

The Gift of Forgiveness Releasing the Drama Triangle

By David Emerald Womeldorff

December is the season of giving in many parts of the world. Multiple religious and spiritual traditions celebrate the season as a holy time. In the Northern Hemisphere, we also acknowledge the longest night and the beginning return of light and warmth (at least eventually), while our friends in the Southern Hemisphere celebrate the fullest of days.

One of the greatest gifts we can give in this time of celebration is that of forgiveness to the past and present persecutors and uninvited challengers in our lives.

We may accomplish this directly and explicitly or, as is often the case, in a more private and reflective way. One of the practices that I have used during this time of year is to write a letter to the person or situation I choose to forgive (remember a persecutor/challenger may be a person, condition or circumstance) and to then burn the letter in a fireplace. Watching it catch fire and turn to ashes is a way of turning the darkness of the experience being forgiven into a burst of light - and then disappearing with the smoke.

This letting go can be liberating and renewing. It is not about condoning or denying that we have experienced being victimized. It is, however, an opportunity to grow by looking for lessons learned that we can apply to life as we move forward. Doing so then "converts the curse into a blessing" (as Henri Nouwen once observed).

Professionally, I experienced this in my relationship with a particularly challenging boss. After much soul searching and reflection, I was able to forgive my manager (in a private and reflective way) and came to really see the gift in the difficult experience, which was to clarify my professional passion and what I wanted to create in my work experience.

Forgiving need not be outwardly focused. We may also need to give ourselves this precious gift. There are times when we are our own worst persecutors!

I had the opportunity to experience this first-hand a while back. After 2 days of wonderful The Power of TED* workshops in Toronto, I was at the airport working on my laptop and actually looking forward to the long flight home and the time to answer emails. I looked at my watch, decided that I had plenty of time to get something to drink, put my laptop down on a small table next to my chair, got up... and promptly tripped on the power cord and pulled the laptop off the table onto the hard floor. Long story short - that was the end of my hard drive!

There was no one to blame but myself. I replayed the scene of the "crime" and my clumsiness over and over again: in the middle of the night; while trying to resuscitate the hard drive; after leaving the laptop at the repair shop where I learned that the sound I heard

from the bowels of my computer was what the technician called "the click of death." My reactions were a perfect illustration of the drama triangle, I was both victim and persecutor and I wanted someone, somewhere to somehow be my rescuer.

I then I remembered this quote from The Power of TED* (*The Empowerment Dynamic):
"forgiveness is giving up all hope of having a better past."

As many times as I replayed the scene, there was never going to be a different ending. The deed had been done. So, slowly and over a few days, I came to forgive myself and to learn from the experience. I limped through a week with an old desktop, doing my best to stay in communication. Over time, I came to cultivate some gratitude for the desktop and webmail - and, most especially, for the web-based back up service that allowed me to eventually recover everything except for a few days of email. I also learned the value of practicing "presence" any time I am using this now-revived laptop.

Forgiving oneself and offering the gift of forgiveness to other people, conditions or circumstances in our lives is a supreme act of generosity that is fitting for this season of giving and re-turning toward the light.