



Forgiveness in Intimate Relationships: A Psychoanalytic Perspective

Shahrzad Siassi

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How can one overcome deeply-held resentment so as to resume or establish a bond with a traumatizing person, mindful that the experience of the self is rooted in the very intimate relationships from which such trauma arose? This book centres on the challenge of forgiveness and recovery from trauma in intimate relationships as viewed psychodynamically in the clinical context. Traumas inflicted by intimates, especially by parents, differ from transgressions and betrayals-however legitimately traumatizing-committed in less psychically-rooted relationships. While some betrayals are in fact not forgivable, what is at issue when parents or other intimates betray is the inevitable yearning for reunion: a wish whose potential fulfillment raises the spectre of re-traumatization and humiliation and is thus fraught with risk. Dr Siassi focuses on the analytic situation as the rightful arena for true forgiveness; one in which the ongoing process of translating experience into words and creating meaning through narrative-often in the transference-allows a victim's wish (as opposed to his/her will) to re-establish a meaningful bond with the offender, to unfold. Dr Siassi argues that this transformative process, first of letting go of resentment, and second of reestablishing a bond that is not superficial with the intimate other, is precisely what allows individuals to transcend the past without erasing it, freeing themselves to fully engage with their world in the present. This is what is meant simply by forgiveness, a formidable challenge for psychoanalytic work.



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