

**THE UNIVERSALITY OF FORGIVENESS:
PERSPECTIVES FROM RELIGION AND CULTURE
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ABSTRACT

Among Christians, forgiveness is a virtue, and all are expected to practice it. It is common, therefore, to hear expressions like “You are a Christian. You must forgive.” Such expressions highlight some of the myths and misconceptions surrounding the concept of forgiveness. For instance, forgiveness is not only a Christian affair as wrongly perceived by many. It is a universal concept encouraged in both theological and secular contexts. Within the secular context, forgiveness is encouraged and promoted by psychologists for psychotherapy and general wellbeing. Within theological context, it is preached and practised by almost all religions. This paper examines the religious and cultural perspectives of forgiveness with a view to showing its universality and relevance for peaceful co-existence, social harmony, and progressive nation-building.

INTRODUCTION

The ancient concept of forgiveness is increasingly gaining prominence in modern human relations and conflict management around the world. In Africa, forgiveness has taken centre-stage, sometimes even at the expense of justice. This has been witnessed especially in the attempt by African societies to transition from recurrent violent conflicts, genocides, dictatorships, and human rights violations to more stable, democratic, and peaceful societies. In various countries on the African continent, Truth Commissions or similar bodies have been established at different times to mediate violent conflict and rebuild violence-torn societies. These Commissions have often emphasised the need for forgiveness as a way forward. At both the community and individual levels, forgiveness is playing a role in socio-political praxis. Indeed, to live successfully in life, there is a lot to remember, a lot to forgive and a lot to forget and so goes for a happy, wholesome and successful family, community, society, nation and indeed the world. It is generally agreed that forgiveness is an important step in rebuilding broken relationships without which there can be no unity, peace, security, stability, cooperation, cohesion, growth and progress in human society.

Understanding Forgiveness

A common, yet simplistic, understanding of forgiveness is summarised by *Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus* (1996), that to forgive is “to give up resentment against, or the desire to punish; pardon (an offense or offender).” Forgiveness is viewed as the intentional and voluntary process by which a victim undergoes a change in feelings and attitude regarding an offense, let's go of negative emotions such as vengefulness, forswears recompense from or punishment of the offender, however legally or morally justified it might be, and with an increased ability to wish the offender well. However, among scholars and researchers, there is no consensus on the definition of forgiveness. Different scholars, depending on their backgrounds and prejudices, view forgiveness in different ways. Theologians and psychologists have different understanding of the concept of forgiveness, its framework, its purpose, and even its benefits.

To most psychologists, forgiveness is an action one undertakes in order to maintain a healthy mind and body. Arlene Malone *et al* (2011)² argue that “Forgiveness has been previously viewed as a construct

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² Meyer, D et al. *The Relationship Between Forgiveness and Emotional Well Being*. Washington D.C., A.C.A. 2011. Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261699897_The_Relationship_Between_Forgiveness_and_Emotional_Well-Being

related to spirituality or religiosity. However, studies have begun to demonstrate that forgiveness offers more than just a spiritual or religious benefit; researchers are studying the possibility that forgiveness has implications for emotional and mental well-being.”

Theologians, on the other hand, view forgiveness as a requirement of God which maintains and nourishes a person’s spiritual life. This view is supported by the commandment of God to Christians in Matthew 5: 23-24 (NIV) that "when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." This scripture and others like it form the basis upon which Christian scholars of forgiveness like Randall O’Brien (2001) argue that: “The whole emphasis of the New Testament is on forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, and holy living manifested and made possible by the love of God through the cross of Jesus Christ.”³

It is important to point out that even among theologians and Christian writers of forgiveness, there is no consensus on the meaning and practice of forgiveness. This is why Bryan Maier (2017) calls for “a more coherent (and theological) definition of forgiveness.” Janis Abrams Spring paints an even more disturbing picture of the complexity of unforgiveness and how this complexity has adverse effect on both those who need to forgive and those who need to be forgiven. Spring argues that: “The concept of forgiveness carries a heavy weight – more than it can bear. It means so many things to so many people who consider it from different frames of reference – from academicians influenced by grand theological teachings to secular researchers trying to reduce abstruse concepts into manageable, bite-size units that can be studied in laboratory settings. What has evolved is a mishmash of concepts that often do nothing more than confuse and pressure those who are seeking relief from suffering. What is missing is a concrete, down to-earth vision of forgiveness – one that is human and attainable.”⁴

From Spring’s opinion above, it is clear that whilst forgiveness is commanded by God as a condition for Christian life and encouraged by psychologists for general wellbeing, there remains a critical gap in the practical application of the concept. This gap is widened by relatively unresolved issues such as the conditions for forgiving. Is forgiveness mandatory or voluntary? Must forgiveness be asked by the offender before it is given by the offended? Should one forgive and forget? If so, how does one guard against a recurrence of the offence? Does forgiveness replace justice? Should punishment be administered despite forgiveness? What is God’s injunction to man on forgiveness?

By my own reckoning from the Christian faith, forgiveness is of God and it is in God. It is one attribute that God possesses and He shares with us human beings. Here, I am using forgiveness as a term used to indicate pardon for a fault or an offence. I am not using it in terms of offsetting i.e. to excuse one from payment for a debt owed.

The Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, is replete with God as forgiveness-personified and as the owner and bestower of forgiveness. God is characterised early in the life of the children of Israel as God who both forgives and holds the guilty accountable, “maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet, He does not leave the guilty unpunished; He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generations” (Exod. 34: 7). “They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracle you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion, appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore, you did not desert them” (Neh. 9:17). God is the source of forgiveness. For the children of Israel at Sinai, Moses prayed, “O Lord, if I have found favour in your eyes, then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin and take us as your inheritance” (Exod. 34: 9). In spite of their wickedness and stiff-neckedness, God promised to keep doing wonders for them and He kept his promise to do wonders that have not been done anywhere in the world for the children of Israel. Forgiveness is divine, and it is in spite of human wickedness, sin and inadequacies.

[accessed Sep 02 2018].

³ Robert B. Kruschwitz, & Norman Wirzba, *Forgiveness: A Christian Reflection*. Centre for Christian Ethics. Texas: Baylor University. 2001. <https://www.baylor.edu/ifl/christianreflection/forgiveness.pdf>

⁴ Spring, J. A., & Spring, M., *How Can I Forgive You: The Courage to Forgive, the Freedom Not To*. India Snehal Wankhede 2018.

In the Old Testament, God provides forgiveness for sin through the sacrificial system. The book of Leviticus, particularly in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 is full of God ordaining sacrificial system for forgiveness of sin. For example: “And do with the bull just as he did with the bull for the sin offering. In this way, the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven” (Lev. 4:20). At the dedication of the Temple built by Solomon, God appears and promises forgiveness to the repentant (2 Chronicles 7:14). Solomon trusts God to forgive the repentant in his prayer of dedication for the temple (1 Kings 8:46-51; 63). This establishes God’s sovereignty and willingness to forgive. God’s forgiveness is directed primarily to His covenant people to sustain His covenant through them. However, outsiders may also become the object of God’s merciful forgiveness (Kings 8: 41-43). Forgiveness is the vehicle in which God’s children appropriate the blessings of His gracious covenant. This is echoed by the prophets and in the Psalms as far as the children of Israel are concerned. God is the only source of forgiveness (Psalm 19:12).

In the beginning of the New Testament, John’s baptism was for repentance and the forgiveness of sin. The two go together – repentance and forgiveness. “And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4). The blood of Jesus’s atonement yields eternal forgiveness of sins – past, present and future - (Matt. 26: 28; Heb. 10:11-12). By Jesus’ sacrificial death, the old Levitical sacrificial system is abolished.

Jesus placed tremendous emphasis on the horizontal relationship - human to human, forgiveness (Matt. 18: 21-35). That is the parable of the unforgiving slave. In the model prayer given by Jesus, the forgiveness the individual receives from God is dependent of the forgiveness the individual gives to those who offend him (Matt. 6:14-15). Jesus Ministry is distinguished as the one by which forgiveness is provided to the sinners through this, Jesus’ blood. Paul discussed forgiveness in the same manner. Paul defines forgiveness as righteousness and fundamental condition for Christian fellowship (2Cor. 2:2-10). Because Christians have been redeemed through forgiveness of their sins, they are obligated to forgive as they have been forgiven (Col. 3: 13). Jesus was very emphatic about both vertical and horizontal forgiveness, “Judge not, and you shall not be judged, condemn not and you shall not be condemned, forgive and you shall be forgiven (Luke 6:37). Freedom that comes from forgiveness is given to Christians but it is their responsibility to accept it or to reject it. Our choice matters in our lives. In both the Torah and the Quran it is pertinent that as much and similar emphasis are consigned to forgiveness in the vertical (God to human), and the horizontal, (human to human) (See e.g. Leviticus 19:18; Quran 39:54).

Jesus takes the issue beyond forgiveness, He heightens it to the level of reconciliation (Matt. 5: 24-25). Forgiveness and reconciliation are essential ingredients of wholesome human relationship and good neighbourliness. God establishes the sacrificial system for the dissolution of ritual impurity and the forgiveness of moral impurities. Yet, “for any person who does anything defiantly”, there is no forgiveness of sin via sacrifice (Numb. 15:30-36). The Bible also speaks of a sin that will not be forgiven (Mark 3:29, Luke 12:10). It is probably a sin of indignantly categorising the Spirit of Jesus whom Jesus identifies as the Holy Spirit as demonic.

I decided to refer to the *Torah*, the Holy Book for the Jewish religion and underpin it with the words of Rabbi Weinreb, a respected rabbi of the Jewish religion in the United States. The Torah and most of the adherents of Jewish religion emphasise and believe in vertical forgiveness in the same sense and mode as contained in the Old Testament of the Bible. The Biblical concept of divine forgiveness reveals the perception of a compassionate God who responds accordingly to human contrition and moral rehabilitation. Indeed, man’s involvement both in conscience (heart) and deed (action) is a *sine qua non* for securing divine forgiveness. It is not enough to hope and pray for pardon, there needs to be contrition in terms of human humbling themselves, acknowledging their wrongs and resolving to depart from sin. Repentance in terms of penitence and confession are integral components of all prayers for forgiveness. But human to human horizontal forgiveness seems to be regarded more as Christian virtue while the statute of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” would appear to many as Jewish value in human relationship. Rabbi Weinreb underlined his teaching with the story of Yosef (Joseph) and his brothers who sold him into slavery. Rabbi Weinreb stated, “I urged people to forgive those who have offended them, only to find that, for many Jews, forgiveness is a Christian, not a Jewish virtue. Of course, this is not true. Forgiveness is a major teaching of our faith which has its roots in the Jewish scriptures. We are encouraged to forgive others who may have

sinned against us, and we must seek forgiveness of those against whom we have sinned...⁵ What then can be the basis for the misconception that forgiveness is a Christian virtue and it is not preached or taught by Judaism? I believe that the lesson here is one that Judaism teaches well. Forgiveness must be earned, it must be deserved, it must be requested, and above all, it can only be granted by the person who was offended. In a sense, Yosef goes beyond the call of duty in expressing forgiveness to his brothers... Yosef is an exemplar of how important it is for each of us to forgive those who have offended us. Forgiveness is a practice for all year long, and not just for the Season of Yom Kippur. After all, it is not just on that one sacred day that each of us stands in need of the Almighty's forgiveness. His forgiveness is something we need at every moment of our lives. Most rabbis believe and regrettably teach 'remission for remission'."

Apart from the wholesomeness of relationship and community as ordained in the Bible, it is also so ordained in the Quran, "Hold to forgiveness, command what is right and turn away from the ignorant" (Quran 9: 199). In another verse, Allah commands "...They should rather pardon and overlook. Would you not love Allah to forgive you. Allah is ever forgiving, Most Merciful" (Quran 24:22). The greatest moral value of the Torah, the Bible and the Quran, is forgiveness, leading to reconciliation and harmonious relationship with fellow human beings and within human community. The Bible highlights the point: "revenge is mine" (It is God's and not human's) and consequently, "do not repay evil for evil". The Quran puts it similarly but in different words, "The retribution of a bad action with one equivalent to it is not right. But if someone pardons and puts things right, his reward is with Allah" (Quran 42:40).

Forgiveness is a superior moral trait. "But if someone is steadfast and forgives, that is the most resolute course to follow" (Quran 42:43). Believers are admonished in the Quran, "Control their rage and pardon other people (Quran 3: 134). Forgiveness must be sincere and genuine, bitterness, anger and malice must not continue to lurk in the deep recesses of the hearts. When we experience Christ's gracious forgiveness we receive peace. To retain this peace, it is necessary to forgive others. Jesus taught that the only way for us to grant forgiveness to others is in the way He has forgiven us. We are not to condition forgiveness according to the nature or gravity of the offense against us, the number of offenses, or the character of the offender. We are to show unconditional mercy as God has shown mercy to us. As we humble ourselves and extend forgiveness to others, God opens the way for us to seek forgiveness for our own mistakes and sins. God fully forgives all that come to Him with a humble and repentant spirit. As we follow the Holy Spirit, we will know the truth, and the truth shall make us free. (John 8:32). Verse 36 says, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Christ tells us in Matthew 6:14-15, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." God as the author of forgiveness and in His omnipotence and sovereignty can and does initiate forgiveness with or without man's commensurate action or follow-up. It does help tremendously if man works in consonance with God to secure divine forgiveness. God will do what He will do, with or without man's involvement.

On the horizontal, forgiveness cannot be graduated or given out in doses no matter how the offence is considered - minor or major, slight or grievous. Forgiveness must be total and comprehensive. Just as contrite heart and repentance are helpful to vertical forgiveness, so are remorse and apology obliging to horizontal forgiveness. Again, remorse and apology must be sincere, coming from the heart. Forgiveness may not imply not talking about the past, we must talk about and remember the past so as not to repeat the errors of the past. The past is history and history must be remembered and be told. But bitterness, revenge, hard feeling and hatred must be totally eschewed in the remembrance of the past. True forgiveness pleases God and pleases humans. Human beings are frail and, while in blood and flesh, are subject to making mistakes and to sin in an imperfect world but as human beings and believers, they are subject also to the will of God and they are supposed to be tolerant, compassionate, accommodating and learn by their mistakes and from mistakes of others. All these are encompassed in forgiveness. With God in charge and in control, all human beings and indeed all believers must surrender to his will. That is what forgiveness is about for Christians. Christians need the assistance of the Holy Spirit to be truly and completely forgiving. In a way,

⁵ Weinreb, Tzvi Hersh., Forgiveness: A Jewish Value. Available at https://www.ou.org/torah/parsha/rabbi-weinreb-on-parsha/rabbi_weinrebs_torah_column_parshas_vayigash/

it is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5: 22-23).

Forgiveness is also preached and practised among Hindu adherents. Hindu traditions use several classical Vedic Sanskrit words to illuminate the supplementary and complementary shades of meanings associated with forgiveness: *kshama*, (merciful); *daya* (compassionate); *krupa* (graceful); *karunya*, (empathetic); *advasha* (unbiased with any form of hatred); and *abhaya* (one which does not cause any fear but rather generates a sense of trust and confidence). The understanding of forgiveness is influenced by the context of discussion; the affiliates in the act or process; and the past and continuing relations between the affiliates. The act of forgiving is a process for getting freedom from inner pains, fears, and sufferings, and moving toward a goal of comfort, freedom, an attitude of detachment, salvation, and self-realization.

Hinduism recognizes two sides in the act of forgiveness. Each side is a multi-layered structure. The first side is the seeker of forgiveness; the other side is the one who extends and delivers forgiveness. The act of seeking (*prar-thana*) forgiveness (*kshama*, *daya*, *krupa*) may be carried out unilaterally, without the presence, permission, or expectation of the other side. The act of extending deliverance (*anugraha-pradana*) or forgiving (*karunya*, *advasha*, *ab-haya*) may also take place unilaterally without the presence, permission, or expectation of acceptance from the other side.⁶

The theological basis for forgiveness in Hinduism is that a person who does not forgive carries a baggage of memories of the wrong, of negative feelings, of anger and unresolved emotions that affect their present as well as future. In Hinduism, not only should one forgive others, but one must also seek forgiveness if one has wronged someone else. Forgiveness is to be sought from the individual wronged, as well as society at large, by acts of charity, purification, fasting, rituals and meditative introspection.

The concept of forgiveness is inconsistently treated in extensive debates of Hindu literature. In some Hindu texts, certain sins and intentional acts are debated as naturally unforgivable; for example, murder and rape; these ancient scholars argue whether blanket forgiveness is morally justifiable in every circumstance, and whether forgiveness encourages crime, disrespect, social disorder and people not taking you seriously. Other ancient Hindu texts highlight that forgiveness is not same as reconciliation.

Forgiveness in Hinduism does not necessarily require that one reconcile with the offender, nor does it rule out reconciliation in some situations. Instead forgiveness in Hindu philosophy is being compassionate, tender, kind and letting go of the harm or hurt caused by someone or something else.⁷ Forgiveness is essential for one to free oneself from negative thoughts, and being able to focus on blissfully living a moral and ethical life (*dharmic life*).⁸

Forgiveness is considered one of the six cardinal virtues in Hinduism. In the highest self-realized state, forgiveness becomes essence of one's personality, where the persecuted person remains unaffected, without agitation, without feeling like a victim, free from anger (*akrodhi*).

Therefore, in Hinduism forgiveness, in the context of theological debates, takes the approach of explaining a personal God's or a spiritual master's (guru's) unbound mercy, grace, and compassion (*daya*, *karunya*, *krupa*). This is the model in which forgiveness is presented as emotion, love, and devotion (*bhavana*, *prema*, *bhakti*). In schools of theology where the concept of god (or a deity) is secondary or even dispensed with, forgiveness is represented as a combination of human virtues: pardoning; grace; mercy; compassion; freedom from all types of hatred, dislike, and repulsions—a state that can result only because of the presence of unbound, unconditioned love; and behaviour that will generate a sense of trust and confidence for interaction and not engender fear in anyone— an attitude that can happen only when honesty and truth nurture the heart, mind, and action.

In Buddhism, forgiveness is distinguished as a practice to prevent harmful thoughts from causing havoc to one's mental well-being. Buddhism recognizes that feelings of hatred and ill-will leave a lasting effect on our mind karma. Instead, Buddhism encourages the cultivation of thoughts that leave a wholesome effect. "In contemplating the law of karma, we realize that it is not a matter of seeking revenge but of practicing *mettā* and forgiveness, for the victimizer is, truly, the most unfortunate of all. When resentments have already arisen, the Buddhist view is to calmly proceed to release them by going back to their roots.

⁶ "Forgiveness in Hinduism" Available at <http://what-when-how.com/love-in-world-religions/forgiveness-in-hinduism/>

⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forgiveness>

⁸ <https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forgiveness>

Buddhism centres on release from delusion and suffering through meditation and receiving insight into the nature of reality. Buddhism questions the reality of the passions that make forgiveness necessary as well as the reality of the objects of those passions.

Buddhism places much emphasis on the concepts of *mettā* (loving kindness), *karuna* (compassion), *mudita* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity), as a means to avoiding resentments in the first place. These reflections are used to understand the context of suffering in the world, both our own and the suffering of others."⁹

The core scriptures of Buddhism, taken from the teachings of the Buddha nearly 2,500 years ago, state the importance of forgiveness. Buddhism teaches the importance of a peaceful state of mind as well as a peaceful way of life. Buddhists believe that forgiveness is a critical step to achieving this peaceful state and these beliefs are founded on certain truths;

In the Buddhist belief system, there is no concept of a creator God with the power to punish or forgive. However, the idea of forgiveness is an important part of the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha teaches the importance of forgiving others as well as ourselves.

The need to forgive is widely recognized by the public, but they are often at a loss for ways to accomplish it. Akin to forgiveness is mercy, so even if a person is not able to complete the forgiveness process they can still show mercy, especially when so many wrongs are done out of weakness rather than malice. Forgiveness as a tool has been extensively used in restorative justice programs. And most of all, forgiveness is most beneficial to self, nothing compares to a peaceful state of mind. Forgiveness, even if it comes hard to people, is pleasing to both receiver and giver and it is an aspect of superior morals and great attribute that eliminates all the harmful effects of anger and helps the individual to enjoy a healthy life both psychologically and physically. Forgiveness which is a great attribute of God is ordained and given by God to humans and it is demanded of God to be given from man to man for healthy living and wholesome relationship and peace and harmony within the society. Scientific findings agree with what was written in the Bible a long time ago, "Sorrow weighs down the heart, but a cheerful heart does good like a medicine (Prov. 17:12).

It has been stated and I believe correctly that there are three things that reveal the depth of our relationship with God: The way we love people, the way we accept people and the way we forgive people. Unforgiveness is bondage to the unforgiving and to the unforgiven. If God has made it obligatory on his part to forgive us, we who have been forgiven have no choice on our part, whether to forgive or not to forgive, it is imperative to forgive. It is the commandment of God. And nobody needs to put himself or herself in the self-made and unnecessary bondage and misery in a mental jail where the bars on the doors and the windows are made of tissues hardened and hormones polluted by unforgiveness, bitterness and hatred.

Most African cultures uphold both vertical and horizontal forgiveness. The deities in traditional African religions are worshipped to seek forgiveness of the Supreme Being for known and unknown sins and offences that might have been committed. The deities are believed to act as proprietors before the Supreme Being. For instance, the Yoruba's Supreme Being is *Olodumare*. The deities are worshipped to secure forgiveness from *Olodumare* and to take petitions to him on behalf of the worshippers. That is as far as vertical forgiveness goes. As for the horizontal, most African cultures uphold and encourage forgiveness and reconciliation for interpersonal relationship and for peace, good neighbourliness, wholesome, cohesive and progressive family, community and society. Conversely, unforgiveness, revenge, bitterness and hatred are abhorred and discouraged. As the Yoruba advocate: *Adie da mi ni ogun nu, mo fo leyin* the typical life of a chicken throws away my medicine and I must avenge by breaking the eggs on which she roosts is not the type of life to live.

Our culture also brings out vividly correlation between unforgiveness, bitterness, hatred and ill-health. It has been empirically established that there is close association between unforgiveness and the

⁹ Geoffrey Parrinder,., *A Dictionary of Religious and Spiritual Quotations*. Routledge: London/New York, 1990/2000.

manipulating mood and headaches, depression, general disability of the body. Culturally, you are advised to forgive and make the matter light in your mind for the benefit of your health.

CONCLUSION

Let me end on a personal note with some reminiscences. By nature, I do not bear grudge, keep malice, remain unforgiving, count offences against those who hurt me or keep matters in mind and let them burn me up and out. I believe that when I am offended or wronged, I should try to understand the reason or the motive of the offender and the wrongdoer, I try to put the issue or the matter behind me so that I can concentrate on the positive and engage in something more useful. I recall that, the worst experience I ever had was when Abacha framed me up to in order to be killed. The grace of God prevented him from having his way as a result of international interventions. All the same, I was sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment for doing no wrong. I felt bad initially but then as I was reading the Psalms to entreat God to vindicate me, I felt relieved. Before long, I took the issue out of my mind and I forgave all. I started praying to God to forgive my adversaries for their sins. While I was still in Jos prison, I learnt that Abacha's son had died in a plane crash. I wrote him a letter of condolence. The prison authorities were surprised but promised to deliver my letter. And they did. The actions liberated my mind and my body to be more progressively active in the prison. I wrote four books, I led Bible Study Fellowship almost every afternoon which impacted on the lives of some hardened armed robbers like Baba Ali. I also established a maize farm and the produce from my farm was distributed to all prison officials and all inmates. I concentrated on fasting and meditation. It was a new life. When Abacha himself died, I wrote a letter of condolence to his wife. Within a week of Abacha's death, I was released from prison and I held no grudge, no bitterness against anybody. In less than one year of my release from prison, I was sworn in as elected-President of Nigeria. All thanks, appreciation and glory to God for giving me the grace to forgive, to have a new life in prison and teach me and others the lessons of the great power and benefit of forgiveness.

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