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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Thank you. And so, in part the idea of the topic of forgiveness came up because of it being Memorial Day, does somehow connected for me. The word for mindfulness in the Buddhist language of Pali, is Sati. And the word Sati is very closely connected to illogically with a word for memory to remember. And in a sense, the, the, the classic definition of mindfulness in Buddhism is very simple. It's simply the ability to hold something in your mind. That's why it can't get to memory, but to hold so if you want to, for example, be mindful of your breath. You hold your attention on your breath. So just kind of holding collecting your attention, recollecting your attention on the breath. Often, people who do meditate are here to meditation teachings. Get the message that Buddhism focuses a lot on the present moment and waking up and being present in the present moment. And so they think that somehow that the past is to be ignored or pushed away or, like they go as quickly as you can, you can come back to the present. A friend of mine, they're like, exactly agree, but the friend of mine came up with a little cliché. I suppose our little description is that it can be claimed, therapy has to do about attending to the past. Buddhism has to do with attending to the present, and coaches have to do but prepare you for the future. And, but Buddhism as a as a spiritual tradition, is much wider than just being in the present moment. And one of the things that happens for many people when they start meditating on a regular basis is they're trying to be in the present moment and the practice of being in the present moment of relaxing the kind of distract normal distractions, surface distractions of the mind allows for the deeper unprocessed stuff of our life to pop up and show itself. And one of those things often is memories. And it's not so uncommon for people to sit in meditation, and then to have some memory of something from the past, come up and let go of it, then it might just come back up again. And again, until it is strong enough something about that memory needs to be attended to and dealt with. And one example of this for so many people is some realizing that you've hurt someone in the past and then feeling you know, unable in some ways to continue in your meditation practice, unless you somehow attend to this and take care of this. Many of you may be heard the story John Travis tells us practicing in India in the 60s. And at some point feeling somewhat, maybe stuck in his practice. And he went to Ram Dass who he knew in India back then. And Ram Dass gave him the instructions,

they had to go back to Tennessee to see his father and to make it a quick trip. But he had to go back and kind of take care of business with his father. And so that he can continue his practice because he was at some point, the holding the unresolved issues, around issues around his father were standing in the way of practice of him continuing the process of opening up. So there's a very kind of in seemingly endearing stories of people. Remembering sometimes very small, seemingly very small, seemingly insignificant thing they've done maybe 2030 years ago. And somehow it it really nags at them. And when meditating say, I really have to do something about this. I think I have to call that person up. And usually, so after 30 years, you call this person up and says, You know, I really want to apologize for what I said to you. And they say, Who are you

30 years ago.

Sometimes they remember and sometimes they very much appreciate coming many years later with an apology. And it's not so much for that person's sake, but it's really maybe for your own sake because to leave something unresolved and left with a sense of regret, that's not taken care of. It becomes a hindrance after a while becomes this kind of energetic thing which keeps agitating the practice and makes difficult to go further. There are other memories that might surface in the course of meditation, often the beginning years of someone's meditation practice. Sometimes they kind of fade away because They get taken care of after a while. But it's understood to be part of the purification practice. That meditation practice involves that part of what meditation practice is purifying us ourselves. Of all the accumulated holding patterns all the ways in which we've shut down or hold held tight or clinging, is built up in our system in our body and our emotional life in our hearts and our minds. And for some people, there's a huge accumulation of tension that's held in the body from holding patterns of a lifetime. And the process of meditation for them for is in part, learning to release these and letting giving space and letting them be released. If a person continues living their life the normal way being very busy or active or lost in their surface concerns of their mind, they're not making any space in their psyche for this stuff to bubble up and so it stays then repressed or hidden. But meditation practice makes it very difficult for oppression to continue. Because the normal mechanisms of holding things at bay are released. And then these things begin bubbling up. And at times, it can be very uncomfortable meditation practice because of this purification process that goes on. But it's considered to be very healthy to do that. It's kind of like the analogy would be. If you were going to put your very dirty clothes into your washing machine and we're going to wash your clothes. You put soap in the washing machine, and washing machines kind of agitates. And after a while, the water gets really brown from all the mud in your clothes. No one criticizes the water for being Brown. They're just happy that the water's leaving the dirt leaving their clothes. This stuff mindfulness is like soap for inner life. And as we kind of bring that soap to our life All this stuff comes out. And the equivalent of the water in the washing machine for, for us is awareness, it comes out into awareness as it passes through. And then if you react to that, and then fight it or criticize it or push it back, then you're not letting that soap do its process. So part of meditation is learning to be patient, learning to be very accepting of whatever arises. So that so that it can pass through you and kind of purify and then you get the added benefit, which is very important one, the same time, you're actually also learning

patience and acceptance. Many people who practice meditation, think they're trying to learn how to be calm or centered or mindful of presence for their experience. And maybe what you're really learning is how to be more patient and accepting of how difficult things are. There's not a lot of focus in Buddhism on forgiveness in the way that there is. In maybe Christianity or Judaism? And that's not exactly sure why. But this is my theory is that they're certainly right. Buddhism recognizes the importance of forgiveness, when there's some kind of holding when there's some kind of pain, some difficulty that been arisen. And in fact, the monastic life, the monks or nuns are expected regularly to go ask for forgiveness. And every every two weeks there's a ritual of asking for forgiveness for transgressions you've done, or once a year, there's a major ceremony of asking for forgiveness. So it's there to be done and recognized as being important. But the focus on I think the focus for Buddhism is not so much dwelling on that kind of future takes care of that kind of matter of factly needs to be taken care of, but rather puts more focus in my friends point of view. On in the present moment by helping us understand how better to deal with circumstances that arise in our life that lead us to have the kind of resentment and grudges that will require forgiveness.

For the whole forgiveness is a is something as a composite event. It's not like a single one little thing. It's involves many different facets. It certainly involves being hurt, some kind of transgression, but to be able to have forgive involves recognizing that hurt but not holding on to it, not clinging to it involves some empathy for oneself or for other people. It involves I would say some feeling of goodwill toward the person that you're going to forgive. It is just simply kind of forgetting about it or kind of, you know, kind of being neutral about the person But forgiveness is a kind of opening to a sense of goodwill to see the humanity of the person and think well of the person again to want well of that person.

So one of the focuses in Buddhism then is not so much in the, you know, the veil, the veil. And so the emphasis tends to be less than talking a lot about forgiveness, and classically much more talking about forbearance, which is maybe not the right English word, good Victorian word. The word is country. And country, sometimes it's translated as patients or patients patient for bearing patients might be the best word. But it's, it means that developing the capacity in difficulties of not getting angry, have not come somehow contracting around the sense of hurt or the pain or the fear that might arise. So there's a lot of training emphasis classes. Find ancient texts, the teachings of the Buddha, a lot of stories about developing this country, this patience, and how you when you find yourself in adverse adversarial situations that you should practice conflict, patience, or forbearance, or you just put it to practice this thing where you're not going to try to let your hurt flip over into anger. Now, it's not not meant as a kind of necessarily as a negative kind of judgment about anger. But it's saying, look, if you can look very honestly, at your hurt, honestly, what's really going on there. There might be an ad window for you not to choose to get angry in that circumstances. So there's lots of stories of this there's a story of Shaka, who's a great king of a king of the gods, who one day was insulted by the king of the surest insurers and devils are always fighting And so the king of the assurers insulted Shakur, the king of the gods and he doesn't do anything and the other kind of devils in the court, I think this is not the very kind of concerned How could How could Shaka you know not not defend himself or get you know do something not get angry or attack back or and so

so then one of the cork ears when the devil said, When face to face with the king of the assurance is it from fear or weakness That you under him so patiently. Listening to his harsh words, is a sign of weakness that the fact that you don't do anything, or fear your fear if you're afraid of what the consequences would be. And Shaka says, It is neither through fear nor weakness, that I am patient. How can a wise person like me engage in combat with a fool? And then the courtier says, fools would vent their anger even more, if no one would keep them in check. This is pretty good arguments right? comes right back. You probably thought of like yourself. Hence with drastic punishment, the wise man, wise person should restrain the fool. And Chaka says, I myself think this alone is I myself think this alone is the way to check the fool when one knows when suppo is angry, when mindfully maintains one, once peace as someone said, that your your enemy can hurt you could, you know could say all kinds of horrible things towards you. But if you really want if you really want to help your enemy, and really get hurt, you have to help them by getting angry. I see this fault so then the quarter goes on, I see this fault in practicing patient endurance, when the fool thinks of you Thus, when the fool thinks thinks like this, he will injure me out of fear. The adult will chase you even more as a bull does one who flees and Chuck yeah says, Let it be whether or not he thinks he endures me out of fear of goals that can't culminate in one's own good. None is found better than patients. When a person endowed with strength patiently endure as a weakling, they call him this. They call that the Supreme patience. The weakling must be patient always. They call that strength, no strength at all. The strength that is a strength of folly. But no one can reproach a person who is strong because guarded by the Dharma. One who repays an angry person with anger, thereby makes things worse for himself. Not repaying an angry person with anger, when wins a battle hard to win. This is nice. Now he goes on to say he practices for the welfare of both his own and the others. When knowing that his foe is angry, he mindfully maintains his peace has a wonderful sense of kind of compassion or care or concern, or at least a very good point of view. That you also can turn also your welfare of your opponent antecedent is kept in mind. Whenever he achieves the cure of both his own and the others, the people who consider him a fool are unskilled and the Dharma. So that's an ancient argument for patient endurance. And there's lots of stories like this and lots of teachings about the importance of doing it much more on doing that, than in forgiveness. Because if there's a need for forgiveness, I mean, if someone asked for forgiveness, and you know, you don't, you don't anger, you know, angry or resentful or feel hurt, but they're asked for forgiveness because they have transgressed against you, then of course, it's a nice thing to offer forgiveness. But in order to, but to need to forgive because we're, we're feeling resentful, or held inside of us, is a sign that we didn't practice patient endurance or patience or this peacefulness that Chucky was practicing. And a lot of the focus on Buddhist practice would be to kind of let's get back and really see the agenda. is the point of beginning in the difficulty we have in life, where we choose to get angry or resentful, and let's see if we can be have a wiser choice in this situation. However, sometimes we find ourselves getting angry anyway, resentful. Forgiveness is a beautiful virtue and beautiful virtue. Sometimes people overlook that they only something like their forgiveness only makes sense. If there's resentment, or grudge. So you need to have grudging resentment in order to forgive.

You can go tell someone I'm a great forgiver I'm really good at it. You know, I do it all the time. What you're telling them is Yeah, I'm really good at getting grudges. I get grudges all the time. So

So the focus on forgiveness from pointed from from the point of view of Buddhist practice, there's a lot of points of ways of studying forgiveness and the need for it but from the point of view of Buddhist practice tends to be somewhat personal, that your own spiritual cultivation development is going to require the release of that grudge that resentments so you're you're doing it for yourself and that can take some of the burden off. Feeling Oh, that person doesn't doesn't deserve my forgiveness. Well, it doesn't really matter whether the person deserves it or not. It's a matter of can you be free of the shackles that hold your own heart tight.

Forgiveness. It was interesting story I heard today about forgiveness. Who someone who had a very difficult time with her mother, very tumultuous and painful relationship and she carried a lot of anger towards Her mother for many years. And, and then some years ago, her mother died. And she was there at the deathbed as her mother was dying. And she was surprised. And she was, she'd been angry because a mother never apologized and never accept never, her mother never acknowledged the fact that you'd heard her daughter so much that she was able to mother's deathbed. And she was surprised to find out that she had forgiven her mother. And it kind of points to one of the ways forgiveness to works is not necessarily something we do always that we can work at it. But sometimes something gets found. And sometimes it's found when conditions change. And one condition is the kind of empathy that arises when someone's dying or great suffering. It's very hard then to kind of re see the person such a radically different way that the you know that Of course, we're gonna forget Of course, we're not going to see them in the old old way hold that grudge against them. So it's very interesting this this person, she said that, you know, she was surprised to find out that you'd forgiven her mother no longer held the grudge, the resentment, the anger. And when that had lifted, then she noticed there was next was that she'd heard her she had hurt her mother too. And that she needed to, she needed to ask for forgiveness from her mother. And as long as she was stuck in her own pain, clinging to her own pain, and kind of always kind of these darts in her eyes towards her mother, she was unable or unwilling to see her responsibility her part of it. And when, when she had been able to forgive her mother, then she saw her own part and then she had to ask her mother for forgiveness and better mother was in a coma. So I'm not sure how that played itself out.

I think asking for forgiveness after someone's died, especially if you can go to the body is still beneficial. So forgiveness

so the skills we learned in mindfulness, practice the skills of learning how to be present in a wise, accepting patient. nonreactive way with our pain or hurt and our anger is a very important step to learning how to forgive. Because without that kind of ability to be present for our own hurt and pain, with acceptance and patience, I think it's very hard to have the realistic kind of steps towards forgiveness and Without the development of the kind of mindfulness which allows you to be really

present for someone else that drops below our reactive filters of how we see the person. Many of us have ways in which we put people in categories, we have old memories and old. Hurts are old opinions about people that we carry with us and we see them we see them through those filters. Part of the function of mindfulness practice is to help relax those filters. So we start seeing other people with less than this filters in front of our eyes, and we start seeing them much more directly. And that is the beginning of empathy. Also, empathy arises also when we see ourselves with less filters, and we see ourselves in a deeper and deeper way. And then greater depth, the greatest greater self forgiveness, the greater self compassion, the greater sense of intimacy and knowing of yourself that we have the greater stillness you can be with yourself. will translate directly into greater empathy for other people. Because it's kind of empathy means being able to put yourself in other people's shoes. And it was more of you to put in other people's shoes. You know, you'll see them much better, but it is less of you to put in those shoes. You know, not, you know, it's not going to mean much to look at the other person. And then part of forgiveness then is to is to kind of maybe consider whether it's reasonable or important to practice forgiveness or try to have forgiveness. What are the benefits of it? What are the benefits of not doing it? What are the benefits of holding on to the anger? What's the benefit of holding on to a grudge or resentments? What are the benefits of trying to offer forgiveness? What is forgiveness? You know, and to explore these things. What does it mean for you? What are the what are all the reservations you might have about you know, is it safe to have forget to offer forgiveness is it okay? Is it Does it mean I'm just gonna have to forget what this person has done doesn't mean I have to. That means kind of condoning of what they've done. Forgiveness means means neither forgetting nor condoning. It's certainly a lot easier to forgive someone if they have apologized. And they've made it clear that they no longer stand behind what they did that they feel that was really, you know, they're not going to do that anymore. That is a lot easier to forgive. But sometimes you can't do that you can't get that from other people. And it doesn't make sense to forgive someone who hasn't apologized, who never will. I think these kinds of questions some people will have to grapple with in their own hearts as they do a meditation practice. Because sooner or later if though, if there's a kind of holding those kinds of resentments somewhere in your heart, you're going to have to confront them directly. There's no spiritual by pasts in Buddhism, maybe temporarily that can be. But, but ultimately as you do this purification process, it all has to come out. And so learning how to be present for and being willing to and learn the skills to do it, and grapple this question of forgiveness is going to be a very important issue for many people.

So offering forgiveness and also asking for forgiveness. There's a beautiful section of the video, the monastic rules for the monks and nuns, which talks about reconciliation and forgiveness. And it says if you need to go ask for forgiveness from someone recommends you use these words go to the person say

I should get it right.

Forgive me. I am at peace towards you. Forgive me, I'm at peace towards you. Those are kinds of ways so you've come in saying now I'm at peace with you. I have no immunity and my heart towards you or hatred or resentment or anger. But you know now I'm at peace with you. And please forgive me.

I like to think of forgiveness as being a personal matter. It's really something you do for yourself. The interpersonal aspect from a Buddhist point of view, I would call reconciliation. And reconciliation has in part of asking for forgiveness as part of the reconciliation part but, but but both parts it both parts are necessary. But maybe to distinguish the two of them is useful because there's a whole complex of things connected to forgiveness and a different bunch of skills and understandings and emotions connected with reconciliation.

and compassion

is just a subset of compassion.

Yeah, I think the difference compassion is, is from Buddhist point point of, say, empathy which is closely connected to compassion empathy is feeling the suffering of someone else, sensing or feeling or intuiting, being present for someone else's suffering. Kind of like it's your own almost perhaps or somehow and compassion is, is empathy plus the desire for that person's betterment. That person that suffering come to an end. So compassion involves feeling, the sufferings kind of shaking, quivering of the heart and connection to that person suffering and wanting the suffering to be alleviated. So empathy and compassion, forgiveness, there can be a lot of compassion without you know, with forgiveness is not an issue at all because, you know, you know, we didn't matter if anybody being hurt I mean, someone's sick in the hospital and you feel compassion for them. But the north part of the process for allowing for Forgiveness is a healthy process. One of the elements I think, is this thing of empathy. If you can really see the other person, as a human being now through the filters of your anger, then it's a lot easier to want to forgive them a lot easier to want to offer forgiveness, ask for forgiveness, the whole thing, you know, so I think empathy is is a very useful thing. And I think when people do do forgiveness trainings, like in the world of psychotherapy, I think I believe one of the things that you're training people to do is, is to develop empathy for the other person,

transgression or hurt.

Someone's to be forgiven

for usually,

their comments or questions.

The idea of helplessness and compassion, and how does that

helplessness and compassion is the theme of the weekend for me. It's the theme of the weekend for me. Lots of compassion when I felt hope helpless to help someone

that's sort of like, almost like a mere Cause if

you see someone suffering and you feel sort of helpless, and that sort of causes the equivalent.

Well, I never heard that. Maybe Maybe I think about that. But I think, you know, until you brought this up, I would never would have thought that I would have thought that compassion just arises out of being in the presence of someone else's suffering, and wanting to do something about it. And sometimes you can, it's really easy.

There's also what's involved as a sense of Oh,

yeah, I think about that. Yes.

experience.

Having

the experience of the person I'm dealing with has been helpful to me to develop

empathy for them. Like a lot of guys, I'm carrying around a lot of

that resentment toward my father for many years. And then when I found

that I was living a life like his, as the father of a boy and self employed and moving, those who are things that lifestyle that he had, I found all of a sudden empathy for him might have explained that forgiveness just swelled up. But oh boy, now I know what his life was like, in some ways, only the clothes I've experienced, but carry some of it.

I wonder sometimes whether part of the reason they want grandchildren

They can, they can be better understood.

And forgiving. Someone that has placed you in a very traumatic situation for many years. You It seems that you don't realize the trauma that you've been in, and you hold a sort of an unknown resentment or

anger toward that horse person. And you may not even know the underlying cause. And it's only really when you understand in that the treatment that you were put under was a very abusive treatment, then it seems is that you can only then at that time, forgive someone until you can understand what happened to you. It's very, very hard to find forgiveness. You can say it 1000 times in your head, but it doesn't work. Yeah,

I agree. Yes, I've heard

sympathy empathy and

empathy expressed in certain body positions up I get the strikes out that

sympathy is leaning towards the person. Empathy was being centered and apathy is leaning back to square.

I like I like the

emphasis on the body posture because so much gets expressed through our body. And, and

so, you know, a body's often a great window into how we're feeling and then what's going on or reactions or intentions or motivations. So that's really great. An apathy apathy I think just kind of disinterest isn't the kind of not this this this interest in, in, in suffering, path even passion, suffering, right not not suffering apathy, sympathy with suffering with and empathy so I know and what exam and taking on taking on and so

i think i think there can be a healthy sense of kind of interest in someone that will lean forward and kind of really get to know them really see them. But sometimes leading into people leaning towards people who didn't, you know, can be a little bit, a little bit attachment connected to it or Little bit overly concerned. One of the things that's talked about in Buddhism is the importance of of combining or balancing compassion with equanimity. And equanimity is this balance kind of yourself, right? And you're fully there compassion for them, but there's no going towards or going away from. And, and I guess, apathy, there's all go pulling away. And I think of apathy, I think of apathy. I think pulling away is kind of aversion. You know, whereas, whereas apathy is just like with the indifference. Yes,

I work with at risk teenagers and one of the challenges with forgiveness is if they're currently in an abusive relationship with their parents.

It's

psychologists, Council and it's not good to work on forgiveness because it perpetuates there. ability or their propensity to accept the abuse and not?

Yeah, well, that's a very good point, it's very, it's considered very dangerous to be too quick, forgiving, you know, just to do it too quickly or to, you know, simply because, because it can, it can be kind of denial or kind of have our own feelings, what's going on inside of us and all that. And certainly, it's been said that forgiveness is not very useful to do while the person is still beating you up. You know, try forgive you. And However, in a situation like that, rather than teaching people forgiveness, when it when they abuse is still current is maybe the very skills connected to patients. patient endurance is what's really called for here. It's been to, to understand how they're reacting towards that how they create how they create anger and resentment. So rather than dealing with resentment, which is there to deal with how when they go back home the next day, and someone yells at them, how not to take that on, like Chuck, I didn't take it on.

During the initial exercise who has to our chosen meditation, we were supposed to

call to mind the person who may have injured me four times and look for forgiveness. I did this and I don't find it there.

And honestly, then I go well, I can realize what I know about it and recognize the other person has a side of the situation as well. And is that about as far as I can go at this point?

The

I think forgiveness only is needed if there's resentment or a sense of grudge. So some people can be injured in some ways when someone has transgressed in some ways, but the person who's been transgressed against doesn't take it on as a grudge doesn't take If it doesn't get angry because of that, I mean, they still have to deal with a problem. And they have to kind of do the best they can, but they haven't taken on internally, they're not froze in some way in their hearts. And so there's no need for forgiveness, unless they ask for it because they realize they've done something. But you know, for your sacred, maybe no need for it. Or it's possible that in a situation you described, is that no forgiveness comes because there's no sense of really understanding or sensing or feeling the level of pain or resentment or anger. That's really there. Some people get become numb to all that. And so this word forgiveness, it makes no sense because they're because they're kind of hit that the dimension of who they are is kind of hidden to themselves.

We might be sometimes things go away through time. It's possible. That's that does happen. And remember what I was saying you 10 years ago or so there was a housemate I had, who I was angry with. And at some point I, I,

I,

I know I was became neutral towards her. But the neutral was not forgiving. You know, because what it was I didn't have any sense of goodwill. But I didn't, it wasn't holding any ill will towards her, but there was no goodwill towards her kind of neutral. And I ran into her some time ago, maybe a while ago, and, and I was really pleased to see that the goodwill was back within me. So sometimes it's up between us just time to time took care of that on its own just. And so sometimes time takes care of the old injuries and we don't no longer holding, so sometimes, but sometimes, that level of hurt the way where the sense of hurt the sense of anger, whatever can be so deeply buried inside of us, because maybe we feel it's unacceptable to be angry. I can't be it. against that person, you know, so or that category of people. So you know, it gets buried deep inside to the safe to forgive, you know, there's no material to use for forgiveness. And so then just a matter of practicing and the mindfulness practice as as it unfolds, whatever needs to come up to the surface and be dealt with will will eventually show itself.

I can see that this is the case it was an old injury, and I was very angry.

But now it's a very long time. years have passed. And

it kind of occurred to me as if I mean, this is sort of like, there's no way it's physically affecting me now. I would just quit holding on to the fact that I was hurt a long time ago. Maybe there would be no need to talk about forgiveness.

Yeah, the injury is still there. If you're hurt You're still holding on to your hurt then then you then you're forgiven. So the, the it's very interesting you know how in part of what happens in mindfulness practice is our whole sense of self identity shifts also what we how identify how we see ourselves and some people see themselves through the filter of their hurt, how they've been hurt, like, you know, heavy so nowadays he talks about people who are attached to being the victim, for example.

And it's very hard.

If you do mindfulness practice seriously, it's very hard to hold on to being the victim because it's involves a holding. All holding has to be released. The someone said, the cost of freedom is forgiveness. Yeah, this last last question or comment, then we'll stop.

lecture by Marshall Rosenberg.

one step further back, when I came realize myself was behind the anger is hurt. And I tried to get ahold of the hurt or express the hurt that I could get around the anger, but be careful the anger you take responsibility for, but he indicated wasn't behind it hurt his knee and until me, and very often, if

we can get back to what the need was, and then trespass or, or otherwise, my wife found that if she could actually feel the need can be like, the mother never said, a positive thing about this. So finally, if you say it to yourself, but I need to hear from her or anybody is that and then say, but you really wanted to hear from your mother or your father or your whatever. It does help because it verbalizes where the need is, and you go ahead and then you say well, mighty

for that, and I think that that's one step further Beautiful,

very nice. So thank you. And I asked for forgiveness for whatever problems this talk the guided meditation. And I was I was hoping to get a little bit of reports from you. I was like to do that guided meditation and if any of you want to just tell me at the as you before you leave tonight, because it's nice to get some feedback when I do things like this. And for those of you who don't who don't like guided meditations, I asked for forgiveness.