

Forgiving Ray

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was
you.

– Lewis B. Smedes

After reading the last chapter you have hopefully decided to never imprison the spirit of a loved one, and you are eager to know the best way to help us. Our realm has many different levels of experiencing, and the more free we are, the more we are able to be fully present, to develop spontaneously and joyfully. Again, this is comparable to childhood. Children who receive love, support and encouragement will explore life openly and with confidence. The positive feelings received during youth remain with them their entire life, positively influencing them. Similarly, being loved and remembered stays with us on our journey. Therefore the biggest favour you can do is to forgive us. But forgiveness is often the hardest thing for the living to do. After all, we took ourselves away from you, by becoming ill, by having an accident, by killing ourselves or by getting killed, or by simply slipping away. And we often 'choose' the worst moment to do so too.

If you can forgive us bit by bit, that's fine by us; any 'flavour' of forgiveness helps us. Nothing keeps us in shackles like the resentment from our loved ones, and nothing frees us more than their forgiveness. The degree to which we stay connected to our loved ones' resentment depends on how we feel about the circumstances of our death. When I discovered that my incapacity to open up to others had played a major role in my death, I also understood that this had been my ego. Fear is ego after all. That made me feel bad enough to be open to developing

a codependent relationship with my parents or fiancé, had they been inclined that way.

It has taken a while to understand what I was responsible for, and what I wasn't. I had been a 'good girl', and didn't need forgiveness – or so I thought. All this changed after I took my own life. To say people have been angry with me is an understatement – and they have taken their time to forgive me! I was curious to know how someone less 'innocent' than me had dealt with the consequences of their actions. I connected with a spirit who had made a really messy exit, and whose reasons to be ashamed and full of regret were many, but who didn't become involved in codependent relationships:

Ray was 53 years of age when he was brought into hospital after he had parked his car against a tree at 100kph, drunk at the wheel. Ray's body was in a bad way and, after consultation with the medical team, Ray's family said their goodbyes and life support was turned off. R.I.P. Ray. Not! There was a passenger in Ray's car and she clearly had been feeling the heat – she wasn't wearing much at the time of the accident, and the paramedics had found her bra wrapped around Ray's neck.

During his life Ray had been a sales representative for a wholesale company. He had travelled extensively for his job, and although he had always been a loving husband and father, he and his wife had been close to breaking up three times during their 22-year marriage – each time for the same reason. The first time was quite early in his marriage, after Lisa, his wife, had found a restaurant receipt in Ray's papers when she was looking for a gas bill. On the back it read: "Thanks for a lovely weekend, cowboy!" It was signed "Ella", and she had scrawled love hearts next to her name. Ray promised it would never, ever happen again and all

was well until Ray's boss called home to speak to him. Lisa was home alone as Ray had left on a business trip the day before. Somehow their marriage survived that episode, but things became shaky again when he admitted contracting herpes a couple of years later. In the end, the marriage outlived Ray. After he died, Lisa and the children were devastated, just like every other family in that situation is, but as well as grieving they had to face other feelings as well.

The children were babies during their parents' first crisis, and the third crisis – the herpes case – was literally never spoken of. That's because Lisa refused to speak to her husband for an entire month after having been confronted with evidence of yet another betrayal. The second incident was accompanied by a loud and stormy scene, perfectly audible by the children, and probably by the rest of the street. That was the first and last time the children ever heard their mother scream. Her behaviour had made the two girls feel scared and unsafe, but afterwards Ray had reassured them, and promised to never make Mummy that angry again. He thought a family holiday would do them all good, and packed them all off to Disney World. Nothing like a visit to the Land of Mickey Mouse to erase bad memories for an 8 and a 10 year old!

Neither of the girls had given their parents' marriage much thought after that. They assumed that their parents loved each other and that they would grow old as a couple. At the time of their father's death they were in their early 20s, an age where you don't yet think of your father as a man with needs other than those of a family man. Suddenly they had to think of their father as someone's lover – and that someone was almost as young as they were. That was about all they would ever learn about her,

other than that she was a passenger in the car with Ray. After being discharged from hospital, she let the family know she had nothing to say to them and that they should count themselves lucky she didn't sue Ray (through them) for having put her in danger.

Besides having to deal with the existence of this charming woman, Ray's daughters had to face the outside world. It had been impossible to keep the circumstances of his death a secret, and in a way this was beneficial for the two young women as it made going into denial impossible. It also made them talk about their feelings, which took pressure off their 'anger-cooker'.

On the other hand, the fact that their father's behaviour was common knowledge was humiliating and confusing. It made them hate him for exposing them to this heartbreaking and deeply embarrassing situation, but at the same time they wanted to defend their father, they wanted to tell everyone what an amazing dad he had been – the best, by far the best. They didn't even know who they were defending anymore, they were lost as to who their father had been.

Ray had been a larger-than-life boy who never really grew up.

Like his father he married a 'good' woman, one who had characteristics that he lacked, such as innocence, naivety and honesty.

To Ray, Lisa's integrity and seriousness had been 'cute'. He had honoured his marriage in the sense that Lisa and later his daughters never went without, and even though Lisa was known for her modesty and kindness, she did love having the best house in the street. One day, a couple of years into their marriage, and just after Ray had returned from a business trip, Lisa mentioned the new alfresco area her uncle was building. Two months later, after Ray received a bonus from work, he gave Lisa her carte

blanche to buy what she wanted for their new outdoor area.

Without any doubt, their alfresco area outshone Lisa's uncle's.

This incident summed up their entire relationship.

Even though Ray loved his wife, he could never just be satisfied with family life. Lisa was sexually loving and willing, but she was 'vanilla', while he was into every taste possible. Lisa looked up to her husband: to her he was strong, handsome and sexy. She had never quite understood why this strong, virile man had chosen her – quiet, plain Lisa – as his wife. She loved how he allowed her to be a stay-at-home mum, while still providing her with money to improve their love nest, and she was grateful for his generosity towards her, the children and the rest of her family. She was proud to be the wife of a romantic man, one who took her on surprise outings, who wined and dined her and who bought her jewellery. She preferred not to think about his motivations for indulging her, unless she was forced to.

Lisa, the children and his house had been Ray's shining achievement in life. He made sure they were kept in the best way that money could buy. His contribution to the education of his children was all about money and playfulness. Being an active man he had filled his daughters' lives with memories of fun outings and holidays. Being a big kid himself, nothing had been too crazy for Ray.

While this big kid's family was trying to understand who the real Ray had been, there was one person, living on the other side of the city, who knew exactly for whom she was grieving.

Marianne was a 45 year old woman who had been his lover for 12 years. They had met in a bar and had developed a deep, loving relationship over the years. There had been other men for her during this affair, because she had always assumed she

would get married and have children one day, but it never happened and the two had always ended up back together. Marianne was everything that Lisa was not: she was sharp, intellectual, career-orientated, politically active and demanding in bed. With her, Ray could relax and completely be himself. She knew how disappointed he was about not having a son and she knew how much he dreaded the girls leaving home, because he sometimes couldn't bear listening to Lisa talking about trivial things, like how the neighbours were doing and the latest trends in furniture and holiday destinations. Marianne had not been possessive and she had no illusions about Ray. She set the rules and he obeyed them. In their own way they had been completely open and honest with each other. The night of the accident she dreamt that Ray walked in and woke her up with a kiss on her forehead. They smiled lovingly at each other and then he vanished. The next morning Marianne still felt a warm glow inside from the dream, until she read the newspaper. "Fifty-three year old father of two dies in car crash." She knew right away.

When Ray woke up in our realm, he approached 'his new day' with a sense of adventure, as he had done every day of his life. What he had lacked in integrity, he had compensated for with his love of life. The world for him had been a big, competitive playground, a place where you could win or lose every day, chase and be chased, get lucky if you played your cards right; it was a place full of possibilities for fun. And then there were the women...

Ray knew he was dead because he 'saw' the accident. This was necessary in his case, because the circumstances of his death helped to explain what his loved ones were feeling. Ray's spirit

didn't need much whitewashing, because he hadn't suffered at all and because he was the kind of being who took everything in his stride. I related to Ray's way of waking up in our realm: he was, like I had been, quite matter of fact about it, because this is how he had been in life. He stayed open for energies as much as he could and he was amazed at how people had seen him. For example he couldn't believe how angry Lisa was about the betrayal. While connecting to her energy he realized that she had always stayed in denial about his infidelity. She had viewed it as an illness, something he couldn't help, and something that had absolutely nothing to do with her. He felt deep regret about having stayed with her. He realized how much of her pain was hurt pride, and he could see how much she would have preferred it had he died in the car alone. She would have been the perfectly happy widow, because (as he discovered) their love had died a long time ago.

The energy of his eldest daughter was condemning: she had the integrity of her mother, but the fierceness of her father. She hurt badly, but she put more energy into building up walls around her, cementing herself into un-forgivingness, than trying to understand her dad. His second daughter had adored her father and just wanted him back. More than suffering from the circumstances in which he died, she simply missed him. What hit Ray's spirit hard was the fact that he had been a stranger to his children. Besides having fun with them and paying for them, he had shared very little of himself. He felt shame and regret about that.

Some of his colleagues and business acquaintances were relieved they no longer had to collaborate with him, because he had always played to win; he never understood that they were

uncomfortable with his competitive behaviour. Overall though, people were shocked and deeply saddened by his death, because Ray had been a loving and a fun guy. For almost everybody, their sadness was combined with regret that they had not known the real Ray. Except Marianne of course. With her, Ray's soul was just as comfortable as when he had been human. He realized this was because she had been the only one he had shared his soul with during his life. The two of them merged naturally and continue to have a loving relationship. Marianne talks to him, he turns up in her dreams, and she smells his cologne when he is around. (It's quite easy for us to produce a particular perfume or aroma to let a loved one know that we're around. The only condition is that the person associates us with that smell; if not, this way of communication can't present itself. What a person associates us with is personal. When we are around, the best way to make our presence clear (to that person) will present itself to us, and the moment it does, it happens. In Ray and Marianne's case, the best available association was fragrance. He put out the intent, and at that moment she smelled the fragrance. Intent without mind means instant manifestation.)

Initially Ray was around Marianne most, because she made him feel like he had been a good man. Her grieving was clear and she let him console her. She didn't blame him for anything, nor did she have any questions or screaming fits. She knew he was going out that night, she never found out the circumstances of his death, just that he died shortly after the accident, and that's all she wanted to know. He felt guilty for not giving her the children that she wanted, but he also knew that it was a blessing that he had not put more children into the world.

While Ray and Marianne were helping each other by being together in love, Lisa was not coping at all. Besides the betrayal and humiliation, she felt that her whole marriage, and therefore her whole adult life, had been a waste. Somewhere in the back of her mind she felt like an idiot for having been in denial – but instead of accepting the responsibility, she blamed Ray. She became depressed, went to the doctor and got medicated. Her eldest daughter didn't want to talk or think about her father. She moved to another city, started a new life and put her father's death behind her with the same determination that had been so typical of her dad. Over the years both father and daughter became more humble. The daughter realized how much she took after her father, and how that knowledge had scared her. Until that day Ray's soul wasn't free of his daughter, and the lesson they both had to learn was about humility – that life and afterlife were not always what they wanted them to be. The daughter believed that what her father had done was unforgivable. He ruined her family, and everything was his fault. Therefore he ceased to exist for her. This was similar to Ray's attitude in life: "I am a good provider, husband and father, and as long as nobody lacks anything, I can do what I want." Through this daughter, Ray's spirit learned that he hadn't been open to anybody's pain because he had never felt his own. Seeing his daughter ignore her own pain, forcing herself not to grieve over his death and pushing her mother and sister away in the process, gave him major insights into the man he had been. He realized how scared of intimacy he had been, and how, as a young boy, he had always felt his father wasn't happy at home, but wasn't able to leave his wife and children. Ray found his second daughter hard to be around because of

the extent of her feeling – her childlike, clear pain. It made Ray feel like a failure, because it showed him how selfish he had been. Here was his beloved child, one of the people he had loved most in his life (in hindsight), at 21 years old, crying herself to sleep every night, calling out for her dad, scared and alone, with no family support other than from her grandmother. Her own mother was numb from medication, drowning in self-pity; her sister had turned into a pillar of salt, with no feeling at all; and her father was dead. All because he wanted to have sex with someone whose name he couldn't even remember.

Had either of his daughters been inclined to start an unhealthy connection with their father, Ray's soul would have probably been hooked, but thankfully, neither of them had. They had come from a loving background, with a good education; this had helped them to become stable young women, who loved themselves enough to work their way through the grieving process, to regain their balance.

The maternal grandmother was the youngest daughter's biggest support. She had loved her son-in-law, because he always made her feel special. His favourite joke was that he had decided to marry Lisa after meeting her attractive mother – with such good genes, Lisa would never lose her good looks. He would regularly compliment his mother-in-law on the clothes, jewellery or perfume she was wearing, or on the food she had prepared. He gave her some of the best presents she had ever received in her life. Grandma and granddaughter refused to let Ray's unfortunate and embarrassing ending ruin their memories of him. Together they would reminisce, looking through photo albums and reminding each other of stories about Ray. Needless to say, the subject of these meetings was always present (in

spirit), loving every moment. The only thing he regretted was that he couldn't manifest a bottle of champagne for the ladies to toast him!

Those meetings became less as the tears subsided, and one day the young girl realized she hadn't thought of her dad for a whole day. She felt happy and guilty at the same time. Ray was happy for her and for himself. The love connection between them had been real and therefore, every time she needed him, he would amplify his energy and wrap it around her as a blanket, meanwhile feeling how much damage he had caused by his selfish and superficial way of living. Throughout his journey to understand and forgive the person he had been, he was supported by the unconditional love from his youngest daughter. This reminded him that he had been capable of loving relationships. The less time Ray's youngest spent grieving over her father, the less he needed to be around. He stayed in her heart of course and their bond will never cease to exist, but they are both free from each other.

Between Ray's lack of love for his former wife and Lisa's refusal to face the reality of who she was, no real connection was established between the two after Ray died. Lisa was still merely going through the motions of everyday life, until a girlfriend suggested Lisa should join her in a course of rock and roll dancing. Ray and Lisa had been keen dancers when they were younger, but life got in the way. Lisa's friend would not take 'no' for an answer and so Lisa ended up at a local community hall on a Wednesday night. That night Lisa laughed, and the sound of it almost startled her. When she came home she finally found the courage to look through her wedding album and she wept. Real tears, real pain, real feelings. Right away she felt Ray around her

and together, each in their own way, they cried, for everything that had and hadn't been.

The reason they had not connected until then was because Lisa's denial made it impossible for her to express any real feelings. The eldest daughter's coldness had allowed Ray to connect with her, because father and daughter loved each other very much, and because her hurt was his fault. The heartbreak of the youngest connected with him for the same reason. But Lisa's breakdown had not been about Ray – it was about who she had been in her marriage. Immediately after his death she saw the real reasons why she had put up with Ray's infidelity (she instinctively knew he'd had a lover for years). She had not stayed – as she had told herself – out of love for her man or her children; she had stayed because her marriage gave her an identity. Ray had been her excuse for not having to think about what to make of her life. All this went through her head in an instant, and it had brought up a terrifying rage in her. She couldn't face her self-hatred, so she hated Ray instead. And because it was fake, in the sense that her true feelings were hurt love towards herself, not towards Ray, it didn't reach her husband's spirit.

This night though, on her couch in her pyjamas, photo album on her lap, she let her walls down and she becomes Lisa, a 52 year old widow who had preferred to stay in a dead marriage rather than build up a life of her own. "Oh, Ray," she said, "where did we go wrong and why didn't you leave?" Because Ray is right next to her, and because both of them are open to communication, Ray feeds her the answer that comes to her the next instant. She suddenly intuits: "You couldn't leave me, could you? You thought I would shrivel down to nothing if you did."

At that moment the truth hits them both. Ray didn't leave Lisa

because he always had to be the good guy: the one who gave the most thoughtful presents; the most fun father; the best son-in-law; record holder of 'employee of the month'; the life of the party; the best lover; the best husband. He wouldn't have been able to face the shame of being the one who broke his wife's heart by leaving her, which would have cost him the love and respect of his children, his family, friends and colleagues.

By now the thoughts flow freely between the two of them.

Lisa saw how she had emotionally blackmailed her husband by being 'the wife who-would-fall-apart-if-you-leave-me'. She realized that, had she been in her own power, she would have probably suggested relationship therapy, and if that hadn't helped, then a divorce. In that moment Ray's soul realized that he hadn't given Marianne, the love of his life, the children she craved because he didn't want to lose face in front of his family and friends. Painful. Feeding this pain to Lisa, with whom he was very cosily sharing the couch, she had a flash of her husband getting ready to go out after dinner: "Catching up with the guys from work. You know what it's like, if I don't go, they will accuse me of being 'up myself'." For one moment they looked each other straight in the eye and a chance was created for her to confront him, to say: "We both know you're lying, Ray; even though I don't know her name, I know where you're going. Why don't we talk?" Lisa's flashback makes Ray realize what an utter coward he has been. To leave it up to his wife to confront him, to leave it up to Marianne to give him the boot, so he could have his cake and eat it too. Ray connects this cowardly energy to his wife, who feels almost sick realizing what a wimp she had been. She recalls moments where she has seen the despair in her husband's eyes when she was talking about their future after he retired. Ray's

soul recalls the pain he felt when he thought of growing old with Lisa instead of with Marianne.

When Lisa went to bed that night, Ray's soul slept in his own bed for the first time since his death, and during the following months Lisa and Ray intensified their connection. Lisa decided to seek help; she found a counsellor who helped her understand her marriage, her motives and her late husband. She also started to do things she had stopped herself from doing because of Ray; she painted a room yellow, the colour he hated the most. In fact she had to stop herself from painting the whole house yellow! With every stroke of her brush she felt stronger. She loved hiking in remote areas, but Ray never wanted to be far away from the action (and the parties). Lisa went on a hiking holiday with her sister and enjoyed every moment of it. Living life her own way and having fun made her feel triumphant and she found herself saying, "Over your dead body, Ray," when doing something he wouldn't have approved of. She couldn't believe that she had that much resentment and hatred against her late husband. She had always thought of herself as a kind and warm-hearted person, but when it came to Ray, she could have been a cold-hearted murderer. And because that was physically impossible, she did the next best thing – and that was to hate him.

Ray was not free from his wife's rage because they were still entangled in a situation they were both responsible for. Lisa had been a woman with low self-esteem and Ray had used that to create exactly the life he wanted, without losing face to the outside world. If Lisa had been more self-assured she would never have put up with his infidelity. Now, with every step on her path to independence, she hated Ray for what he had done, and she hated herself for allowing him.

Had Ray been a wonderful husband who died of a heart attack while mowing his own lawn, Lisa could still have been raging, because she had been left to grow old on her own. In this scenario, she would also hate him with every step into her new life as a widow. Perfect-late-husband-Ray would connect to that hatred, out of love for his wife.

In both scenarios the spirit is not free, but in the second case it won't be long before the real reason for Lisa's rage will come to the surface: fear of abandonment. People with this issue normally attract partners who have to keep reassuring them, making them feel safe and taken care of. They have known moments or times (and sometimes an entire childhood) in which they were not loved. They – generally speaking – attract partners who have been taught that love is conditional, that they have to earn love through 'good' behaviour.

The 'abandoned' need ongoing reassurance that they are being loved, and those who have been taught that love is conditional need to perform, in order to deserve love. One demands and one reassures, and when the one reassuring dies, the demanding one will send messages like: "How could you?" and "Why did you leave me?" Even though the deceased partner has no mind left, he or she can connect with the mind dynamics of their relationship and become engaged in an unhealthy connection, which will enslave the spirit. In this case the situation remains the same until the surviving partner changes focus (which always happens, sooner or later). When the soul doesn't get entangled, it will connect with the hurt love from the surviving partner and they will feed each other insights until they find peace.

This also occurs the other way around when a newly-deceased

spouse can't accept that his or her death causes them to be in separate realms. This is a particular type of becoming stuck after dying; but contrary to the troubled souls we talked about in the last chapter, these spirits accept our realm, but reject the reality of the new situation. This is because, so far, they have avoided dealing with their issues. When a spirit is around a partner in a desperate way, there is always unfinished business of some sort; it is rarely done out of true love (although they might love their spouse very much).

For example a man who has always been scared to be on his own marries a woman who leaves work early so she can be home before he is (no coincidence). Children arrive; they leave the nest; he retires from work; he eventually falls ill and then he dies. All this time, he has never looked at his fear of being alone, so there is no chance of resolving it. His need to be with people masked the real fear, which was fear of the Self, of meeting his own mortality – which can be terrifying if you believe that the Self dies and nothing remains. Instead of discovering he still IS after he dies, he ignores the blissful truth that we are eternal, and returns to his old situation. Unresolved abandonment issues can cause spirits to envelop their spouse in desperation, instead of embracing the unconditional love of our realm.

This phenomenon can only occur if the partner was – consciously or not – covering up for their spouse's issues. It can be as simple as growing up feeling worthless and marrying somebody who thinks the world of you. When they die, this 'worthless' person will probably forsake the moment of Bliss, in which we see we are love and therefore always worthy, because they have not dealt with this issue. Instead they will wrap their partner in a blanket of doom.

When this happens, the surviving partner will find it hard, often impossible, to lift the fog of depression that descended on them after their other half died, and they are often surprised about the fact that they can't seem to move on. There is a big difference between grieving and being depressed, and although the widow/widower is not depressed, the energy of the deceased is depressing. Partners of the clinging souls are usually stronger and more independent during the relationship, and would be unlikely to fall apart afterwards.

This clinging behaviour is the opposite of merging, where true feelings between spirit and person unify. Instead the soul attempts to unite in despair, from fear instead of from love. The surviving partner feels like they're losing their partner over and over again, because the spirit gets 'too close' to them, constantly being needy and constantly avoiding doing anything about it. They often transmit their desperation when the loved one is ready for bed, when the mind makes way for sleep, and in the early mornings, when the mind hasn't switched back on. The spirit sleeps on its side of the bed, reassuring itself that everything is still the way it was, and transmits despair to the unsuspecting other half, who is at that time most vulnerable to receiving these feelings.

The good news is that this can't last forever – nothing ever does. In most situations the spirit does love the partner but is unaware of the effect this is having on their life; once they realize what they're 'doing' they become open to receive help.

If you feel you could be in a situation like this, please find a loving, reliable person who is capable of helping spirits. You can also help by talking to the deceased soul lovingly but firmly, meditating on them, sending them love and reassurance. The best

way to tell if this applies to you is if you're surprised by the intensity of your feelings, as if they aren't yours.

Back to the real, not-so-perfect Ray: while Lisa let her resentment flow free, Ray's soul exchanged with her. Even though her feelings towards Ray were not exactly positive, husband and wife didn't have an unhealthy connection. Ray's soul was not free to move on until they had worked through the issues around his former behaviour, but he was motivated to work through anything that came up between them anyway. Not every soul is this open: through Nelly's soul I learned that if a soul isn't eager to connect and evolve, it can go into 'suspended animation' like a body does. This doesn't stop them from exchanging, but they exchange the minimum amount possible. Stuck souls are often in a similar state when they are in-between places or people, depending on their mind fixation, and not ready to embrace our realm.

Ray, however, was absolutely not the type to do things minimally, or even by halves. He embraced what he learned about himself, even when it was nothing to be proud of, and he displayed great curiosity to whatever was coming his way, just as I had done. In fact Ray and I had a lot in common: both our loved ones felt betrayed by us because we did not share our lives with them. Both of us had been 'larger than life' people with big hearts, and we both had been the centre of the lives of our loved ones. Ray taught me not to shy away when it comes to what our loved ones go through. He reckoned the biggest favour he could do for his loved ones was to be totally present when they were expressing their feelings. Before connecting with him, I would at times shut down when my loved ones' feelings became too

intense. In return, I taught Ray's soul patience, as his energy continually read, "What's next?" He would get restless when one of his family members became stuck or returned to an old issue. Now he knows that this is an ongoing process, and there may not necessarily be closure.

Ray's soul keeps returning to his 'women', especially to Lisa, who now faces having to trust a man again. For the rest, he is at peace with what has been and with who he has been.

However... he still misses being alive.