The Phases of the Act of Forgiveness

1) Recognition of situation requiring forgiveness
   a) To forgive requires in the first instance an honest acknowledgment that one has suffered or is in pain because of the action of another.
   b) The choice presented to the sufferer is between harboring resentment or allowing the healing of forgiveness to take place.

2) Intention and decision to forgive
   a) Because intention is a willful act, it does not happen unless we intend it. For some this will be one of the more difficult aspects of forgiveness.
   b) To forgive requires courage – in the face of the injury which may have occurred recently or in the past, the sufferer makes a conscious decision to begin the forgiveness process.
   c) The initial stage in coming to a decision to forgive is simply the willingness to admit that one has not forgiven someone but wants to forgive and will try.
   d) The decision to forgive should be specifically addressed to the situation which requires forgiveness and not left to the realm of generality.

3) Forgiveness as a memorial activity
   a) To forgive is to remember the past in order to digest it and to make it a part of one’s history. The remembering which is forgiveness is a creative work and not simply a repeating in the mind of the past event.
   b) What prompts forgiveness is an injury which is held in memory in such a way that it returns to consciousness to re-inflict pain.
   c) An important step in the process of forgiving is remembering in some detail the experience of injury and one’s response to it and to seek to understand the reasons for the emotional impact of the experience.
   d) One may also make connections between this injury and other painful experiences, perhaps in early life.
   e) While not denying what may have been ill motivated behavior, the forgiver disengages the injurer from the behavior and sees the worth of the other as a person who like oneself lives in an imperfect world fraught with stress and various conflicts.
   f) By pointing to the value of the other, forgiveness becomes...
4) **An act of revelation**
   a) In the act of remembering, the forgiver recalls the person who was responsible as the injurer but then proceeds to change in memory the other’s identity from injurer to his or her deeper identity as a valuable person like yourself with human weakness and limitations.
   b) Likewise, the forgiver changes in memory the perception of him or herself as victim or as injured party to a perception of oneself as a person who can rise above injury.
   c) It is an act of integration in which the painful event is incorporated into one’s personal history as a past event but one that does not foreclose on the future.

5) **Forgiveness as forgiveness of oneself**
   a) One aspect of forgiveness which is sometimes overlooked is the forgiveness of the self.
   b) Some hang onto the belief that the injury should never have happened to them. Anger and rage directed at the self for not preventing the injury is not uncommon.
   c) A task for the forgiver is an acceptance of the self with its limitations and vulnerability ties and recognition that life in the world does not exempt anyone from the possibility of injury.
   d) In the act of forgiving the forgiver can come to a more realistic view of him or herself and can provide for the forgiver the opportunity to review the illusions which guide his or her life.

6) **Forgiveness as acceptance**
   a) Forgiveness is ultimately a form of acceptance of the other as he or she is. It meets the injurer with compassion which springs from an awareness of one’s own tendencies to hurt.
   b) Mutual acceptance can transform the injury and provide a sounder footing for the relationship.

7) **Reconciliation comes at the culmination of the forgiveness process**
   a) The forgiver is willing to start a new relationship with the injurer.
   b) There are cases where reconciliation is not possible such as in the absence or death of the injurer and where forgiveness is simply an integral process. Yet here reconciliation can come about in the mind and heart of the forgiver as more pleasant memories of the relationship with the injurer is recalled and now cherished.
   c) The forgiver is enabled then to go forward with an increased capacity for new relationships and with a firmer belief in one’s ability to survive and even grow from hurtful experiences.