

Transformative Forgiveness: From Self-healing to Others-healing

Gabriela Mihalache

PhD Student – Institute of Transpersonal Psychology

How do some individuals forgive that which was seemingly unforgivable? This is the main research question of this study, which examines transformative forgiveness following traumatic events.

A new integrative definition and a new conceptualization of transformative forgiveness as an exceptional human experience are presented. Transformative forgiveness is defined as a complex process of gradual transformation of consciousness, transpersonal in nature, developing in the interpersonal context, but primarily intrapsychic. Its dynamics are studied mainly at the individual intrapsychic level, in order to understand its transformative impact and how it develops, along with its facilitators, inhibitors, accompaniments, and aftereffects. In a qualitative heuristic research design, data collection was accomplished through a questionnaire and in-depth interviews. Study of journals, published books, and other creative works added another data dimension.

Positive inner transformation becomes salient in some individuals affected by considerable trauma and subsequent forgiveness. Twelve such individuals were selected from different religious and ethnic backgrounds, answering thus a need in the field to explore forgiveness in different religions. A number of participants have survived homicide or suicide of close family members, and have succeeded not only in forgiving the perpetrator but in becoming national activists for social issues, such as peace, restorative justice, and youth non-violence. Hence, forgiveness took them from self-healing to others-healing, a process of expanding meaning and value.

Synthesizing the results, a complementary perspective seems to be emerging, that integrates psychological and theological approaches to forgiveness.