

What is the secret to forgiving your enemy?

Many of you will remember the Pogo comic strip created by Walt Kelly, which famously stated, "We have met the enemy and he is us." To learn to forgive an enemy we must first look inside ourselves and realize that what creates the enmity between us may be some action or attitude that is generated from inside us that our enemy is responding to. By changing our own actions or attitudes we may reduce or even eliminate the anger that made us enemies in the first place. We must also remember that our enemy is just like us, indeed is a reflection of our own selves. In Leviticus [19:18], we learn one of the key concepts in maintaining a just and civil society: "Love your neighbor as yourself." The original Hebrew may be understood as "Love your neighbor who is exactly like you." Being conscious of our similarities, rather than focusing on our differences, makes it easier to forgive someone who hurts or wrongs us. Understanding the motivations of our enemy makes it easier to find it within ourselves to forgive their actions. We can strive to understand what engenders our enemy's actions by listening to their narrative, finding in it the mirror of our own story and sharing that with our enemy so that we both discover the common humanity that leads to forgiveness. Finally, we are taught [Genesis 1:27] that each one of us is created "in the divine image." If, as I believe, we are constantly striving to live by the highest ideals that divinity represents in order to live Godly lives, we must emulate God's forgiveness by forgiving our enemies.