffee, and tea breaks to the materials needed for exercises occurring that day, such as flip chart paper, newsprint, markers, or handouts.
- Use mistakes as learning experiences. Everyone makes mistakes.
 - When they happen, use them as an opportunity for group and individual learning, rather than leaving participants with a negative experience.

Facilitation and Training Skills

Under this subheading, we shall look at the role of a facilitator and the rationale for interactive participatory methodology. The trainer will be equipped with tips for effective facilitation, exercises for engaging and energising participants, incorporating group work (subgroups), and how they report.

Defining the Role of a Facilitator

Developing and implementing a training that is participatory and interesting is not an easy task. As a trainer, you will have to play multiple roles, sometimes as teacher or facilitator, and at other times as mediator or participant. Think about the times that you had a good learning experience - what was different about that experience? How did the teacher or trainer interact with you as a participant? What roles did he or she play? It is likely that this person involved you as a participant in the learning experience, paid attention to both the process and the content of the training, and pushed you to learn in a variety of ways. Training individuals requires many of the same experiences.

As a trainer using an interactive and participatory methodology, your role is similar to that of a facilitator. As a trainer, it is your role to teach the concepts in this toolkit to the participants.

The participants of this training will be adults, including women and youth ages 18 to 34 years. Therefore, during group discussions and in debriefing many of the exercises and skill activities, your role will require inclusive facilitation skills. The word facilitate means "to make easier". As a facilitator, your role is to make discussion easier by providing a process that enables participants to discuss content and ensure that all have a voice, encouraging women and youth especially, to be as vocal and participatory as they are comfortable with.

A facilitator is someone who is concerned more with the process than with the content. The content is what the group is talking about, while the process is how the group talks about the subject. A facilitator acts as an advocate for the process but stays neutral on the content. Content neutrality means not taking a position regarding the issues for discussion, or not having a stake in the outcome. Process advocacy means advocating particular processes that are inclusive and open and that allow everyone to participate in the discussions.

A facilitator has four functions:

- 1. To encourage full participation.
- 2. To promote mutual understanding.
- 3. To foster inclusive solutions.
- 4. To posit new critical thinking skills.

Energising the Group

During the training, participants are required to remain in focus, to maximise learning. The trainer is tasked with the provision of space for the group members to energise through different activities. Some activities that energise the group can be divided into different ways. Subdividing the training into different parts will serve a powerful role in ensuring the group remains focused now and then. Most of the lessons or topics in this training will last for about three hours. It is good for a facilitator to subdivide this time into units after which to engage the

group in energisers. Some activities may include breaks, singing games, storytelling related to the lesson/testimonies, stretching, or mild physical exercises. The trainer will select from any of these activities to ensure that the group is lively. It is important to note that most of these activities will be based on the day's topic and experience, to make it more contextualised.

Dividing Participants into Groups

Dividing participants into different groups as often as possible is a vital component of participatory learning. This reduces the monotony of the lecture method that is used in the group. A good facilitator looks for suitable ways of dividing members into subgroups, either by their characteristics, such as age, gender, type of experience they have had, religion, or even randomly, such as by birth month. Such an arrangement is meant to ensure equal participation in the training roles and to minimise time spent just giving information and one-sided participation in the training.

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ANNEXES

Annex I – The Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Introduction to the Peace Charter

Prof. Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia and Dr. Josef Boehle

The Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation was adopted by the 10th World Assembly of *Religions for Peace* which convened from August 20 to 23, 2019, in Lindau, Germany. The Peace Charter was developed over eight years in dialogues, symposia, consultations, and work meetings, starting in 2011. An editorial panel with thirteen members was formed in 2016 to jointly develop the Charter text and promote universal ownership, open inclusiveness and ensure a high-quality Charter from the beginning. The editorial panel consisted of the two Peace Charter Co-convenors, Prof. Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia (Chairman and Spiritual Leader GNNSJ and Co- president *Religions for Peace*) and Dr. William F. Vendley (former Secretary-General *Religions for Peace*), Dr Josef Boehle, the Director of the Peace Charter and of the editorial panel, and ten editorial panel members. Prof Azza Karam (former Secretary-General *Religions for Peace*)

joined the Peace Charter leadership team as Co-convenor in 2019.

There is an urgent and profound need for reconciliation in communities in conflict and coming out of conflict. Experience shows that conflict settlements and peace accords tend to be short-lived; and that conflicts resume in the absence of reconciliation, which includes addressing deep wounds, injustices, distrust, fear, and hatred. In conflict situations, very often urgent efforts to end physical violence do not address the important process of reconciliation, which needs to be advanced through truth-telling, accepting responsibility, embracing repentance, and transacting forms of restitution. This absence of reconciliation compromises peace settlements and thwarts true positive peace. *Religions for Peace* has long recognised that a deeper process of forgiveness and reconciliation is profoundly needed to achieve positive peace. Moreover, *Religions for Peace* knows well that religions have profound and unique resources that can—if mobilised and creatively adapted—contribute to reconciliation.

The Peace Charter will help to equip the *Religions for Peace* global family of affiliated multireligious bodies, and other like-minded groups, organisations, communities, and initiatives, for the important work of reconciliation by raising awareness, deepening understanding, and increasing reflection on the crucial role of forgiveness and reconciliation in sustainable positive peacebuilding.

The Peace Charter is a tool that can lovingly inspire, educate, and provide guidance in processes of forgiveness, reconciliation, and peacebuilding amongst persons, and communities of all types and nations. Importantly, it can also be a resource for healing painful historical memories within religions' various histories. It will also make a vital contribution to value-led peace education in formal and informal settings, thereby strengthening ever more the foundation for more just and peaceful persons, communities, and nations.

Contemporary Context and Relevance of the Peace Charter

(written by Bhai Sahib, Prof. Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia)

If there was ever an international currency for peace and prosperity in our lives – one that every person on our planet could access - it would be the currency of values that are sacred to us as humans. We would plan for an economy and education where qualities like compassion, integrity, contentment, humility and loving responsibility are to be gathered, used, exchanged and invested,

where the impacts of their presence or their lack are both noticed and noted to inform our next steps. It is this impactful, yet invisible, currency of values that inspires the International Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation.

When collective work on the Peace Charter first began in 2011, it emerged from a conviction to use the healing and restorative power of forgiveness to bring reconciliation and positive regeneration in a conflicted and impoverished world. This was strengthened by an awareness of many remarkable historical and current-day examples, where forgiveness was identified and applied as a peace-building resource to generate recognisably positive outcomes. There was a recognition too that to create conditions for forgiveness - and to willingly summon up and sustain it - is never easy. Whatever our technical or conceptual knowledge, forgiveness must be humanely inspired and cannot be demanded. For this, we must create forums to lend each other our lived experiences as well as knowledge and expertise.

Forgiveness, for the religious, has long been cherished as a faith-inspired virtue. If to exercise virtue is to 'live in God's image', forgiveness is the hallmark of the Divine presence ignited within us. For others, forgiveness is still somehow sacred. It emanates from an innate human wisdom that can be described as spiritual. Either way, out of all the qualities we can unearth from within us, forgiveness lies the deepest and is the most difficult to lift out. Its formation, like a diamond, occurs under the weight of untold heat and pressure, but its value makes it the most precious of riches we can discover and use.

Importantly, the Peace Charter arose from a sense of impending crisis and urgency. Today, this has escalated into conditions of emergency, that are pushing us to prepare for acute levels of mental, social, and environmental trauma for the foreseeable future. Globally, our societies and the earth itself are reaching a tipping point. As the ice caps melt, it is our human hearts that should be melting to pave the way for a seminal shift in our mindsets. As we edge towards a point of no return, a time has come for values and virtues like forgiveness to fully crystallise within our psyches and inform how we partner and plan to meet the unprecedented challenges before us. For this, spiritual traditions inform us, that we must discard our arrogance and the ingrained self-interest that drives divisions, injustices, and all forms of seen and unseen injury in the world. By doing so, we become more whole as humans, capable of healing and replenishing our interdependent lives, as part of an interconnected whole.

Further information can be found on the Peace Charter web site: www.charterforforgiveness.org

Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation

PREAMBLE

The vision of the Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation is that the process of forgiving is vital if healing and reconciliation are to take place, as part of our collective efforts to seek justice, harmony and sustainable peace.

Fostering and practising forgiveness has the power to transform memories and deep-seated responses to legacies of injustice, conflict and war. It can liberate people from being imprisoned in their pasts and long ingrained mental and emotional conditions. Faith and spiritual traditions guide and inspire us to awaken the best of our human potential, by practising compassion, mercy, kindness, love, forgiveness and reconciliation, and to positively reshape our destinies.

Forgiveness is understood as an activity arising directly out of a compassionate consciousness, rooted in the awareness that we all belong to one human family. Compassion is an indispensable spiritual disposition in every faith, religion, dharam, or deen, as well as for our everyday human relations. Forgiveness is fostered by our experience of unconditional love and mercy, and an inner calling to live magnanimously and responsibly. It stems from our ability to see a larger context to our individual and collective existence, and from our impulse to lovingly seek and forge genuine and sincere bonds with one another as brothers and sisters.

To see forgiveness as a most profound expression and manifestation of our spiritual and human nature, and a catalyst for inward and outward change, is at the heart of the Charter. To love one's neighbour as oneself means that the efforts to seek forgiveness for oneself are related to endeavours to forgive and receive forgiveness from the other. Our human journey of forgiveness and reconciliation can only be navigated freely and voluntarily. Sharing forgiveness can therefore only be inspired, not demanded.

Existing, inspirational examples of forgiveness compel us to practical and effective actions, leading to reconciliation, conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Forgiveness and reconciliation are an indispensable part of our journey to peace, in our interconnected and interdependent world and our quest for restorative justice.

Throughout history, acts of forgiveness have helped to de-escalate national and international conflicts, and to restore and sustain harmonious relationships in the daily lives of individuals, families, communities and societies. Insights from the lives of outstanding individuals and inspiring grassroots movements, combined with learning from a shared global heritage of sacred teachings, provide guidance to take forward the Charter's work.

By offering paradigms of forgiveness, the Charter inspires commitment and directs activities that contribute to a growing practice of forgiveness and reconciliation, both in public processes and in private settings, in order to foster healing, harmony and peace in a wounded and fractured world.

PURPOSE

We, people, mindful of our shared humanity, commit to practise and nurture forgiveness and reconciliation, to foster healing, harmony, justice and sustainable peace in our world.

PRINCIPLES

- 1. The Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation is the founding document of a worldwide movement of people, seeking forgiveness, reconciliation, justice and sustainable peace, being aware of the oneness of our human family.
- 2. We seek forgiveness, reconciliation and peace between individuals, families, communities, public institutions, states and religious traditions.
- 3. We believe that forgiveness and reconciliation are needed for peace to be sustainable, and to end cycles of violence.
- 4. We co-create reconciliation and peace, by seeking and receiving forgiveness. Forgiveness is the first step towards a deeper reconciliation.
- 5. We believe to be forgiving and to let-go of past burdens is in the hand of each of us.
- 6. We believe that forgiveness cannot be demanded from others, can only be freely offered and is for the benefit, freedom and inner peace of the one who forgives.
- 7. We believe forgiveness finds completion in becoming unconditional.
- 8. We aim to express respect, compassion, mercy, kindness and love in all our interactions with others.
- 9. We believe that peace is more than the absence of violence, and that it includes inner peacefulness as well as peacefulness with others and with the environment.
- 10. We join hands and reach out to others to free ourselves of destructive pasts, to heal personal wounds, to overcome conflicts and wars, in order to create a better future for all.
- 11. We draw upon the wisdom of the world's traditions, which include religious, spiritual, indigenous, and philosophical worldviews, as well as on our intuitive sense of compassion.
- 12. We seek cooperation with all interested and like-minded people, organisations, public institutions and the UN System, bearing in mind the interdependence and unity of humanity.
- 13. We affirm the equal rights and responsibilities of all women and men, as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the proposed Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities.
- 14. We practise open inclusiveness of all, regardless of gender, traditions, affiliations, and ethnicity.
- 15. We are committed to non-violence and restorative justice, always seeking peaceful resolutions to conflicts and wars, even if self-defence may be necessary in some circumstances.
- 16. We support all efforts and initiatives of healing, reconciliation and peacebuilding, and encourage intercultural, interreligious, and interethnic dialogue, understanding and cooperation.
- 17. We seek to foster harmony within our Earth community and unity amongst our human family, valuing the interconnectedness of all life.
- 18. We welcome as members and supporters all individuals, organisations and institutions who subscribe to the Preamble, Purpose, and Principles. We will seek affiliation with institutions and networks that support the Vision, Purpose, Aims and Objectives of the Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation.

Annex II – Pre-Su	rvey			
Full name:				
Country:				
Organisation:				
Religious affiliation	:			
Email address:				
Phone number:				
Gender (circle one):	:			
Male	Female	Prefer not to say	Other:	
Your age bracket (c	ircle one):			
20-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	More
Questions for considerable What do you hope to	deration: gain in this workshop	?		
What are the biggest and region?	concerns you have abo	out the notion of forgiveness in	1 your commun	ity, nation
What is your underst gaged multi-religious		of forgiveness and how can th	is mindful prac	tice be en-
Any additional comm	ments?			

Exercise One: Inhibition Breaking

Ask participants to write all their titles on a piece of paper then fold the paper into the smallest piece possible. The papers are then put in a box or bowl and participants are asked to shed them off to experience the process without inhibition. They will pick them up on the last day.

Exercise Two: Introduction Game

All participants stand in a circle for an introduction game. A ball could be involved with the first participant starting with "My name is X, and I pass the ball to Y." Y then takes the ball and says, "My name is Y, I have received the ball from X and I pass it to W." W then says, "My name is W, and I have received the ball from Y who received it from X." The game goes on with all sharing who gave them the ball and from where they received it until it reaches back to X who has to recite all the names.

Exercise Three: Sinking Boat

In this game, participants are informed that they are inside a boat and that it is sinking. Any chant cannot be used by the facilitator to indicate the danger. They then inform participants that lifebuoys will be thrown out and only a specific number of people can take them. When the facilitator shouts a number, participants should form groups of those numbers. The ones that fail to meet the numbers are eliminated.

Exercise Four: Coconut

Participants stand and are to write the word coconut using their bodies. For the first "C," participants curve their arms to form the letter "C." For the letter "O" they form an "O" above their heads with their arms. For the second "C" they curve their arms to form the letter "C" again. For the letter "N" they bend down with their arms down to form a lowercase "n." For the letter "U" they stand and lift their arms. Finally, for the letter "T," they stand and spread their arms horizontally.

Exercise Five: Singing

Participants are divided into two groups and given five minutes to agree on five nursery rhymes. The rhymes should be different, and none should be repeated. One group starts and mocks the other with a rhyme and the other group responds with another nursery rhyme. This is done until all the groups are done.

Exercise Six: Balloon Games

Each individual is given a balloon and a toothpick. They are asked to blow the balloons big and then instructed to walk around freely mingling with each other. In the process of mingling with the inflated balloons, each participant is instructed to pierce any other's balloon in the process of mingling. If one's balloon is pierced, they are out of the game.

Annex III – Post	-Survey				
Full name:					
Country:					
Organisation:					
Religious affiliation	:				
Email address:					
Phone number:					
Gender (circle one)	:				
Male	Female	Prefer not to say		Other:	
Your age bracket (c	ircle one):				
20-30	30-40	40-50		50-60	More
Please rate the follo	wing workshop session	ons			
DAY 1	Unsatisfactory	Average	Good		Excellent
DAY 2					
DAY 3					
DAY 4					
Questions for consid	deration:				
1. Which specific se	essions did you like be	st and why?			
0 101.1	P. 19 1	1 0			
2. Which sessions d	lid you like least and w	vhy?			

3.	To what extent were the workshop objectives and your expectations achieved?		
4.	What qualities do you think you still need to effectively engage in the science of forgiveness multi-religiously?		
5.	Please give suggestions of how we could improve this toolkit.		
6.	What follow-up activities would you recommend for the trainers to implement with participants?		
7.	Any additional comments?		

~ Religions for Peace

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