



FORGIVENESS - AT THE EDGE OF ETERNITY

by Brigitte B. Nussbächer



A true story of father and daughter: no matter how long a relationship was destroyed and seems lost, there is always - as long as a person lives - the possibility of forgiveness and finding to each other.

YOM KIPPUR

For the time between the Jewish New Year Rosh HaShanah to the Day of Atonement Yom Kippur the focus is reflecting on transgressions and asking for forgiveness.

During these days, Jews seek to make peace with all people by forgiving others and also asking for forgiveness themselves.

As the sun sets, Yom Kippur begins and the first stars begin to twinkle, a holy silence settles over the land. Israelis dressed in white make their way to the synagogue. Jewish prayers, songs of atonement take hold of the soul. At the end of this day, the shofar is sounded.



It is the call for forgiveness for the sins of our generation. Because: Whoever forgives a person for having hurt him is freed from the burden associated with it - and forgiveness by God is preceded by mutual forgiveness.

My personal experience about what blessings can be released through forgiveness, happened during the three last days with my father - on the edge of eternity.

THE PRICE OF FORGIVENESS

In my youth, I knew nothing about Yom Kippur.

As a child, I had learned that you ask for forgiveness when you had made a mistake or had brought guilt upon yourself. I associated it primarily with admitting one's own wrongdoing and repenting of it. It was part of interpersonal interaction, a matter of good manners and social competence.



Later I learned that forgiveness also has to do with God. God, before whom our guilt gathered. This was a completely different dimension: "the wages of sin is death" – the death of the guilty one. That was hard - and hopeless.

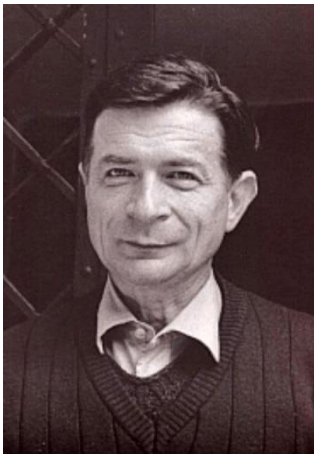
Then I heard that God so loved his human children that he himself had paid for their guilt. This outlines the whole scope of forgiveness: that guilt never simply passes away or expires, but always demands an atonement. That mercy means nothing other than someone else is paying the debt.

Alternatively, I understood that retribution is the attempt to force or wrest this atonement from the other person; I grasped the perpetuum that is triggered by this, as well as the hopelessness of the vicious circle that is created by the fact that atonement always continues to demand atonement.

And slowly I began to understand that forgiveness required the forgiver to relinquish precisely his right to retaliate, or to pay the deficit, the debt itself.

Which was sometimes difficult, very difficult. Especially when one did not really want to forgive, because what the other one had done was so serious and so painful. And because one perhaps also assumed that he would do it again and again.

MY FATHER



That's what had happened to me with you. You had hurt me too often and too deeply.

You were my father, but we had lived a lifetime like two parallels that never touched: within sight of each other, but never together.

You went your way, unswervingly. You had set yourself the goal of creating a historical monument to the Transylvanians, a people that ceased to be. For this you invested every free minute and nothing else seemed important to you. You lived in your world and I could not find access.

[The Transylvanians were a German minority in today's Transylvania/Romania, which before belonged to the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. In 1918 Transylvania was assigned to Romania. The Transylvanians immigrated in the 12th century at the invitation of the Hungarian King Geisa II. to develop the land and defend it against invasions. They were very successful and shaped the region economically and culturally until the communists came to power in 1944. After the bloody revolution of 1989, when the communist Ceausescu regime was overthrown, over 90% of the German minority emigrated to Germany and Austria.]

No matter what life confronted us with: whether the political exclusion by the Romanian secret service "Securitate" or the serious illness because of which my mother was taken away to an institution for incurables: we did not carry this burden together, but each one for himself. I knew thousands of external details of your daily life but we never talked about what the other thought or felt.



When you began to receive international honors for your historic life's work, I was happy to see that you had come very close to your goal: You had succeeded in creating something enduring for the future. Even if I had to do without you all my life, something valuable had been created in return, which I could respect and appreciate.

But even that could not fill the void between us... for 48 years. In the meantime, thousands of kilometers and borders separated us.

You seemed to have forgotten me: You gave away our family house and appointed a stranger as your general heir: both for your scientific works and for all your material and financial assets.

Your last will, with which you disinherited me, was the final forte of the message I had heard from you all my life: that I meant nothing to you.



THE NEWS

And then came the news that you were sick and had only a few weeks to live. The news came not from you, but through others. I had not anticipated it to touch me. I expected it to be more of a release for me because this bitter part of my life would be gone and the wounds would slowly heal. I hoped to finally be able to close the door behind this painful chapter of my life.

But when this news came, an imperative suddenly surrounded me with incredible clarity: that I would make the long journey to you - and that I had to forgive you: everything and unconditionally.

I did not associate any hope with it - I only knew that there was no alternative. In the few days until my journey to Transylvania/Romania, I tried to prepare myself inwardly by saying that I forgive you but also to feel this and to stand behind it. Still the pain and anger inside me remained.

I FORGIVE YOU

Then I was standing in front of your bed and you were lying in front of me, so shockingly slimmed and small that it seemed as if there were only a few remnants of you left. Nevertheless, I had not been too late. But although mentally you were completely lucid, there was silence between us and an awkwardness that had grown in 48 years: There was too much between us.



But I tried to show you that I was there, that I was there for you and finally I spoke it out: I told you that I had missed you all my life and how much it had hurt me to be forgotten by you, but that I forgave you everything: freely and unconditionally. And then I asked you to forgive me.

You seemed surprised, you seemed affected. Then, quit casually, you acknowledged that you had been neglecting me all my life and that I had not done negative things in your life as you had done in mine.

We didn't burst into tears, we didn't hug each other either, but we had met each other on the threshold of death and we had cleared things up. Finally, I said goodbye to you - unsure if you would survive the night.



THE BLESSING OF FORGIVENESS

And then the miracle began: in the 3 days that followed - imperceptibly at first - a complete change set in. You mobilized unimagined energy reserves and did not want to let me go. We, who had never communicated, suddenly spoke for hours. Time flew by. You made jokes, laughed, even sang. I learned more from you and about you in those hours than ever before. But you also listened to me and tried to give me little joys. We were closer than ever before.

Was it because my forgiveness had torn down the wall that had separated us for decades? Had it freed us both to reach out and respond to each other? Had it made love possible?

Was it possible to achieve inner freedom through forgiveness? Free from ballast and free for new dimensions? If so, then forgiveness not only wrung something from the forgiver, but also gave him something himself. Could it be, that forgiveness not only demanded a high price, but also brought a high gain?

HOURS LIKE DIAMONDS

We both knew that these few days were all we ever had and would have together and they passed irretrievably. We could not hold on to the time or prolong it, we could only use it, make it as beautiful as possible for each other and absorb it with everything in us.



You had decided to give me a farewell gift and you risked the goodwill of the person whom you had appointed as your general heir. Because you had already given him everything of your belongings, you could not give me anything, without taking something away from him. But then you did exactly that. You decided to take action and stand up for me in a way you had never done before. It was as if the gap that had always existed was suddenly closed. The word "Father! My father!" was filled with meaning for me for the first time.

But already the last day dawned. They were hours like diamonds, full of unshed tears, under enormous pressure - but also of inconceivable beauty and clarity.

Suddenly you told me that for years you had believed that I was not your daughter. Today, the resemblance to you was written all over my face, but as a child it wasn't necessarily so. And you said, that my mother had done everything to keep me away from you. She had succeeded only too well.

But you also shared how you and my mother had become close in a wonderful way in the last years and in the last months of her life. You had recorded her last time in a diary and asked me to read from it to you. It was a strange moment: It was as if through my reading aloud, time had turned back and I was experiencing this last time of hers with you. In my mind, you and I stood hand in hand at my mother's grave and said goodbye to her. But it didn't feel like goodbye, it felt like we had met on the threshold of eternity. When I stopped reading, you said with a tear-streaked face, but smiling: "This was our finale con brio".



I asked for your blessing. We had prayed to the same God for years, but never together. The chasm that separated us had permeated all areas. But now you blessed me and I felt as if invisible hands were wrapping protectively around me.

And then you hugged me. In 48 years we had never done that. It was the first and the last time at the same time. Completely foreign, but indescribably beautiful. We had arrived - at the very end - at each other. I had experienced my father for 3 days and this found expression in this very conscious gesture!

On June 21th , the day of the summer solstice, the third anniversary after the death of my mother you finally left this earth. You were not afraid of death. You had made your peace with God and mankind and were looking full of serenity into another future. And I imagined your smile when you could see that God had fulfilled your wish to come to Him on that very day.

FOREVER

I was torn apart by a wild, merciless pain. We had just taken our first steps together, sipped from the cup of connection. That could not be all. What would survive, what and how could I preserve those moments? I did not want to lose my father again.

Finally, I was comforted by the thought that I recognized the similarities and the framework of the qualities he had bequeathed to me behind my personality and thus him in me.

And so I wrote that night:

Dear Gernot,

No, I will not say goodbye to you - I will hold you in my arms like someone you have found and not like someone you are parting with.

When I came to you, I thought: from real parallels they say that they touch each other in infinity, because the space becomes another and there is a change of perspective. And so I had only the hope of eternity

BUT we have reached and touched each other - now! here! - not only in eternity.

No, I will not say goodbye to you! I will always keep your blessing that you gave me at the farewell - and a part of you as well. Because whatever happens with your earthly inheritance, I, as your only child, carry in my genes your other, imperishable inheritance and so you will be a part of me and I will keep you - forever!

Brigitte





THE RING

During the time after the desire grew in me to have something real, something concrete from my father in my life, something that accompanied me. I had the "Golden Badge of Honor of the Republic of Austria for his services as a historian, writer and archivist" which had been awarded to him by the Federal President of Austria. But that was too impersonal for me. It was not something I could feel like being a part of myself.



Two months later, I came across a gold ring from Israel with a Hebrew inscription that read, "I found the one my soul was seeking". The moment I saw it, I knew: This is it!

A ring from this land that is closer to me than any other. Made of gold, the symbol of permanence, with a text stamped on it that for me expressed our meeting: Finally I had found him, my father, whom my soul had always sought.

I decided to pay for the ring with my father's farewell gift: Thus it became a posthumous gift from him, as a sign of connectedness beyond death!

**Since then this ring accompanies me ...
and reminds me of the miracle, that was made possible by forgiveness:
that for three wonderful days I had a father!**



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