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## **THE SEASON OF FORGIVENESS**

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At this holiday time of year, should the spirit so move a single parent, she or he might want to consider the most powerful giving of all, FORGIVENESS - forgiving any grievances that linger from divorce.

For former marriage partners, there are two grievances divorce can commonly engender depending on the role in divorce she or he has played. There is the role of the DIVORCE INITIATOR and there is the role of the DIVORCE REACTOR. Each role carries its own potential for pain.

If a single parent was initiator of divorce, deciding to end the marriage in order to begin a happier life, there can be THE GRIEVANCE OF GUILT over causing suffering to one's children (and to one's spouse).

If the single parent was reactor to divorce, left to cope with feelings of loss and betrayal, there can be THE GRIEVANCE OF RESENTMENT at being cast aside, perhaps for another, perhaps left with responsibility for the children's emotional healing and primary care.

It can be hard for the divorce initiator to forgive herself or himself for causing the children pain. It can be hard for the divorce reactor to forgive the ex-spouse for injury abandonment has done. Yet it is only through forgiveness that the burdens of guilt and resentment can be lifted.

### **The Divorce Initiator and The Grievance of Guilt**

Guilt arises from blaming oneself for a failure, regret, or wrongdoing. Guilt can either be constructive or destructive. In divorce, CONSTRUCTIVE GUILT accepts responsibility for knowingly making a personal decision for one's personal happiness that will cause sorrow to one's children. Denying this responsibility would not only be dishonest, it might encourage confused children to blame themselves for the break up of the marriage. To various degrees, children pay emotional costs for parental divorce - grief from divorce at first, then having divided family contact with parents ever after.

DESTRUCTIVE GUILT occurs when the divorce initiator continues to punish herself or himself after the divorce for the children's hurt, trying to compensate for their suffering

and loss. Unhappily, these acts of compensation only reinforce parental guilt and can even encourage children to engage in parental blame.

After accepting responsibility for moving to end the marriage, the divorce initiator needs to forgive himself or herself in order to desist from paying emotional penance ever after.

### The Divorce Reactor and The Grievance of Resentment

Resentment arises from holding a grudge against another for some offense that was done. Anger is a response to perceived mistreatment. "That was wrong!" "That shouldn't have happened!" "That was unfair!" It takes holding on to anger to create resentment, nourishing it with continued grievance to keep it alive, to allow it to grow. It takes acting on resentment to create revenge.

Like the burden of guilt, the burden of resentment is a punishing one. Alcoholics Anonymous puts it succinctly: "Resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die." It's hard to punish others with resentment without becoming embittered yourself.

Resentment toward the ex, in addition to creating loyalty conflicts for children who feel forced to choose which parent is most at fault when both are loved, keeps the divorce reactor in a "married" state. Love and loathing are both passionate connections; and the divorce reactor is still "wed" to the ex through hate.

The purpose of forgiving the divorce initiator for abandonment or betrayal is not to relieve that person of responsibility. The purpose of this forgiveness is to allow the divorce reactor break free of emotional entanglement by letting the toxic burden of resentment go.

So: in the spirit of this holiday season give yourself the gift of forgiveness. Let go recrimination and start the New Year guilt and resentment free.