The Theory Behind Forgiveness, by Ken Wilber

I always liked the _Course's_ [http://www.acim.org/]reliance upon forgiveness as a way to remeber the true Self. This is a somewhat unique approach, found in few of the other great wisdom traditions, which usually stress some form of awareness training or devotion. But the theory behind forgiveness is simple: The ego, the separate-self sense, is not just a congnitive construct, but also an affective one. That is, it is propped up not just by concepts but by the emotions. And the primal emotion of the ego, according to this teaching is fear followed by resentment. As the Upanishads put it, "Wherever there is other, there is fear."

In other words, whenever we split seamless awareness into a subject versus an object, into a self versus an other, then that self feels fear, simply because there are now so many "others" out there that can harm it. Out of this fear grows resentment. If we are going to insist on identifying with just the little self in here, then others are going to bruise it, insult it, injure it. The ego, then, is kept in existence by a collection of emotional insults; it carries its personal bruises as the fabric of its very existence. It actively collects hurts and insults, even while resenting them, because without its bruises, it would be, literally, nothing.

The ego's first maneuver in dealing with this resentment is to try to get others to confess their faults. "You hurt me; say you're sorry." Sometimes this makes the ego feel temporarily better, but does nothing to uproot the original cause. And, as often as not, even if the person does apologize, the likely result is now hatred of them. "I knew you did that to me; see you just admitted it!" The fundamental mood of the ego: never forgive, never forget.

What the ego doesn't try is forgiveness, because that would undermine its very existence. To forgive others for insults, real or imagined, is to weaken the boundary between self and other, to dissolve the sense of separation between subject and object. And thus, with forgiveness, awareness tends to let go of the ego and its insults, and revert instead to the Witness, the Self, which views both subject and object equally. And thus according to the _Course_, forgiveness is the way I let go of my self and remember my Self.

I found this practice extremely useful (...) My ego was so bruised, so

injured -- I had collected so many insults (real and imagined) -- that forgiveness alone could begin to uncoil the pain of my own self-contraction. The more I got "hurt", the more contracted I got, which made the existence of "others" all the more painful, which made bruises all the more likely. And if I felt I couldn't forgive others for their "insensitivity" (in other words, the pain caused by my own self-contracting tendencies) then I used another affirmation from the _Course_: "God is the love with which I forgive."

- Ken Wilber from "Grace and Grit"

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