

Forgive Your Unfaithful Partner and Let Go of Anger

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By Dennis Ortman Updated: January 07, 2015

Categories: Coping with Divorce, Divorce Recovery, Health and Well-Being

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The final, and perhaps lifelong, stage of recovery involves forgiving your unfaithful partner. Those who have been traumatized are normally filled with rage at their offender. When you consider the harm she has caused you and your family, you may wonder if you ever want to, or ever can, forgive her. You might think to yourself, "I do not owe her forgiveness." That's true. Your forgiveness is a free gift. There is no obligation to show mercy. You may also wonder if you can ever get over the hurt and anger enough to say with sincerity that you forgive the wrong she has done. "It takes a saint to turn the other cheek," you reason. It certainly takes courage and humility to let go of anger and the desire for revenge and to replace it with kindness. But it is possible, with time, effort, and prayer

Just as those who are dying protest in anger that death is being imposed on them against their will, those who have been betrayed are outraged at what is taken from them. It is only natural to feel anger, to protest the injustice suffered. It is normal to close yourself off behind a wall of anger for protection. However, if that wall of anger becomes a permanent structure in your life, it will imprison you. Your world will shrink, and you will suffocate. At some point, for your recovery to proceed, you need to let go of your anger. It is for your own sake. If you refuse to forgive either yourself or your partner, you will remain in the grip of your anger and hurt. The anger will eventually consume you, seep out in ways beyond your control, and result in continued unhappiness. The desire to punish your partner will rebound as a loss of inner peace. The anger will also color your view of the world, making it difficult to trust others, because you will be ever alert to being betrayed again.

Paradoxically, entering the fiery furnace of your anger provides an opportunity to purify your love. Let me explain. The opposite of love is not hatred, but indifference, the avoidance of intimacy. Both anger and love are passions directed toward those we care about. Intimacy is always a risk, approached with fear and trepidation, because when we care about another we open ourselves to the inevitability of being hurt. We allow ourselves to become vulnerable to another. Because we are unique individuals, misunderstandings, disappointments, and separations happen often in every intimate relationship. Infidelity provides a near ultimate test of love. At that moment of betrayal, our vulnerability is exposed. Our lover has become our enemy, and we naturally react with anger to nurse the wound. By embracing the rage we feel at the betrayal, any superficial consolations we received from the relationship are destroyed. The ensuing struggle to forgive and love again produces a different quality of love, a more mature and wiser love. As Jesus repeatedly taught his disciples and demonstrated by his life and death,

the highest form of love is the love of our enemy, of those who have harmed us. The price of such a love is a dying to ourselves, a generous giving of ourselves for the good of another, without expectation of return.

From the book TRANSCENDING POST-INFIDELITY STRESS DISORDER: THE SIX STAGES OF HEALING by Dennis Ortman © 2009, published by Celestial Arts/Ten Speed, an imprint of The Crown Publishing Group.