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English 105

Date

Forgive and Forget: Good Advice or Unwise Expectation

The main argument in Gilbert's chapter "Reporting Live from Tomorrow" is that many American expressions about happiness are unrealistic, unattainable, and do not bring happiness. Gilbert argues that they are meant to uphold or transmit a portion of the social fabric, but instead, they contain information that is no longer useful. Gilbert uses examples such as "children bring happiness" and "money brings happiness" to explain his theory. Additionally, the author uses the metaphor of a *super replicator* to explain how ideas are transmitted in American culture and then taken to be truths. "Forgive and forget" is one such adage that has been spread around but contains sometimes unhealthy and unrealistic expectations for the person who was wronged.

~~One very common phrase that seems to be an unrealistic~~ As a *super replicator*, is the phrase "forgive and forget." ~~When something bad happens, whether it is betrayal, disappointment, loss of a job or friend, family and friends of the receiver want them to move on and get over it. This phrase~~ certainly has its own "means of transmission" like the expression of certain genes, because life is full of hardship, betrayal and loss (Gilbert 213). These ~~sad~~ circumstances offer plenty of opportunity for people to use and spread this supposed piece of wisdom. ~~When we say: "forgive and forget" we "are attempting to change the way they see the world so that their view is more closely resembles our own" (213). According to Gilbert's criteria, this old proverb meets the definition of a "super-~~

replicator.”²² Not only do we hear it from people around us, we also see it on television, in movies, and in books, especially self-help books. For example, a search on Amazon leads to the following books: *Forgiveness Therapy*, *Betrayal Trust and Forgiveness*, and *The Forgiving Self—the Road from Resentment to Connection*, among many others.

Children's shows also use this phrase frequently, as do school teachers, particularly in preschools. It's a good idea and well-intended, but what if the child is being abused, or witnesses domestic violence? Will they have the ability to understand that there are times when it isn't good to "forgive and forget?" It is unlikely that a preschool or even older child would be able to understand and decide when to speak out and when to "forgive and forget."

Painful events such as betrayal, disappointment, loss of a job or friend are not uncommon. But family and friends of the receiver want the person to move on and get over it, since as long as the receiver remains unhappy, those around feel uncomfortable. When we say “forgive and forget” we are “attempting to change the way they see the world so that their view of it more closely resembles our own” (213). In the long run, "forgive and forget" will benefit the victim as well as the person who was hurtful, but it is unwise to push victims to forgiveness when they are not ready. According to Gilbert's criteria, this old proverb meets the definition of a “super replicator” because of the way it is transmitted and how it is used as an easy thing to tell someone when they are upset. That is, it is easy for the speaker, but difficult for the receiver, especially soon after the painful event. At that time it is beneficial to the speaker, but it can cause further harm for the receiver.

"Forgive and forget" is supposed to be good advice to help someone get over a problem in a positive way but can send the message that someone needs to forget about what has happened to them. This may be the wrong message to send to people who have truly been **seriously** wronged. **At first, it is better to express empathy and concern for the person rather than pushing forgiveness.** Likewise, ~~for~~ those who have committed mistakes, ~~they~~ need to learn how to take responsibility and make amends with their victims. Yet, that part, the responsibility and reconciliation, is not emphasized in our culture. In using Gilbert's analogy of the super replicator, promoting the transmission of this adage "forgive and forget" is not advantageous from the view of evolutionary biology because it tells takers to keep taking and givers to keep giving and forgiving. **This would lead to a society of takers because givers can only give so much. At some point, there are just too many takers.**

_____ "Forgive and forget" ~~is~~ **can be** unhealthy because it places the responsibility to get over **the event** and survive on the victim. Sometimes, ~~the~~ victim needs to fully process the events so that they understand why they happened, and do not repeat them in the future. As Gilbert discusses, the point of "To learn from our experience, we must remember it and for a variety of reasons, memory is a faithless friend" (225). As Gilbert comments: "human hogwash does not always achieve its end" (224). If we cannot take the time to learn from our mistakes, we will make them again. This is an unintended consequence of telling people to "forgive and forget" too soon. Although it is impossible to predict the future, it is possible to imagine and project what would our reactions be to possible events in the future. This way we are preparing ourselves for various outcomes by having

done the introspective footwork of self-reflection. Gilbert calls this “imagination” and “surrogation.”

~~Another~~ The mechanism that Gilbert describes is as surrogation, ~~which~~ is the ability to predict future feelings of emotional reactions (such as loss) by using other people, or a “surrogate” (224). Further, in order to make “accurate predictions” about our emotional futures, we need “accurate information”; ~~so~~, this means that we need to observe those close to us, imagine how we would feel in those circumstances, and remember the wise choices that lead to our own happiness and fulfillment (225). The hidden message there is usually something like: “things are not so bad” or “you will get over this”, or “stop thinking about it and it will go away,” and perhaps these are not the healthiest or wisest ways to deal with future problems. However, on the other side, if a person who is wronged does not forgive, their anger and resentment can ruin their life. ~~But forgiveness should come in its own time. Otherwise, the person will end up trying to convince themselves that they have forgiven, and they will hold back the hurt and anger until it builds up so that they are unable to control it anymore.~~

In conclusion, the idea of social super replicators is a fascinating metaphor for looking at how we spread and adopt truisms. This chapter from his book shows how it is unwise to simply rely on old sayings for nuggets of wisdom about life and other serious matters. It is interesting how many people would rather not discuss and listen to the complicated events of someone’s personal life, but rather reduce them to a simple phrase like “forgive and forget.” Furthermore, this saying does not allow the victim to process their issues, but quickly forces them to move on and forget. Also, it skips the important step of thinking through and remembering why something happened, which is vital for

avoiding future mistakes. The person could wind up in the same circumstances that led to their previous problem, without remembering, which is the opposite of “forgive and forget.” Lastly, “forgive and forget” is not realistic in all situations; ~~and perhaps should only be used in small situations like arguments between children and not be applied in complex adult situations.~~ some wrongs are so hurtful that it is almost impossible to forgive them and also very difficult to forget them. "Forgive and forget" is not always the answer.



Works Cited

Gilbert, Daniel. "Reporting Live from Tomorrow" in *Stumbling on Happiness*. New

