

ONLINE SEMINARY
„Self-healing by Forgiving”

by Mother Siluana

DEFINITION

- *Forgiveness is a way to learn God and be like Him.*
- *Forgiveness is a conscious process and one which emerges from a deep-heart belief that we no longer consider guilty those who have done us wrong and no longer feel guilty towards those whom we have done wrong.*
- *It is a working process, a voluntary and free act, and not a feeling.*
- *It is a free process and one which brings along freedom.*
- *It is a matter of the heart in the Biblical and not in the psychological way.*
- *It renews the wounded relationship.*
- *It interrupts the avalanche of reactions caused by the pain originated from the traumatic experiences.*
- *It enables the power to resist being overcome by the negative feelings and emotions, which maintain the pain.*
- *It is rather a matter between man¹ and God.*
- *It is a source of Grace and of liberation from the negative powers of anger, remembrance of the harm done onto us, self-pity, bitterness, defensive behaviours, blocking oneself behind a protection wall, hiding one's true identity.*
- *God is ready at every moment to forgive and to love us under no condition whatsoever. The difficulty is ours as it emerges from our inability to let ourselves be loved.*

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND FORGIVENESS WE HAVE TO:

- Understand what convictions and assumptions we have about our identity in God.
- Become aware of the fact that we are humans, which means that:
 - we have been created *in the image* of the Lord, the one God in Three Hypostases, meaning that we are *like God, subject* in relation to *other subjects*,
 - we are created beings, meaning that we are *different* from God and dependent on him, and
 - we are being called to become *like* him by working together with His Grace.
- Man exists only in *relation* with:
 - God
 - himself/herself
 - the others
- For the fallen man, *relation* is the *place* where:
 - he loves and is being loved,
 - he hurts and is being hurt,
 - may grow and may get healed forgiving *like* God and receiving forgiveness gratefully.

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¹ Man is referred to in this text as person, as individual regardless of gender.

- Be aware of the existence of good and evil, and of being surrounded by the consequences of evil that has been around before we have come to this world.
- Realize that our dark side puts pressures on us – and that the Grace of God alone can set us free from these pressures.
- Discover that God forgives us and bestows forgiveness upon us as a way to heal our emotional wounds and to repair the broken relationships, making possible for us to go beyond our sins and those of others.

MAN IS DIFFERENT THAN GOD

God

Is the Creator of all seen and unseen
Is perfect in the absolute way

Loves utterly

Loves unconditionally

Enters into an intimate personal relationship with every human being

Never breaks His promises

Cares about the wellbeing of every human being

Man

Is a being created by God

Has an unquenchable longing for the Absolute and completeness

Has limited powers of love

Loves conditionally

Doesn't interact harmoniously with all people, but aims towards this state

Breaks his promises

Is selfish and abusive

THE IMPORTANCE OF FORGIVENESS:

- Heals the hearts and renews relations. It is the key to the holistic health of the human being.
- Is the unexpected and unfolded remedy of love against unjust pain.
- Opens the door towards new possibilities of living life.
- Sets free emotions and feelings.
- Empowers through the release of energies blocked by hatred, anger and anxiety.
- Helps you face the reality of life and deal with it.
- Makes you realize that you no longer need hatred and anger because once you decide to stop fighting, you don't need any weapons anymore.

Once you have decided to forgive:

- Don't stop: after you have decided that you want to forgive, you will realize that you will feel differently than the way expected to feel.
- Don't feel scared: anger may continue even after you have forgiven, because the feelings of anger and pain need time to disappear. Allow them to stay within you while forgiving.
- Ask for forgiveness for your "share" of the guilt.
- Think that the problem is between you and God, rather than between you and the person who hurt you.
- It is necessary to understand and acknowledge one's own feelings without letting them drive one's life.
- Begin where you can and let forgiveness do its work in the process of healing with the grace of God.

HOMEWORK

1. Make a list of the things that you have forgiven those who hurt you throughout your life.
2. Make a list of the things that you were forgiven for by those to whom you have done wrong and to whom you are grateful for their forgiveness.
3. Make a list of the things that you cannot forgive. If it is hard to name them, use a symbol to represent them.
4. Make a list of the things for which you think that you cannot be forgiven.
5. Make a list of the things for which you think you cannot forgive yourself.
6. What do you believe that prevents you from forgiving when you cannot forgive?

WHAT IS NOT FORGIVENESS

Forgiving is not forgetting

- The so-called forgotten wounds have been chased into the sub-conscious and from there they continue to torment the person. In order to treat and heal them, it is necessary to bring them back to the conscious level.
- Forgiveness heals up the emotional wounds. Only after we have forgiven we can remember the event without any resentment. We no longer suffer. The Savior came back to life with the signs of the nails on his body, but without feeling the pain anylonger.

Forgiving is not just a sudden act of will

- Many feel guilty or accuse others for not being able to forgive at once. However, forgiving is not a heroic act of will, through which we suppress our emotions, but an act of our entire being, one which requires the contribution of all our spiritual powers: heart, intelligence, will.
- Who skips the stages of the emotional transformation and healing does nothing else but dresses an infected wound, which will end up by becoming even more infected.
- Experiencing anger and an inner feeling of injustice is part of the forgiveness process.
- It takes time to heal and to forgive; we shouldn't pressure to hurry what is happening with us.
- It is necessary to distinguish between feeling angry and being willing to take revenge, having visions of making our own "justice".
- Anger (rage) is a healthy emotion, a power of the spirit that God has given us in order to protect our integrity. Anger in itself is not a sin, but the hatred and the fury that it can unleash. In your anger, do not sin (4 Ephesians 26), says the Lord.
- What matters is to take the decision that we no longer want revenge. Revenge is useless and devastating. We need to acquire an inner peace, an emotional peace.

Forgiving does not mean excusing

- Excusing someone means that we don't consider accountable anymore the person who offended us. When someone hurts us without knowing or without wanting to do so, s/he doesn't have to ask for our forgiveness, but needs to apologize.
- If someone wanted to hurt or to wound us, excuses are out of place. Our tendency to pardon the person who offended us is based on mitigating circumstances from his/her past. But no guilt, no matter how explainable it may be, can be excused. It can only be forgiven. When Moses asked God to forgive His people, God answered back revealing that He is: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty" (Exodus 34, 6-7)².

Forgiveness doesn't stand for reconciliation

- Forgiveness relates to the act that hurt the relationship. Reconciliation may be a result of forgiveness, but it doesn't necessarily have to take place. If after forgiving, we feel that our relation would not grow deeper through reconciliation, it is better to

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² New King James Version

leave it aside in order to maintain peace. Peace means not taking revenge and not wishing to take revenge. Peace and love of enemies do not necessarily imply friendship.

- Unfortunately, many people reconcile with one another without forgiving each other's guilt by saying "let the dead bury the dead". But without recognizing and pointing out the suffering that we have produced or that we have suffered, true reconciliation cannot take place. Truth must be spoken.
- Reconciliation implies forgiveness, and forgiveness implies the utterance of truth.

Forgiveness cannot be imposed

- Forgiveness is a work of love. The person, who forgives, must voluntarily assume the choice s/he has made, without expecting something from the forgiven person.
- We may wish to be loved by those around us despite our negative behavior, but we cannot claim love.
- Forgiveness may be granted, may be asked for, but may not be claimed.

Forgiveness doesn't imply renouncing to what is ours

- Forgiveness doesn't exclude justice. A forgiven thief is not spared from returning the stolen goods to the rightful owner.
- Forgiveness doesn't override the consequences of a negative behavior or of a hurtful word. Forgiveness is not an act of justice, but a work of love for the rehabilitation of the guilty one. It doesn't exclude facing the wrongdoer with his/her deed and hating the sin, while loving the sinner.
- On His cross, the Savior damned the sin that lives in us, made justice, but didn't damn us together with the sin.

Forgiveness doesn't change the other

- When we forgive, something indeed extraordinary happens, but with the person that forgives and not with the one that is forgiven. The later may become conscious of the wonder and may change his attitude or behavior, but the power of forgiveness works in us, those who forgive. We are the ones being healed, that ones that receive peace, the ones that receive the power to pray for others.
- We shouldn't forgive while waiting for the other to change his/her attitude.

THE OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF FORGIVENESS

1. The fallen nature and its twisted powers

- For the fallen man, it is *natural* not to be able to forgive the one who hurt him and to use his powers to make himself "justice". As such:
 - *Anger (rage)* is used to make us feel and look powerful. Without rage, man may feel unarmed and vulnerable.
 - *Fear* is no longer used to face the unknown that must be conquered and changes into fear of facing pain and into escaping from acknowledging it.
- Forgiveness brings pain into the foreground so it can be healed. The acknowledgment and acceptance of pain are the premises of forgiveness.

2. The exculpation of guilt by behavioral justification

- Forgiveness doesn't mean clearing the behavior that hurt us.
- It is necessary to do a subjective analysis of the events that took place.
- Responsibility needs to be emphasized.

3. Mistaking forgiving for forgetting

- The past shapes the individual and the decisions he takes.
- By forgetting, you may let again the ones who hurt you once hurt you again.

- “Integration”, assimilation of the traumatic events is needed.
 - We may forgive without forgetting.
4. *Connecting the act of forgiving someone with his/her regrets*
- Forgiveness is an act that comes unilaterally from the part of the one who forgives. It doesn't depend either on the understanding, or on the behavior and agreement of the other person.
5. *The thought the one should repent in order to be forgiven*
- Forgiveness is always a free and undeserved gift.

HOMEWORK

Take the following steps towards forgiveness:

1. Each day of the following week, preferably before going to sleep at night, read the Akathist of the Holy Spirit (which you can find in the Book of Akathists, Vol. 2, published by the St. Vladimir Seminary Press) or another prayer to the Holy Spirit.
2. Draw the “river of your life”, marking on its windings the most relevant moments that you can remember.
3. Remember and describe in writing at least seven traumatic memories from childhood. Name and shortly describe the persons involved.
4. Mention the negative feelings, which you experienced during the event.
5. How did the story end and what impacts do you think it had on your life?
6. What are your feelings now towards those persons?
7. Did you confess what you feel guilty for?

KILLING OF THE BROTHER

KILLING OF THE BROTHER (GENESIS 4)

- God “did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell” (v. 5).³
- Cain was wounded in his legitimate expectation regarding the attention of God. Now he experiences:
 - *Rebellion* towards the injustice done to him,
 - *Anger, resentment and desire to take revenge,*
 - *Sadness and despair.*
- In **this** moment God intervenes in order to:
 - Provide a teaching that was meant to help Cain grow to a new spiritual stage.
 - Test his freedom: Cain could have freely chosen the rise or the fall.
 - Test his trust in Him: he was either to trust the Love and the justice of God and grasp the meaning of the moment through a spiritual growth, or to doubt and slide down, falling prey to the blind laws of the already fallen nature.
- Cain refused to “win over” the sin that was “knocking on the door” and chose to let himself overcome by jealousy, envy and revolt, then took revenge by killing his brother.
- Cain, the first born, “the man acquired from the Lord” (Genesis 4, v. 1) becomes the first killer in the history of manhood. His crime becomes the first link in an endless chain of crimes, the first ring in the chain of criminal violence that has ruled and continues to rule this world.
- Cain’s crime became the prototype of all aggressions done by man against man.

THE FEELING OF INJUSTICE LEADS TO VIOLENCE

- Just like Cain, the person experiencing the feeling of injustice will become sad, will suffer and will rebel.
- Rebellion will be expressed through resentments: revival of the painful feelings produced by the event.
- Resentment, if allowed and entertained, leads to the desire to take revenge.
- The spirit of revenge destroys the inner peace and feeds the hatred against the brother until it eventually leads to the desire to kill him.
- Hatred and the spirit of revenge give then birth to a devastating spiral that may lead not only to crime, but also to the equally annihilating calumny, backbiting, mockery, etc.
- The engine of this violent dynamism is the human refusal to grow up, the persistence in maintaining the mentality of the child, who thinks that he is entitled to everything. From here emerges the spirit of laying claims, chronic discontent, continuous fight for one’s rights.
- Cain’s story shows that egocentric attitudes lead to violence and make the individual blind to the gifts s/he has received. Cain waits for God to meet his expectations and to conform to his spirit of justice.

³ New King James Version

- But the ways of God are the ways of God. Cain, like every other individual, is invited to lift his head and listen to the teachings of God for cleaning and transforming one's heart, for growing into the image of God.
- Any form of violence against one's brother is nothing but a refusal to follow the spiritual path offered by God to every man at the various stages of his development.
- The violence of the human desire, when not oriented towards conquering the Kingdom of God, turns towards other people.
- Cain takes revenge on God by killing his brother.
- God took a human form and Christ freely accepted to become the victim of human revenge on God in order to make obvious God's love for man and, through his sacrifice, to reconcile mankind with the Heavenly Father.
- People always find a way to justify their violence and feel entitled to make their own justice. But making one's own justice means trying to replace the Rightful One.

Justification, self-righteousness

- Refers to making the other(s) responsible: "not me – he, she, they..."
- Prevents us from becoming aware of our responsibilities.
- Prevents us from becoming aware of the action of the unconscious protection mechanisms, which poison our life.
- Prevents us from realizing the harm we did to our brother, who, as a result, will feel guilty. When a wound cannot be named, because the one, who produced it, refuses to acknowledge his share of guilt, the victim will end up feeling culpable, considering that the respective prejudice is right and legitimate. Then false guilt feelings develop.

False guilt

- Makes the one, who experiences it, regard the offences as legitimate.
- Causes the victim to enter into a mimesis of the harm s/he has experienced, which s/he will unwillingly further replicate onto others.
- As such, the raped could become a rapist, the abused an abuser, the humiliated an offender, the tortured a torturer.

THE LIBERATION OF MAN FROM PRE-DETERMINATION AND CONDITIONING

- With the grace of God, a person can become aware of the unconscious schemes of mimesis and may free himself from their control. Love is more powerful than death.
- The word of God to Cain "sin lies at your door, but you should rule over it" shows us that we have the power to be free, that we can answer to hurtful experiences other than through violence. Even if this freedom is alternated by fall, by passions and the conditioning they bring along, it is not less of a power that man can use at his free will.
- The freedom of the human being is never fully annihilated. In any circumstance, no matter how "pressured" we might have been to take an evil course, we realize that we had the opportunity to choose between life and death (Deuteronomy 30, 19).

HOMEWORK

1. Continue to pray each day to the Holy Spirit, keeping forgiveness in mind.
2. Remember and describe a situation in which you felt wronged.
3. Describe the feelings you experienced then.
4. Describe the resentments you might have now.
5. Describe what you did then to "make yourself justice" or to take revenge.

6. What are you expecting from those in front of whom you justify yourself?
7. In which kind of situations do you believe that you are “entitled” to offend someone?
8. Identify and describe aspects of your behavior that could be forms of mimesis of a harm experienced as a child.
9. When those around you claim that you are making them suffer:
 - what do you feel?
 - what do you think?
 - and what do you do?

Annexes:

1. Guilt
2. Freedom for...a responsible freedom.

ANNEX 1: GUILT

Introduction

I like reading those colorful travel magazines and then I look and see how much a trip costs and tell myself: „Maybe next year!“ Have you ever seen such a brochure with the question: “Do you need a holiday? Take a journey into your guilt!” No? Neither have I. Still, this is a journey that we all, at one point or another, have taken. For some of us it has become a routine, like going to the office every day of the week. Even more, it is a journey that we make without considering the costs, the benefits, the time and the energy that it requires. So, in this brochure we will look more carefully to this subject – guilt. What is it? What are the costs associated with it? And the benefits – if any?

What is guilt?

Magda is an accountant. She stole some money from her employer and “tricked” the books in order to hide what she did. In the past months she pulled out enough money to “support” her gambling addiction. When she was caught and arrested, she justified herself by saying: “My boss has so much money that he doesn’t know what to do with them!”

Tibor lives at the other end of the city. His wife suffered a stroke three months earlier. He keeps telling himself that he should have remained at home the night when this happened. He should have known that this was going to happen. Had he been at home, he could have taken his wife faster to the hospital.

Tibor feels guilty. Magda doesn’t. So what is guilt? Something useful or rather harmful?

According to the dictionary, guilt is defined as “feeling responsible or full of resentments for certain offences.” If a person doesn’t assume any responsibility for his past mistakes, we can describe him as anti-social (someone who never feels guilty could be suffering from anti-social personality disorder).

As long as Magda stole the money from her employer, guilt would have been a normal reaction on her side. Had she experienced guilt, she would have stopped pulling out money before she was caught and arrested.

Tibor could not have known in advance that his wife was going to have a stroke. He did nothing wrong by being away from home that evening. Being awake every night, feeling guilty for his behavior is something that doesn’t do Tibor any good. This is an “irrational” guilt, although it may also be part of the pain that follows a loss.

☞ *Guilt that leads to lower self-esteem or scatters away the inner peace is destructive and unnecessary.*

Guilt and shame

We can distinguish between the feelings of guilt and shame through the way we think about our behavior and about ourselves. If we think that our behavior was wrong and we don’t feel good about it, then what we experience is guilt. If, instead, we think that because of what we did we are no longer of any good, we then cross the line between guilt and shame. Shame has much deeper roots than guilt. Often it comes from a childhood lived in a dysfunctional family, where we had been forced to feel ashamed or had been physically, emotionally or sexually abused. Shame is chronic and often requires therapy.

☞ A person who feels **guilty** will say:

I feel sorry for the way I behaved.

☞ A person who feels **ashamed** may say:

I am no good. How can you possibly stay with me?

Guilt and dependency

Magda has been having guilt feelings since childhood, but she learned to ignore them through a well-functioning protection mechanism. As part of it she became to rationalize that her boss didn't need the money she had stolen. This distorted way of thinking prevented her from seeing the reality of her offence.

Magda went to prison for embezzlement. During her detention, she received help for her alcohol and gambling addictions. She began to understand that she had to face her shame, or otherwise she could not continue the recovery treatment. If she felt comfortable with the feeling of shame without doing anything about it, she was due to fall back into alcoholism and gambling.

Magda also learned that her feelings of guilt for her previous behavior were necessary now. If she felt guilty for the mistakes she had made in the past, there were good chances that she would not do them again.

If we face the pain that we caused ourselves or others, we can prevent repeating it.

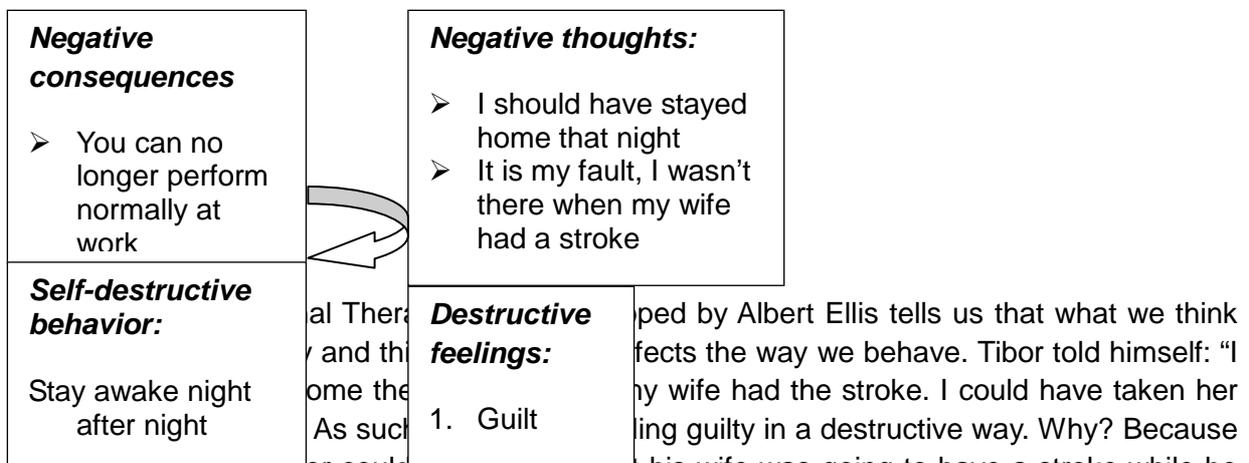
Guilt can help us become responsible, and this is essential for being able to recover from any kind of dependency.

Making the change with the help of the Rational-Emotional Therapy (RET)

How can you find out if what you feel is shame or guilt? One way is to listen to what you say to yourself, what are the thoughts that you have about what is happening around you. If you say to yourself that **your behavior is wrong** and that you have to change it, then what you are experiencing is **guilt**. If you say to yourself that **you are wrong**, that you are worthless for behaving in a particular way, then you are experiencing **shame**.

Once you become aware of your inner discourse – that conversation you have with yourself – you can decide if the guilt you are experiencing is useful or destructive. You can, afterwards, induce yourself the thoughts that lead to a destructive guilt.

Observe the diagram bellow. Notice how the inner discourse affects your feelings and how the feelings, in return, affect your behavior.



there was no way Tibor could have known that his wife was going to have a stroke while he was in the city. He cannot change what happened. Tibor has to challenge his irrational belief

that, somehow, he should have known what was going to happen. If he will do so, he may reduce his feelings of guilt and his self-destructive behavior will change. And so he will be able to sleep again.

RET uses the following process in order to challenge and change the irrational thoughts:



First we need to remember the event or the situation that upset us. Then we analyze our thoughts and beliefs regarding this situation. For the next step we have to identify the feelings that we experience as a result of these thoughts. Finally, we try to challenge the disturbing thoughts.

This is how Tibor used the four stages of RET:

A ← Event or situation	B ← Thoughts and beliefs	C ← Feelings	D ← Challenge of irrational thoughts
My wife had a stroke and I was not there to help her.	I should have been there. I could have taken her faster to the hospital.	Guilt, sadness, depression.	There was no way I could have known what was going to happen. Had I known, I would have remained at home. I didn't let her down.

Another example of the RET process in four phases:

Dana's mother believes that if her children love her, they will spend each holiday with her. Dana was invited for Easter brunch by a friend whom she wanted to get to know better. Dana feels now guilty because her mother wanted her to come home.

A ← Event or situation	B ← Thoughts and beliefs	C ← Feelings	D ← Challenge of irrational thoughts
I spent Easter with a friend. My mother is upset because I wasn't with her.	I am a bad daughter. I should have pleased my mother. She has done so much for me... How could have I left her alone on Easter?	Guilt, shame	I am a good daughter. Both my mother and I are adults and can make our decisions on how to spend Easter. She could have invited someone else if I decided not to go to her. I have the right to spend my time with my friends. There is no reason to feel guilty. I love my mother and prove this to her in many ways, other than spending Easter with her.

Both Dana and Tibor had irrational ideas that made them feel guilty. Dana's conviction that she has to obtain everyone's approval in life – in this case, her mother's – is a common belief that leads to guilt feelings. Tibor's irrational idea that he should have foreseen the future is also a cause of guilt.

Both Dana and Tibor load a "must" on their shoulders. Search for every "must" or "should" in your inner discourse. When we think that we must or should do something, we feel guilty if we don't succeed. It is better to use "I wish I could" instead of "I should".

Another word to search for in your inner discourse is "awful". If we refer to something we did or didn't do as "awful", we feel much guiltier than if we use "bad luck" or "disappointment".

Another irrational belief that leads to guilt is that we should always be perfect and that making a mistake is "awful". *No one is perfect. We all make mistakes, but mistakes are a great opportunity to learn something new.*

Guilt and anxiety

After accusing himself for having done something wrong, Victor usually ended up feeling guilty and then anxious. Yesterday he began to fight with his boss; later he felt guilty and anxious, and started to worry that he might get fired. He became so troubled that he forgot to lock the door to his office when he left in the evening. Overnight, someone broke into his office and stole his computer. Fortunately, Victor was able to use RET in order to minimize his feelings of guilt.

A ← Event or situation	B ← Thoughts and beliefs	C ← Feelings	D ← Challenge of irrational thoughts
I fought with my boss and he reminded me that I owe my job to him.	Why do I always contradict him? I really blew it this time! It's sure he will fire me now. Just by the way he looks at me, it's obvious that he wants to get rid of me. I am a stupid idiot! No one will ever hire me again.	Anxiety, guilt, shame	It's normal that we don't always have the same point of view. I am a valuable person, with my own thoughts and opinions. I don't owe my job to my boss; I have many qualities and skills. My latest evaluation has shown that I do a good work.

Notice that one of Victor's thoughts under section B was "I am a stupid idiot". Labeling ourselves with negative words leads to a diminishing of our self-esteem and to the extension of the guilt circle. Victor was able to change this belief by referring to himself as a "valuable person, with my own thoughts and opinions". In this way, Victor was able to assert his own personality.

Assertions are sentences that state who you are and build one's self-esteem. Observe the following irrational ideas. Next to each one there is an assertion that challenges the irrational belief.

Irrational belief	Assertion
☞ I should never make a mistake.	☞ I like to learn from my experiences.
☞ I should always please other people, otherwise they will not like me.	☞ It feels good to say what I feel and what I want.
☞ I am unworthy because I am an alcoholic.	☞ I am a good person and I feel good about going through a therapy.
☞ I should never get angry.	☞ It is alright to feel anger. Anger helps to realize when my rights are not being respected. It helps me to realize when I should be assertive.

☞ It is my fault that my wife is irritable.

☞ I am responsible for my own feelings and my wife for hers.

Setting a scope and an action plan

Once we realized that we have a tendency to blame ourselves and to become anxious, we can define a scope in order to reduce these negative feelings. Victor's reason was to minimize his feelings of guilt. He built his plan of action on using assertions. Each time he used RET, he rewarded himself by putting 2EUR in a box. To the box he attached a piece of paper with a sentence, which he read each time he put money into the box: *"I am a happy man. I take good decisions"*. Below this sentence, Victor taped the picture of a CD-player, which he wanted to have. When he gathered enough money into the box, Victor bought himself the CD-player.

You can also include a scope and a plan of action in your own RET. Victor added these two:

<p>E ←</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scope <p>Minimizing the feelings of guilt</p>	<p>F</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Action plan <p>Put 2 EUR in a box each time I use RET. Tape a piece of paper on it and read each time I put money in it the sentence „I am a happy man. I take good decisions“.</p>
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Now RET has become a process with six steps:

E ← <i>Scope</i>	A ← <i>Event</i>	B ← <i>Thoughts and beliefs</i>	C ← <i>Feelings</i>	D ← <i>Challenge of thoughts and beliefs</i>	F <i>Plan of action</i>
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Guilt, perfectionism and depression

Mariana is a perfectionist. Since the day she forgot her husband's birthday, she has been feeling depressive. She keeps asking herself how her husband is able to stand such a forgetful wife. She continued feeling this way although her husband had also forgotten her birthday on several occasions.

Feeling good about ourselves when we do well a job is not perfectionism. Perfectionism is more than that; it is that uncomfortable feeling we get each time when we do something that is less than perfect, when we have unrealistic expectations from ourselves as well as from the others, and when we don't allow ourselves to make any mistakes.

Guilt and perfectionism go hand in hand. Let's look again at Mariana's situation. She was expecting – in an unrealistic way – not to forget any birthday, more so her husband's. When she did forget it, she felt overwhelmed by guilt. This is how Mariana used RET in order to reduce her feelings of guilt.

<p>A ←</p> <p>○ <i>Event</i></p> <p>I forgot the birthday of my husband.</p>	<p>B ←</p> <p><i>Thoughts and beliefs</i></p> <p>What's happening with me? How could I be so absent-minded? I am no good.</p>	<p>C ←</p> <p>• <i>Feelings</i></p> <p>Guilt Depression</p>	<p>D</p> <p><i>Challenge of thoughts and beliefs</i></p> <p>Wait a second. Of course I love him. Anyways, it's human to forget a birthday. It is alright to make mistakes. I am not perfect. Neither is he. I forgave him when he forgot my birthday, so I trust that he will also forgive me.</p>
<p>E ←</p> <p><i>Scope</i></p> <p>Exercise each day on identifying my feelings.</p>		<p>F</p> <p>▪ <i>Plan of action.</i></p> <p>Keep a diary of emotions and write down in it everyday.</p>	

Mariana's story reflects the way in which guilt, perfectionism and depression are related with one another. By writing down in her diary, she will begin to identify her guilt and the depression that results from it. Then she can use RET to recognize the perfectionist behavior that is the actual cause of the entire process.

Not all depressions are derived from guilt. Depression can be a result of a loss or of a change. This is called "reactive" depression. It may sometimes be biologic when it is caused by bio-chemical changes. Depression may also be caused by certain types of personality and involves a system of values and norms. Eventually, a person may combine elements from all three depression types.

Mariana's depression is related to her irrational belief that everything has to be perfect. If she is able to overcome this belief, she may be able to get rid of her depression.

Guilt and anger

Eduard was raised in a family where expressing one's anger was not allowed. His brother always harassed and offended him when their parents were not at home. When he complained to his mother, she used to tell him that he was a good child for being so patient with his brother. This was the reward he got for his passive behavior. By the time he reached adulthood, he had an extremely passive behavior. For Eduard, being angry meant being sulky and grumpy. Sometimes, the pressure was so high that "smoke was coming out of him", as he used to say himself. That's when he would lock himself in the bathroom and begin to hit the walls, complaining about his wife.

After he was done hitting the walls, he would come out of the bathroom with a peaceful attitude, but inside he would feel guilty. "I am awful," he used to tell himself, "how could I get so angry with her?"

Learning to express one's anger in an assertive way is crucial in a relationship. It is normal to feel angry. Anger is a feeling just as normal as happiness. Anger helps us identify the situations in which our rights are being broken, and it helps us know when to be assertive. We shouldn't feel guilty when we feel angry. However, sometimes it may happen that we feel angry for irrational reasons. RET can help us distinguish the rational from the irrational reasons.

Here is an example. Notice how Eduard's anger turns into guilt.

Eduard is in therapy to learn more about his passive behavior, to find out which are its negative effects and in order to practice assertion. Yesterday he felt guilty because he had complained to a work colleague about his wife.

Because his passive behavior was customary, the therapist asked Eduard to use RET and to include a scope and a plan of action to solve this problem. This is what Eduard wrote:

A ← <i>Event</i>	B ← <i>Thoughts and beliefs</i>	C ← <i>Feelings</i>	D <i>Challenge of thoughts and beliefs</i>
<p>My wife and I had a fight yesterday. I couldn't sleep all night. At work, I went to Dan and complained about my wife.</p>	<p>My wife annoyed me a great deal. It's all my fault. I shouldn't have picked up a fight with her. It's awful to complain about her behind her back. I am a terrible husband.</p>	<p>Guilt, depression</p>	<p>My therapist says that it is not my wife, who annoys me. I get angry because of the way I think, when, for example, I expect her to read my thoughts or share the same opinion about everything. Anyways, feeling angry is not something negative. It may even help.</p> <p>It is normal not to agree on everything. How strange it would be if everyone thought the same! It would be better to confront my wife, but it's also not a disaster to talk to a friend about my feelings. I love my wife. I am a good husband.</p>

E ← <i>Scope</i>	F <i>Plan of action</i>
<p>Allow myself to be angry without feeling guilty and to express in an assertive way what I feel.</p>	<p>Tape on the bathroom door this sentence and read it three times each time I go inside:</p> <p><i>"I am a valuable person. My anger feelings are part of my personality and I will express them. When I need something, I express it in an assertive manner."</i></p>

Who is guilty?

Each time we find ourselves accusing someone for this or the other reason, it would be helpful to stop and analyse our interior dialogue. Because then we might realize that what we feel may be rational or irrational guilt.

Accusing someone may be a way to protect ourselves from analysing our own behavior. For example, Sofia touched the teapot that was standing on the corner of the table, and that fell down and broke. The teapot had been a Christmas present from her mother-in-law and she imagined her husband will get upset. That's when she began to shout at him: "Why did you let the teapot on the corner of the table? Wait and see how angry your mother will be!" Maybe Sofia didn't consciously realize that the accusations she brought to her husband were actually surfacing from her own guilt, but an analysis of the interior dialogue could have clarified the situation.

Summary

Guilt feelings could be helpful when they stop us from repeating a destructive or addictive behavior, but dangerous when they are caused by irrational beliefs. For example, we may believe that the Divine Power will not approve if we act in a certain way, or that our parents or friends will no longer love us if we don't behave the way they want us to behave. These irrational ideas lead to unnecessary feelings of guilt. As grown-ups we need to deal with these irrational beliefs, and one way to do so is to observe our own reactions to the behavior of others: do we give up on someone's friendship just because s/he has a different opinion on a certain matter? Do we stop talking to our mother anymore because instead of spending her holidays with us, she decides to go for a treatment? Of course not.

Using RET may help us change our irrational beliefs. Give it a chance, but remember that as it takes time to grow a habit, it also takes time and practice to get rid of one. So, practice a lot! As time goes by, you will feel healthier, happier and more liberated.

ANNEX 2: FREEDOM TO..., A RESPONSIBLE FREEDOM

The free and responsible individual

- The subject of responsibility can only be an individual
- Even an individual may act irresponsibly under the influence of certain coercive forces that are stronger than his psychological defence and his capacity for “rational thought”.
- Responsibility requires two essential conditions:
 - to be in full command of one’s rational powers,
 - to be free to chose one’s actions.
- Freedom is almost synonymous with:
 - the individual’s responsibility towards his own feelings, and with
 - the power and the ability to control them.
- The human being, through the virtue of consciousness and autonomous capacity of reflection, is responsible for his own thinking, actions and feelings, since he is self-conscious and aware of the possibility to identify his own needs, feelings and desires, and to control them responsibly in relation to himself and to the others.
- The human responsibility is based on freedom. Between the two there is a relation of reciprocity, unity and inter-conditionality.
- A responsible act is:
 - *voluntary*, meaning that it derives from the free will and upon full understanding of the scope;
 - *in accordance with* maturity and personal freedom;
 - morally *attributable*;
 - free.
- There is a difference, at times very subtle, between a voluntary act and an apparently free one.

The most common obstacles to voluntary and responsible acts are:

- **Coercion (violence, constraint)** – may be:
 - absolute and total – the actions done under these conditions do not carry any responsibility;
 - relative or partial – the actions are in the wrong if resistance was possible, but wasn’t sufficiently used;
 - a psychological constraint – apparently without external causes, but due to an internal obsession or repression resulted from the surrounding environment of the individual.
- **Fear:**
 - Is the strongest obstacle in the way of the individual freedom;
 - Arises from the emotional sphere, is a primary emotion, an emotional state with which we are born and which may influence in a decisive manner our external reactions (the way we act);
 - Has a very powerful influence upon the individual will;
 - Depending on its cause, it may be: *internal* (anxiety, fright, panic) or *external* (produced by visible and impending dangers);
 - Depending on its gravity, it may be: *strong* or *light*;
 - It depends primarily on the emotional structure of the individual.

- **Ignorance:**
 - is defined as “lack of knowledge or lack of understanding of certain matters that one should be familiar with”;
 - it is rather an educational and cognitive impediment;
 - the gravity of ignorance depends both on the negligence or carelessness of the subject, and on the significance of the matter in question.
- **Addictions:**
 - Are *psychological* and even *physiological dependencies* of the individual that has taken a passive stand;
 - From a psychological point of view, they are
 - *pathological stages of certain feelings* that overcome the human soul, or
 - *obsessive feelings* that force the individual to act only in their direction.
 - From a moral point of view, they are strong desires targeted towards certain sensorial benefits that can produce pleasure and sometimes may prevent the practicing of free will. For example: hatred, frustration, jealousy, despair, fright, etc.
- **Habits:**
 - Belong to the sphere of the will. “*Originally voluntary acts, which through repetition, can be performed with great precision, effortlessly and without a conscious control, making possible for the person that possesses them to spare time and energy, and to develop the ability to act under the same circumstances always in the same manner.*”
 - The actions resulted from negative habits are reprehensible, provided that the habits were acquired consciously.
 - If the individual forces himself to set his will in a direction opposite to a negative habit, even if the habit prevails, the action is involuntary, which, in return, reduces the culpability and the responsibility.
- **Other influences:**
 - Specific particularities;
 - The hormonal systems;
 - The physiological system and the personality constitution;
 - Mental disorders;
 - Suggestion through hypnosis;
 - The influence of the social and physical environment;
 - Age, sex, race, etc.

The existential responsibility: life’s calls and the individual’s answers

- Frankl⁴ (survivor of four concentration camps) said: “*Being a human being, a person, means deciding each time what to do with your own self, and this, in return, means assuming the responsibility of your own actions and behaviour.*”
- Every individual has a place and a mission in life – all that is asked from him is to find them.

⁴ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Beacon Press 2006

- Man can find a *meaning* in every and any situation in life, even in the most difficult and hopeless ones, by:
 - living what is worthwhile living (nature, art, relations, etc.).
 - creating values (material, artistic, spiritual).
 - accepting what is unavoidable (disease, the loss of the dear ones, etc.).
 - being truthful to oneself and being able to face oneself in the eyes.
- Being responsible for your own life, for yourself, means:
 - Being aware of your own importance, of what has been “invested” in you in order to be able to answer properly to life’s calls.
- The decision is yours. You may choose:
 - a true life, full of meaning, or
 - to waste yourself in an existential illusion, being yourself the source of your failure, and not the circumstances or the external conditions;
 - even if certain conditionings are hard to overcome or can not be overcome, the duty to live your life in a real and responsible manner is yours.
- Frankl: *We need to teach those in great need that what matters is not what we expect from life, but what life expects from us! It is not that we search for the meaning of life, but we feel being constantly asked by people, questions put every day and every moment, to which we have to give an exact answer not just through:*
 - *Meditations, phantasms, imagination,*
 - *Words, declarations, slogans, promises,*
 - *But through a correct action, a correct behaviour.*
- Frankl: *“Motivated by the will for a meaning, man, face to face with all types of conditioning, beyond objectifying to them through the virtue of the capacity to self-distance oneself, is able to identify in them problems that need to be resolved and tasks that need to be fulfilled for one’s own development.”*
- From such a perspective, the individual needs to act in his existence:
 - not in order to fulfil pleasure (*The will for pleasure*, Freud),
 - nor power (*The will for power*, Adler),
 - not even for one’s *self-realization*,
 - but in order to follow a *realization of the meaning* (*The will for meaning*, Frankl).
- Frankl: Man is responsible
 - not only on a horizontal level, towards life, social living norms, own moral consciousness as a social product, but
 - especially on the vertical level, “*towards Someone personal*”, in front of Whom we not only respond for our “sins”, but especially for what we have become and achieved from our “pound”⁵, from our purpose, our existential reason.
- Unfortunately, the religious interpretation emphasises a negative moralist vision regarding man’s responsibilities, focusing rather on the culpability in front of God for the sins committed, or even on the necessity to redeem oneself, instead of pointing out the positive (actual) responsibility, the existentially vocational and axiological responsibility of man, his duty to make use of his personal pound through a life lived

⁵ Reference to the Parable of Pounds

fully and responsibly in the *Presence of God*. Many sins are nothing but unfortunate consequences of existential frustrations or deficiencies at the level of self realization.

Moral consciousness, culpability and moral responsibility

Psychological consciousness

- Is the capacity of the human being to perceive himself in his own unique and unrepeatable individuality; it is the psychological judgement, the ability of being self-conscious.
- Is formed during the development stage (childhood and adolescence) through interactions between the internal tendencies of the subject and conditionings from the external environment all the way to *the freedom to choose and the capacity to take responsibility for the choices made*.
- Is the stable centre point around which the *I* will be structured as the unifying centre, coordinator and propulsive force of the choices made on the basis of value criteria.

Moral consciousness

- Implies the existence of the psychological consciousness and it is actually this consciousness arrived at a maximum level of differentiation, at the level of being in the world of values.
- It is an inner place, a compass for oneself and in relation with the others, an inner source of judgement, the source of reference for the choices one makes.
- It is a function of the individual and for the individual; it is not a voice of nature, but of the individual.
- The moral order exists not because the individual conforms to nature, but because nature is personalized in the individual, who speaks with God.

Culpability

1. The feeling of responsibility, of guilt:

- belongs to the psychological and moral health of the individual;
- is a stimulating factor in the development of the personality and of the sense of duty and responsibility;
- is a protection mechanism used in order to avoid being hurt by diversions and declines of the moral dignity; and
- is a guardian of ethical standards, which doesn't allow any inconsequence and moral fluctuations above the limits of acceptance;
- sufferance resulted from the feeling of guilt may be a starting point in the individual's responsible attitude towards one's own life and in the moral stand in relation with himself and the others.

2. The feeling of culpability:

- has a neurotic origin and indicates an ethical decline;
- obstructs the inner freedom and slows down the individual development.

Moral responsibility

- Assumes a responsible behaviour, a truly moral one, resulted from a mature, free and responsible decision. A truly moral individual doesn't do any evil not because he cannot do it, but because he does the good and has no "reasons" to do the evil.
- Implies:

- *freedom of the will*: I is the creative source of desires and decisions, but is not constrained to express them either by external conditions, or by inner impulses; and
- *freedom of the action* – which expresses itself when desire and the decision taken as a result of the desire do not encounter any difficulties in their fulfilment.

(Source: Eugen Jurca, *The Art of Being Free*)

Civilizations have been built on fatal violence

- Ever since Cain, the fallen man has built fortresses and raised civilizations only through violence.
- This world is governed by a logic of violence, is fascinated by evil and caught into an endless reiteration of a “founding” past due to unconscious mechanisms, both collective and individual, set into motion by each new generation that has been hurt by the previous generation.
- The only way out from the cycle is through the return to God and to love.
- God has prepared the return through the Law of Moses and He Himself made it through the embodiment of His Son and through the conquest of death through His own death, which made possible the resurrection and the release from the laws of the fatal logic.

The human being is an infinite desire

- Man is a thirsty and hungry being, longing for peace, joy and happiness.
- Man yearns only to love and to be loved, to live the joy of the shared love.
- This yearning turns the human being into a pilgrim, who cannot find rest until he can satisfy his longing for love. It is an infinite longing, one that cannot be satisfied by anything finite, because it is a longing for the essence, the desire **to be**, the desire for the absolute, the desire for God.
- Man’s desire is to become one with God and nothing else can satisfy it. (St. Gregory Palamas).

The existential experience

- Man’s desire to become one with God strikes against the limitations of the human being. When a child comes to this world, he is fully dependent on his parents, on their love and attention. If he doesn’t receive the love and attention he expects, the child will feel hurt and will react accordingly, setting into motion defense mechanisms and learning to hurt others in return.
- It is important to realize that in this life we cannot avoid being hurt and hurting others.
- Breaking the laws of the fatal logic cannot be achieved through the exclusion of the evil from the world, because the Lord would have already done so had this been the way, but through a personal separation from the evil and its doings, and the acceptance of an ontological relationship with God.

The fatal logic

- No human being can love unconditionally. The evil works in the world and in people.
- The person who has been hurt in a relationship is afraid that he might be hurt again and that he will experience once more what hurt him in the past. As a result, he grows feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, and develops defense mechanisms in order to avoid the suffering that the other – now identified as a potential aggressor – could inflict onto him. Often these mechanisms function at an unconscious level, but lead to repetitive behaviors initiated by the traumas that have been suppressed.
- The disruption of a trust-based relation attracts a logic of interaction based on force, and every person feels entitled to acquire more defense mechanisms in order to defend himself.

- Aggression is a defense mechanism. The stronger someone has been hurt and the deeper the wound is, the more vulnerable and more threatened the individual will feel, and the more he will act in an aggressive and violent manner.
- Furthermore, the individual that has been hurt will search and offer himself compensations by acquiring and desiring objects that offer immediate pleasure as a “justification” for the fundamental lack of love. The more he will try to substitute the lack of love through compensatory systems, the more he will be enslaved by the objects he desires and the more he will feel a chronic lack of satisfaction. Eventually the spiral of sufferance, anxiety and guilt will worsen.
- The increasing aggression will be targeted towards:
 - The close ones, who will be held guilty and responsible for his binding;
 - Oneself, in the form of depression and despair.
- Feeling unloved, the wounded person will try to attract the attention of others in order to feel that they are aware of his existence. He does so through provocations and aggression, or through an **exaggerated** display of kindness.
- The need to be recognized, accepted and praised by the others exists in the heart of the child in each of us.

HOMEWORK

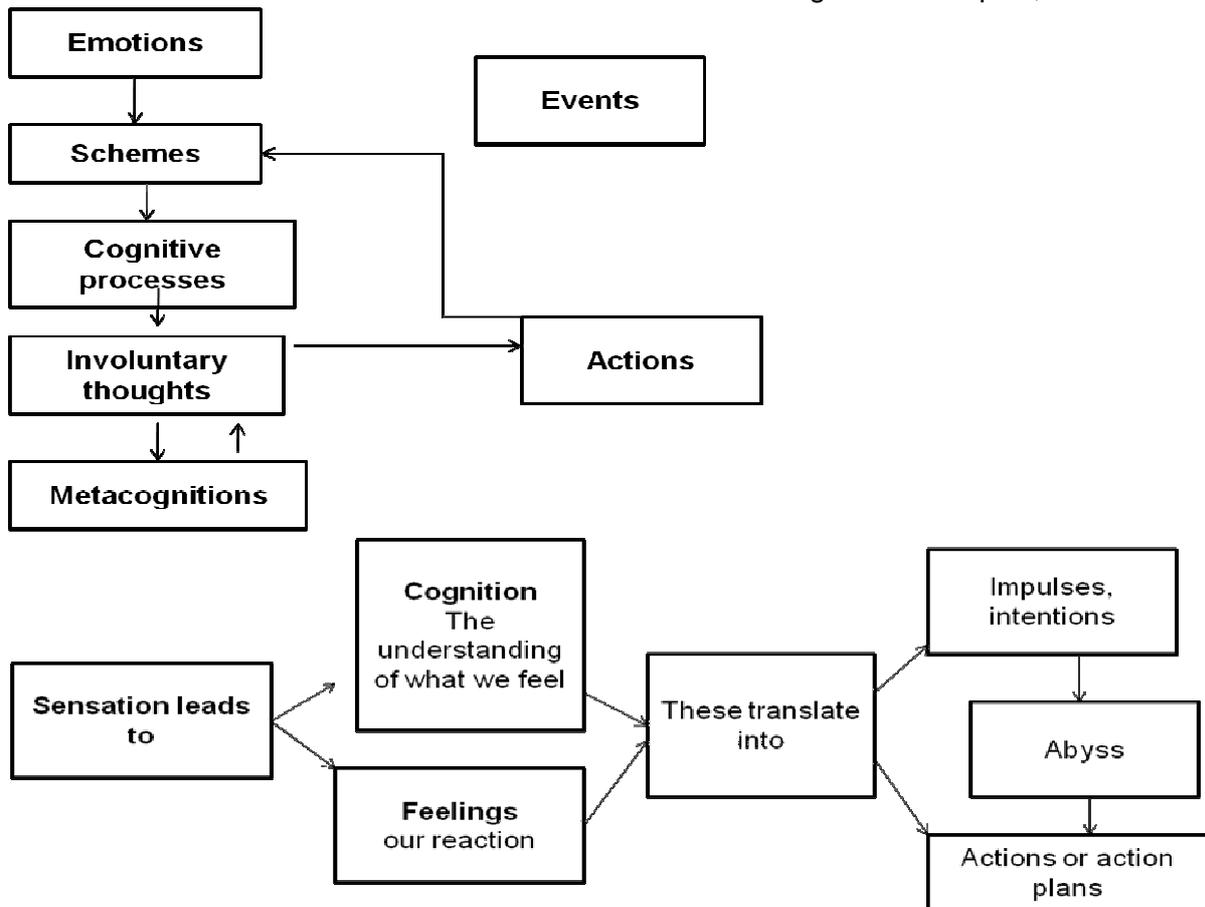
1. Continue to pray to the Holly Sprit.
2. Make a list with all the deep wishes that you have had in your life and which were fulfilled.
3. Make a list with all the deep wishes, which were not fulfilled.
4. Study the list of the maladaptive schemas and try to find out if you recognize yourself in one or more of them.
5. Draw the heart of the child you used to be and the “strategies” you employed in order to be recognized, accepted and appreciated by the ones around you.

Necessary materials

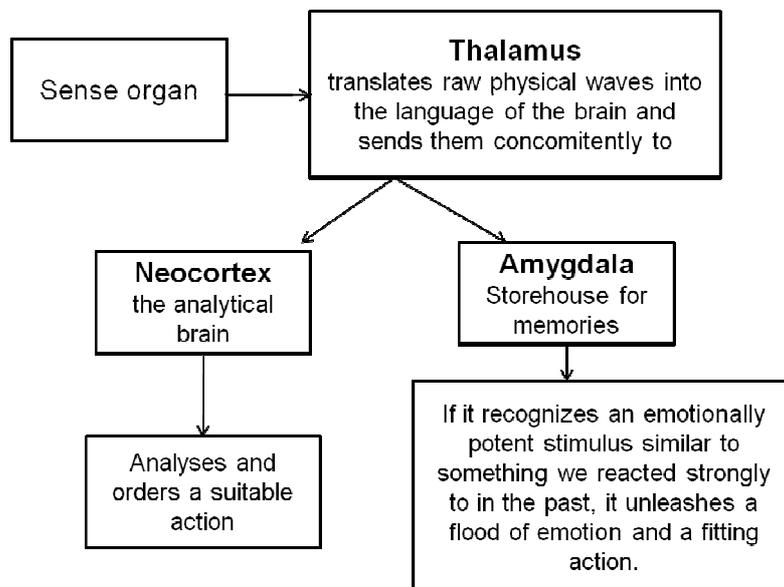
- ❖ **THE LIST OF MALADAPTIVESCHEMAS**

Jean Cottraux's COGNITIVE MODEL

Source: Cognitive Therapies, Polirom 2003



Neurologists argue that each time we feel a sensation, the information circulates in the following order:⁶



Every individual will react to an event through emotions, which will activate certain schemas.

⁶ Source: Tara Bennett- Goleman, „Emotional Alchemy: How the Mind can Heal the Heart“

Schemas

- Are organized structures, which contain knowledge about, as well as the expectations of the individual from the exterior world.

Beliefs

- Are a set of personal views regarding oneself, the others and the world, which constitute a system of interpretation, or the personal life philosophy.
- May be structured in systems of rational beliefs – adapted to the personal culture of the subject –, or
- in systems of irrational beliefs.

Levels of cognition

1. The unconscious level: schemas

- Are organised structures, which contain knowledge about, as well as the expectations of the individual from the exterior world.
- Function in an automated manner.
- Are located in the semantic memory and, apparently, correspond to two networks stabilized by neurons.
- Belong to the daily routine and are activated by regular events.

2. The preconscious level: cognitive events

- Contains involuntary thoughts, interior monologues and involuntary preconscious mental images, which make possible the access to unconscious schemas.
- Corresponds to the activation of schemas through emotionally induced situations.

3. The conscious level: focused attention

- Attention focuses on a certain number of elements from the surrounding reality.
- It results from schemas, which polarize the perception based on their content.

4. The metacognitive level: the second degree cognition

- Cognitions about cognitions, interpretation of interior monologues.
- May be positive or negative.

Connections between the conscious and the unconscious are realized through:

1. Involuntary cognitive processes:

- Unconscious, fast, they take place effortlessly, require little or no attention, and are difficult to adjust.
- Correspond to the schemas.
- Lead to involuntary thoughts, which appear at a level near to the consciousness.

2. Controlled cognitive processes:

- Conscious, slow, involve effort and attention, and are easy to adjust.
- Correspond to the logical thinking.
- Lead to a decentralization in relation to oneself.

The process of assimilation:

- The schema will try to interpret the event, trying to compare it with existing assumptions and beliefs.

The process of accommodation:

- The schemas adjust if the event is not compatible with them.

Information may be processed in two ways:

1. bottom up:

- comes from environmental stimuli and is directed towards the upper cognitive processes;
- is under the control of data received from the external environment.

2. from above:

- is under the influence of concepts or theories;
- prevails over external information in the learning process, in the recollection of similar situations and already defined schemas of thinking;
- lack of flexibility and permeability of schemas is responsible for psychological drawbacks and the recurrence of undesired behaviours.

ANNEX 3: MALADAPTIVE SCHEMAS

Source: Tara Bennett-Goleman,
Emotional Alchemy: How the Mind Can Heal the Heart
Crown Publishing Group, 2002 (Romanian translation, Curtea Veche, Bucharest, 2002)

A schema can be adaptive or maladaptive.

A maladaptive schema is a mental habit, a strong combination of negative thoughts and feelings. It tries to avoid conflicting mental states.

Maladaptive schemas represented at some point a suitable solution for a problem, which we faced during childhood. They are flawed solutions to satisfy one of the four essential needs: security, relationships with others, autonomy, competence. When these needs remain unsatisfied, they lead to the development of schemas.

Each schema has its own emotional fingerprint and it revives the feelings experienced during the original traumatic events.

The strategies of a schema are incomplete solutions to the inevitable problems we face in life. They might lightly reduce the sufferance during critical moments, but do not really solve the problem.

Schemas handle the imperative needs, but cause us to think and act in ways that actually prevent us from satisfying those needs.

Schema-based responses are exaggerated reactions to difficult situations.

Schemas are storage systems, which contain the emotional elements that have been well assimilated. These continue to assimilate what we experience according to a specific pattern. Some schemas represent the way in which we sacrificed our own potential in order to maintain the relationships with the others.

Schemas function like mental lenses that portray the surrounding world very differently than the way it actually is through the distortion of attention, memory and perception.

Maladaptive schemas are life patterns owned to distorted opinions that people have about themselves and others.

Some schemas function like scenarios that seem fated to repeat several times in someone's life.

How a schema can be recognized

Each schema has its own "signature", a pattern of stimuli and typical reactions, which makes it possible to recognize it after:

1. situations, which trigger it,
2. feelings and thoughts, which appear automatically, and after
3. typical reactions, which accompany those states (and which are counterproductive).

How we can free ourselves from the domination of schemas

We begin to heal ourselves when we are ready to relive the feelings that hold tight together these patterns. It takes courage to face the feelings hidden by affective patterns.

What can we do?

1. Become aware of what is happening by looking at ourselves in an honest manner, no matter how difficult that might be.

2. Relieve the pain or the fright that hides behind these schemas, if nothing else just to realize that we can overcome this step.
3. Observe the thoughts, which accompany these feelings, and see to which extent they justify what we do. Thoughts feed into the affective reaction. Extremely powerful reactions suggest that we find symbolical meanings in something that occurred, and those feelings release the reaction. Remembering similar situations from the past, especially from childhood, helps identify the pattern of the schema, which troubles us.
4. We should pay attention to our actions and impulses at all levels of manifestation: what we say (loud or in our mind, verbally or non-verbally), how we say it, what we do, what we felt like doing but restrained ourselves... We shouldn't suppress our emotions, but we should also not react under their impulse. We can live them without doing what they want us to do.
5. We shouldn't let ourselves be dominated by emotional reactions and we should observe the way in which they change through our emotional awareness and through the choice of reactions, which are more suitable to the present situation.

The tools of awareness are attention and acceptance.

Attention (or contemplation) should be practised permanently in order to become a useful tool during crisis situations. It consists of simply observing the feeling, without becoming absorbed by it and without fully identifying with it and with the thoughts that accompany it automatically.

We concentrate on the awareness process, and not on its content.

Awareness is not repression; instead it presumes experiencing the feeling and observing the thoughts, sensations and impulses we are having.

As a result, reactions will be specific, not typical.

The main maladaptive schemas described by specialists are:

1. Fear of abandonment

- based on the permanent fear that people will leave us;
 - may have the origin in a real experience from childhood;
 - typical emotions of this schema are: deep sadness, feeling of isolation, fear and panic of being alone;
 - it exteriorizes through a tight attachment to the people around, which may lead to anxious attachment.
- ✓ *Possible behaviour:*
- testing the stability of the relation through repeated questions;
 - excessive anxiety each time there is tension in the relationship;
 - acceptance of negative relationships and compromises out of fear of being abandoned;
 - quitting the relationship before the other person;
 - extreme sensibility in front of any sign of distancing from the ones around us;
 - constant and irrational jealousy;
 - anxiety when the person we are attached to is away, no matter what the reason might be.
- ✓ *Solutions:*
- carry an analysis of the thoughts, which feed into the fear of abandonment;
 - become aware of and contemplate the feelings released by an abandonment;

- confront the fear of abandonment;
- test the inner resources for living alone;
- choose a stable life partner.

2. Deprivation

- relies on the deep conviction that personal needs cannot be satisfied;
 - appears during childhood, due to nurture, warmth or affection deprivation, or to lack of proper guidance;
 - at adulthood, the schema makes people become oversensitive to any sign of being ignored or not being helped, especially in close relationships;
 - the active feelings are: sadness or despair of a person, who will never be understood or taken into consideration, fury, loneliness, fear that the wishes will not be fulfilled if they are spoken out loud.
- ✓ *Possible behaviour:*
- extreme kindness towards other people, refusal to communicate one's own needs under the expectation that they should be guessed by the others;
 - sometimes, persons affected by this schema have unlimited claims regarding the way other people should understand and help them.
- ✓ *Strategies of the schema:*
- exaggerated care for the needs of others, blaming oneself for caring too much about the needs of others in order to obtain the necessary attention, constant disguise of good-humour and display of inexhaustible energy. People affected by this schema regularly chose careers in social assistance, medical assistance and physiotherapy, where they work until exhaustion;
 - strategies of avoidance, protection by maintaining distance in the relationship, concealing true feelings and needs.
- ✓ *Solutions:*
- become aware of the tendency to distort the attitude of others towards us;
 - learn to express own needs and desires in a clear and proper manner;
 - avoid relationships with aggressive and indifferent persons;
 - accept childhood traumas, which generated the schema, express your grief over them and learn to overcome them.

3. Subjugation

- persons who develop this schema give up easily on their own needs and desires, and learn to behave helplessly and powerlessly in relation to those who assume leading roles;
 - originates in childhood, where authoritarian parents imposed their will through violence, threats and disapproval.
- ✓ *Feelings:*
- fury;
 - resentment;
 - anger.
- ✓ *Possible behaviour:*
- excessive concern to please others;
 - submission to the requests of the dominant partner;

- quick renouncement to any personal need, or resistance accompanied by violent reactions to the slightest attempt of domination or authority;
 - inability to impose onto others expectations of their limits, ready to work for others and even in their place;
 - unable to express resentments, but ready to take revenge on people by delaying, postponing and ignoring deadlines.
- ✓ *Strategies:*
- avoidance;
 - revolt;
 - refusal of attachment, avoidance of situations where one could be trapped and dominated;
 - subjugation may go all the way to the inability to recognize one's own preferences, opinions and even one's own identity;
 - the person prefers to keep secret his own preferences and desires for the sake of the relationship.
- ✓ *Solutions:*
- become aware of the schema;
 - acknowledge automated reactions of anger and thoughts unleashed by the fear of being dominated;
 - learn to communicate one's own needs and desires.

4. Mistrust

- characterized by extreme suspicion, a deep conviction that people cannot be trusted;
 - originates in an affective, physical or sexual abuse that took place during childhood.
- ✓ *Feelings:*
- fury,
 - fear,
 - shame.
- ✓ *Possible behaviour:*
- excessive caution in relationships;
 - closure and reservation towards the others;
 - sometimes there is a tendency to engage in relationships with partners, who behave offensively, in order to fulfil the "prophecies" of the schema;
 - tendency to idealize a person at the beginning of a relationship, only to consider him a traitor when the relationship is ended;
 - tendency to revive the traumatic situation from childhood through connection with abusive persons;
 - the victim may become an aggressor himself, making possible the perpetuation of the abuse;
 - avoidance of close friendships based on a conviction that people have a hidden agenda when befriending one another.
- ✓ *Solutions:*
- engage in therapy with abuse counselling;

- learn to communicate the powerful feelings experienced during the traumatic event: fury, feeling of being betrayed, shame, fear;
- become aware of the tendency to be suspicious, reject self-destructive thoughts and try to offset them through positive thoughts;
- completely reject any kind of abuse in a relationship;
- resist the attraction of abusive partners.

5. Unlovability

- characterized by the involuntary assumption that we are not worthy of being loved, that we don't have enough qualities, that if someone were able to see us deep inside, would realize how many failures we have and would no longer love us;
- the origin of the scheme lies in messages given by excessively critical parents, who insult and humiliate their children;
- ✓ *Feelings:*
 - shame,
 - humility,
 - vulnerability,
 - anxiety.
- ✓ *Possible behaviour*
 - indifference, surrender, acceptance of a negative image of oneself, ability to regard oneself with the despise parents used to show one as a child. People are hard to get to know closer, they hide and don't disclose their feelings and emotions;
 - or, the opposite: bolstering, arrogance, overly-confident attitude.
- ✓ *Solutions:*
 - recognize and acknowledge the schema indicators;
 - get rid of obsessive thoughts regarding one's failures;
 - dismiss doubts regarding oneself;
 - acquire a realistic recognition of one's personal qualities;
 - understand emotional reactions and learn to trust those who love us the way we are.

6. Social exclusion

- inner conviction that we "don't belong to...", that we are not being accepted by a certain community, which, in turn, creates of feeling of non-involvement;
- schema functions on the self-fulfilling prophecy basis: fear of being rejected causes an inappropriate behaviour, which eventually leads to rejection.
- ✓ *Feelings:*
 - anxiety;
 - deep sadness;
 - loneliness.
- ✓ *Possible behaviour:*
 - isolation, tendency to avoid groups, loneliness;

- increasing efforts of integration through excessive attention and total adoption of qualities required by the group;
 - nonconformist behaviour: excessive display of the “outlaw” role, seen as an accomplishment.
- ✓ *Solutions:*
- become aware of and contemplate the thoughts that accompany the feeling of exclusion;
 - learn to control anxiety and to relax emotionally in a group;
 - develop communication abilities.

7. Vulnerability

- exaggerated fear that something terrible is about to happen;
 - normal fears get out of control, a minor reason for anxiety may get over-amplified into a potential disaster;
 - the root of vulnerability lies either in the behaviour of a parent we are imitating, or in dangerous situations we might have experienced during childhood.
- ✓ *Feelings:*
- worry;
 - anxiety;
 - exaggerated fear;
 - panic.
- ✓ *Possible behaviour:*
- excessive efforts for success despite a permanent fear of failure. These lead to the “impostor” phenomenon, in which the person, who did well, feels deep inside that he committed a fraud and lives terrorized by the thought that the truth will one day be unveiled;
 - failure-driven behaviour;
 - fear of failure blocks the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, causes unjustified delays, which, in turn, lead to failure.
- ✓ *Solutions:*
- awareness of the internal mechanisms of discouragement;
 - proper evaluation of real skills and abilities;
 - true evaluation of accomplishments.

9. Perfectionism

- inner conviction that “you have to be perfect”;
 - the root of this scheme lies in the need to acquire the love of others through exceptional performances;
 - it leads to overrated, unrealistic expectations of oneself and the others;
 - it robs away the joy of life;
 - the distorted lenses of perfectionism target each flaw or minor error, which turns into a cause for criticism and self-criticism, and a reason to reprimand oneself mercilessly.
- ✓ *Feelings:*
- fear of not being capable or not having time to realize what one has planned;

- a constant feeling of having to do more and better;
- lack of patience and irritation on the surface;
- sadness and melancholy deep inside.
- ✓ *Possible behaviour:*
 - dependent attachment on one's work to the prejudice of personal life, health, social relations and capacity to enjoy life;
 - excessive concern with one's exterior image, social status, quantity and quality of goods acquired;
 - tendency to impose onto others and oneself extremely high standards.
- ✓ *Solutions:*
 - become aware of and try to take apart the patterns of flawed thinking;
 - give up self-criticism and self-accusations;
 - lower the standards to realistic levels;
 - discover the simple joys of life.

10. Entitlement

- is an emotional pattern that concentrates on the rejection of the limits one has in life;
- those who experience this schema feel that they are very special and, as such, entitled to have everything they want;
- the root lies in:
 - spoiled behaviour encouraged during childhood;
 - excessively demanding attitude of parents, whose love was conditioned on the qualities of the child;
 - lack of affection, attention or material goods experienced during childhood.
- entitlement develops as a reaction to an injustice suffered during childhood
- ✓ *Feelings:*
 - vanity;
 - pride;
 - lack of compassion;
 - fake superiority to hide a feeling of inferiority;
 - frustration to rejections.
- ✓ *Possible behaviour:*
 - lack of discipline;
 - tendency to satisfy the first impulses and desires, independent of the consequences;
 - chaotic life-style;
 - lack of interest towards cleaning and tidiness in the house;
 - lack of interest regarding the negative effects this schema might have on others.
- ✓ *Solutions:*
 - become aware of the strong feelings that prompt this schema;
 - become aware of the negative effect this schema has on others;
 - assume responsibility for one's obligations and duties;
 - become conscious of the impulses and learn to ignore them.

Notice

We should not be afraid to identify the schemas even if we “don’t trust the psychologists” and “don’t want to heal our wounds through psycho-therapy” (quotation from a critical analysis). An identified suffering, even in conventional terms, becomes an assumed suffering. Denial, the greatest obstacle to our spiritual healing, has been overcome. Now it is possible to begin to choose freely the way to heal oneself. Courage! (Mother Siluana)

The freeing from determinations and conditionings

- With the grace of God, man can become aware of the unconscious schemes of mimesis and can free himself from their domination. Love is more powerful than death.
- God's words to Cain: "Sin lies at the door, but you should rule over it" show that we have the power to be free and that we can respond to a painful occurrence other than through violence. Even if this freedom is altered by fall, by passions and the conditionings they bring along, it remains nevertheless a power that man can use at his free will.
- Man's freedom is never fully annihilated. Under no circumstances, no matter how "pressured" we might have been to take an evil course, we realize that we had the opportunity to choose between life and death (Deuteronomy 30, 19).

Forgiveness

- Is the point where we break the chain of fatal violence and free ourselves from the domination of subconscious protection mechanisms.
- Forgiveness is the path that the Saviour brought to us. And He is the one, who teaches us how to forgive.
- The forgiveness that the Saviour describes is not one of a psychological kind, but one, which exceeds the human limitation, going all the way to the love of the enemy.
- We can only forgive through prayer and blessing.
- In order to forgive, we have to trust God rather than not our own powers, and entrust ourselves to Him through prayer.
- Forgiveness means turning each wound into a ground for prayer and realizing that without the mercy of God, no one could survive or could do anything on independently.
- Forgiving means bringing close to us, in prayer, those who hate and hurt us.
- Praying especially for those, who hurt us, means parting with the tendency to protect oneself, with the wish to be right and, most of all, with the wish to take revenge.
- Prayer makes possible the liberation from the domination of subconscious forces that push one to act according to a logic that is fatal to people. When we cannot pray for someone, we pass a judgement on him.
- Forgiveness is Jesus' answer to the human weakness: "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing!"
- Jesus, the Truth, frees us from the fate of mimesis and of fatal repetition, and gives us back the right to the freedom of our history.
- The way to achieve this is through forgiveness.

Forgiveness requires an inner conversion

- The inner conversion, *metanoia*, is
 - a change from "all is given" to "all is a gift";
 - a new positioning under the eyes of Christ, which frees me from the fatal logic and helps me turn each trial into an opportunity for spiritual growth;
 - the transformation, with the grace of God, of all tendencies to act harmfully in opportunities for prayer.

- A heart that has converted is a heart ready to forgive, because it is conscious of its vulnerability, it knows its own weaknesses and falls, and is aware of the love of God that goes all the way deep into its misery;
- By forgiving, we show the other person that he is loved, we free him from the burden of guilt and from the feeling of unworthiness.

Forgiveness needs prayer

- Without the grace of God, we cannot forgive, and grace comes through prayer.
- Forgiveness begins in the heart and in the thoughts.
- In front of an offence, I either let myself be carried away by the impulse to judge the person who has angered me, by resentments and self-justification, or I obey Christ by anchoring myself in prayer for the other and blessing him.
- It is very important to express the offence that we suffered, to express what we want to forgive. Forgiveness should not be understood as simple-mindedness, as an attempt to excuse the one who hurt us, but as the wish to love him as he is, to give him the possibility to see his mistake and to repent it. And it also implies loving the other as he is.
- By defining the wounds that we suffered, we also have to give them a meaning, to integrate them into the history of our life, to turn them into opportunities for spiritual growth. To learn to become like Christ, whose wound healed us all.

The wounds we suffered may become

- opportunities for conversion and spiritual growth
- opportunities for communion with all those who have been suffering in life
- for many a mean of healing compassion
- windows that open us towards the pains of the person next to us

THE TRUE FORGIVENESS IS A FORGIVENESS IN TRUTH

- A true relationship cannot exist with unspoken truths and unless each one recognizes his share of guilt in order to assume his responsibility and the love of God.
- Repentance and forgiveness are tightly related to one another(Luke 17, 3).
- Forgiving is neither forgetting, nor excusing, it is a growing love that recognizes the beauty and uniqueness of the other person, without stumbling over the appearances, over the surface. It implies having a new way of looking at things, having a clean eye that can remove the “log” of the resentful memory, of prejudices, of judgments and criticisms...
- Forgiving means telling the other one that he is more than his mistakes or crimes, even more than the image he made of himself.
- Forgiving means no longer limiting the other one to what he lacks, no longer enclosing him in a judgement and a culpability that can lead him to a hardening of the heart.
- Forgiving means accepting the one next to you in his otherness. Difference is no longer understood as adversarial, but as the basis of a rich diversity.
- Forgiving in truth means clearly defining the prejudices one has suffered, but bringing love into the process in order to avoid being pulled into the cycle of the deadly hatred.
- Forgiving in truth means hating the sin, but loving the sinner. It means being able to distinguish the deed from the doer.
- The enemy of man is not the other man, his brother, but the obsession that dominates and weighs him down.

True forgiveness

- Is the gift of God.
- Man has the wish to forgive, which God turns into the Gift of forgetting.
- God alone can forgive in us, we can only receive Him and let Him work. *Doing* belongs to God – *letting be done* belongs to man.
- We feel the love of God as we give our love to the other person, and we give love by forgiving.
- Forgiving is the greatest form of love for man.

HOMEWORK

1. Read each night the Akathist to the Holy Spirit or repeat several times the prayer
“*O Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere present and fillest all things, Treasury of good things, and Giver of life: come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every sin, and save our souls, O Good One!*”
2. For five minutes pray while crossing yourself for those who hurt you, without saying their names, and bless them (For example: *Lord, have mercy on those who harmed and harm me now, those who made and make me suffer now, and bless them!*)
3. Read a prayer for the enemies.

Annex

❖ PRAYER FOR THE ENEMIES

ANNEX 4: PRAYER FOR THE ENNEMIES

The great Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic, a martyr of communist atheism

God bless my enemies! Even I bless and don't curse them!

My enemies brought me closer to You, drove me into Your arms, more than my friends ever did so. My friends bound me tightly to the earth and drove each of my hopes towards this world. My enemies made me a foreigner into the earthly kingdom and an unworthy citizen on earth. Like a hunted animal, I found a more secure shelter under Your tent, where neither enemies, nor friends can slay my soul.

God bless my enemies! Even I bless and don't curse them!

They have confessed into my place my sins before the world.

They have lashed me when I have spared myself the lashes.

They have tortured me when I have run away from torture.

They have scolded me when I have flattered myself.

They have spit into my face when I have felt proud of myself.

When I have turned wise, they have called me a fool.

When I have become strong, they have laughed at me as if I were a dwarf.

When I have wanted to lead the people, they have pushed me back.

When I have rushed to become rich, they have pulled me back with an iron grip.

When I have laid down for a quiet sleep, they have woken me up.

When I have built my house for a long and quiet life, they have torn it down and thrown me on the street.

My enemies have truly untied me from the world and lengthened my arms until they touched Your vestment.

God bless my enemies!

Bless and increase their number;

turn them even stronger against me so that my fleeing towards You may not have a way back;

so that my trust in people be scattered like a spider web;

so that humbleness may fully reign into my heart;

so that my heart may be the grave of evil.

So that my treasure may be found in heaven.

If I could only free myself from that self-delusion that tangled me into the awful mesh of the deceptive life!

My enemies taught me what only few in this world know: that man's only enemy is no one but himself.

Only who doesn't know that enemies are not enemies, but sever friends, can hate the enemies. And for that reason, God, bless both my friends and my enemies!

The servant curses the enemies for he knows no better, but the Son blesses them for He knows.

The Son knows that the enemies cannot touch His life. And this is why He steps freely among them and prays to God for them.

God bless my enemies! Even I bless and don't curse them!

HOW DO WE FORGIVE?

The levels of forgiveness are:

- Forgiveness of one self
- Forgiveness **of** the others
- Forgiveness **from** the others

To be able to forgive we have to clearly determine:

1. Who do we have to forgive and why?
2. What do we have to forgive?
3. Who do we have to ask for forgiveness and why?

The Stages of Forgiveness

1. Taking the decision to forgive

- Forgiveness doesn't come on its own; rather, we have to take a conscious decision not to take revenge for an injustice, a wound, a betrayal or an offense that we suffered.
- It is very important to take this decision **before** the occurrence of an action that could harm us. Otherwise we risk falling down the slope of revenge into the vortex of pain.
- Forgiveness cannot be complete as long as someone continues to hurt us. It is important that we do something to stop the harm: talk to the person that is hurting us, ask for someone's mediation, or break the relationship.
- Lack of courage may hide behind the mask of a shallow forgiveness through the suppression of feelings for the sake of an illusory comfort.
- Communicating to someone that we feel hurt doesn't necessarily imply becoming angry with that person. We can address an injustice without turning violent. We can communicate in an assertive manner.

2. Acknowledging the fact that we have been hurt

- For many of us it is difficult to acknowledge that we have been hurt for fear of pain and fear of our emotions. This is when we make use of various schemes to avoid facing the emotions triggered by the offense: excusing the other person, self-accusation, identification with the aggressor, quick and shallow forgiveness, ignorance of one's own feelings.
- But a "cleansing of the heart" requires the removal of pain, sadness, anger and frustration, which is not the same as denying the emotions, but rather accepting and experiencing them, and freeing ourselves from their pressure to take revenge, actively or passively, on others or ourselves.
- Acknowledging the harm we suffered implies an accurate recognition of the wound, of the pain, of the loss, its "mourning" without self-pity, lamentation and nervous breakdown. It is an identification of the area where we have been affected: in our honesty, fidelity, competence, dignity, trust, integrity... By identifying the area where the harm was produced, the victim will realize that not the entire personality, but just a part has been affected and, as a result, will experience a decrease in anger.

3. Expressing the suffering

- The utterance of suffering is crucial in order to make possible for the victim to cope with it, or to heal it. The feelings of pain can be written in a diary, told to someone, expressed through prayer...
- The suffering should not be phrased with the purpose of taking revenge or slandering the other person because we already made the decision not to take any revenge. The utterance helps us describe the facts and our pain, without interpreting the intentions.
- It is better to share our sorrow with an emotionally and spiritually more mature person, who is able to listen to us without judging and condemning us, but also without judging or condemning the person who hurt us. Because sharing the pain with someone else often leads to misunderstandings, many people prefer to keep their problems to themselves and isolate themselves from the rest of the community.
- An active and emphatic listener can help us see more clearly what was affected in us, which is the real wound.

4. Receiving the healing

- Total forgiveness cannot take place as long as our inner self has not been healed.
- By telling someone else about our suffering, without accusations and desires for revenge, will help us benefit gradually from the work of our healing powers.
- For a believer, this is the point where God steps in. Especially if the wound is very old and deep, this is the point where we realize that we cannot go any further without the help of God. The Holy Spirit, Who is in us, will work through our prayer, as the Lord has promised us (Luke 4, 28).

5. Opening oneself for forgiveness

- Only if we move onward on the process of healing, we can say that our heart is ready for the gift of forgiveness. Because forgiveness is not ours, it is always a gift of God, regardless of whether we are aware of it and regardless of whether we believe in God.
- Forgiveness is neither a heroic act, nor a moral virtue, but a theological virtue, because it is, in fact, love. God asks us for it, God inspires us to ask for and to grant it, God gives us the power to live it by receiving or giving it.
- When we begin the process of forgiveness, only the first act of will is ours – later on everything becomes an opening to and an acceptance of the love of God.
- This doesn't mean that someone who is not a Christian cannot forgive. The grace of God works in the unfaithful if they open themselves to love and kindness, which are from God. What matters is to understand that forgiveness cannot be given as a personal choice – it can only be received.
- The force that sets forgiveness into motion is the clear understanding that the love of God is unconditional and that man doesn't have to pay anything for His love.

6. Establishing a new relationship with the person who hurt us

- After granting forgiveness, the relationship with the person who hurt us is not the same. It can either:
 - turn into a deeper love, if both accept the suffering for what happened (a love, which didn't experience suffering is not a mature love); or
 - it can come to an end as a physical relationship, out of love, in order to prevent the aggressor from hurting us further.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF FORGIVENESS

- We receive God's power to become like Him.
- We recover our true identity because

- we become one with Christ (Luke 23, 24) and receive His gift;
- we become one with the rest of mankind (Colossians 3, 3; Luke 7, 47).
- we regain the unity of the heart because the sin is like a blade that blocks the flow of the divine grace).

When we refuse to forgive

- We are overcome by the wish to take revenge. Revenge is natural and emerges from an instinct of justice; however, it attracts an endless spiral of violence.
- We will not be forgiven by God (Matthew 18, 35).
- We are torn apart by the wish to harm, to destroy the other person.
- We are overwhelmed by bitterness (Hebrews 12, 14-15).
- We will become alike with the ones we cannot forgive, either through similar weaknesses, or because we will be “judged” in the way we judged ourselves.
- Our soul will be poisoned by hatred and resentment.
 - Resentment indicates the state of “feeling again”. It is a passive and concealed revenge, which hampers the work for the happiness of the other. It is a constant source of stress, which may generate somatic diseases: ulcer, hyper-pressure, arthritis and even cancer.
- We live behind a protection wall and cannot perceive the good in those whom we cannot forgive.
- We judge and condemn and are overcome by slander, pride, resistance, desire to take revenge and spite, and our heart hardens.
- In the event of major aggressions, the inability to forgive may lead to an inner fragmentation, to a dual-personality effect:
 - when someone has been severely aggressed and has experienced a very strong fear, it may be possible that in order to survive, the victim develops an unconscious defence mechanism, called identification with the aggressor, through which he adopts the behavioural patterns of the aggressor. Consequently, the victim feels tainted by the aggressor, perceives himself as violent, soiled, may sense a double personality – both aggressor and victim – and continues to harass himself internally. When he becomes tired of harassing himself, the victim may eventually turn into an aggressor towards someone else. In this way, someone, who was raped, may become a rapist, someone, who was aggressed, may become an aggressor, someone, who was abused, may become as abuser,...

Solution

- Search for the aggressor deep inside us, find it, heal it and transform it. And this can be obtained through forgiveness.

HOMEWORK

- Identify and write down the obstacles you feel when trying to reconcile with:
 - a. your own life
 - b. your parents
 - c. the teachers / professors, who hurt you
 - d. the persons, who aggressed you
- Think of a situation where you find it hard to forgive someone and ask for God’s help every day, for two minutes, until you will feel a change.
- **Write (in a short essay) what is your relationship with God now.**

ANOTHER OBSTACLE IN THE WAY OF FORGIVENESS

And, still, we cannot forgive

We have come to the end of a difficult and painful road! We just finished the session, in which we learned how to forgive and, full of hope, we are waiting for our life to change and for the joy that we have experienced several times during the previous sessions, even if just for short periods, to settle in.

And, still, at difficult times, during crisis situations, we react as if we have never completed the Seminary. We fall into the schemas identified earlier before we even have the time to say “Lord, have mercy on me”! What is happening with us? Even though we know **how** to forgive, when we look closer, we realize that we **cannot** do so!

If you have come to this conclusion, it proves that you have done fairly and properly the homework of the Seminary and that you have come to its end. The goal of our endeavour, which is actually your endeavour with God, is learning from experience, understanding until the bitter end the fact that we have something to forgive, that we know what forgiveness is, that we wish to live the joy of forgiving, but that **we cannot** forgive! This is the moment of our awakening. It is only now that we can hear the voice of God, full of love, telling us: “*Without Me you cannot do anything!*”. It is only now that we can say “Lord, come and do inside of me and with me everything that I could not do when I have tried to do it without You, or when I tried to turn You into the slave of my desires, which pushed me deeper into suffering and confusion! Come, oh, Lord! Here and now I let myself into Your hands, which created me, and I pray to You: teach me how to do meet your will! I am ready to follow You! Help my **powerlessness!**”.

If we sense an inner resistance when we try to say these words, we have to ask ourselves why is it so? If we listen again carefully – and honestly – to the thoughts and emotions, which overcome us when we try to let ourselves fully into the hands of God, we realize that it is fear and a hidden anger that prevail, and maybe the question that has bothered us all along: “Why have all these happened to me?”. Here is where we find the last barrier to forgiveness: the forgiveness of God! Many of us don’t have the courage to utter this notion, but it will burst out, in the most unexpected moments, as thoughts of blasphemy, revolt, judgement, accompanied by feelings of despair and powerlessness. This is the last bastion of the Devil. He, the creator of lie, has suggested to us from the beginning that “the Lord is a wicked Master, Who brought us into this world to live in hardship and Who doesn’t do anything to improve our condition; Who, actually, is on the watch for each of our failures, waiting to punish us. And, anyways, what he asks from us through His precepts is far too much. And it looks like He only expects *us* to fulfil His precepts. Others seem just happy without doing so...”

It’s important to realize that these thoughts come especially during our times of worship and devotion, during the moments when we listen to God with the hope of feeling the joy that He promised to us. And this is a sign that our worship is not done in the way the Lord has taught us, in “spirit and in truth”! As far as the worship “in spirit” is concerned, the Seminary has taught us how and what we have to do, but as far as the worship “in truth” goes, although it is being taught in the Church and in the family, a few more explanations may be necessary. Without worshiping in truth, we cannot learn God the way He is, the way

He has revealed Himself in His Holy Church, and, deep in our heart, we will continue to be frustrated with Him. Let us then follow the advice of St. Paul the Apostle and “make peace with God” in the name of Christ.

The Reconciliation with God

This reconciliation, the beginning and the strength of every reconciliation, is a work of mystery between God and each individual. It can only start with the acceptance of the question: “If God is love, why has He allowed that I experience and that I provoke so much pain? If God knew that I will do things that will stop me from being redeemed, or that I will not be able to know Him, why has He brought me into this life?” In this or another similar form, this question, whether it is being articulated, torments all those who assume the attitude of the criminal crucified on “the left side” of Jesus. Ignoring it and refusing to acknowledge the fact that it torments us when we cannot identify with the criminal on the right side, who cried “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom”, means that we are either denying the love of God, or are experiencing a deep indifference towards our relationship with Him. By acting so, we do nothing else but delay entering into the relationship with God until the moment of our death, and so we refuse to accept the His gift of love.

“If you knew the gift of God”, the Lord said to the woman of Samaria... But do we know the gift of God?

This gift from God is God Himself, Who came to us, in us, so He can be with us, in **this life**, which is not the gift He has made to us at the time of our Creation, but rather an inheritance from our parents and ancestors.

The coming into existence of every individual is the concurred work of God with the parents. The human being as a person, as an individual, doesn't exist before his conception in the womb of his mother. You, the one who is asking this question, did not exist before being called into existence by the conceiving act of your parents. Before that moment, you were not in some heavenly pockets or drawers, waiting to be thrown or sent into a life especially prepared for you. Such a belief not only corresponds to the heresy of Origen or others of the kind, but also makes impossible the learning of God as Love.

You, as a unique individual, singular and inimitable, were created and brought into existence by God as your body was being formed through the act of conception between your parents. At that particular moment you received, at the same time, the **personal existence** from God and the **human life** from your parents. It was not God, Who chose your parents, but it was them who called you into life, consciously or unconsciously, through their act of conception, and it was God, Who created you as the embodiment of this life. And **you**, as a person created after the image of God, received **then** the power and the ability to acquire, under these exact circumstances, the likeness to Him. Moreover, through the Holy act of Baptism, you were born a second time, from God, and received an eternal, godlike life, grafting the powerless and ephemeral life received from your parents onto Christ, our true Life. You have received and continue to receive in His Holy Church the power and the ability to transform the life of misery inherited from this world into a blessing. Your life as a Christian is a true liturgy in which you, freely and responsibly, are offering to God your human life, with its pains and anxieties, its longings and desires, so He can transform them into a holy life. He, the Lord, tells His disciples that their sadness and pain will turn into happiness! And somewhere else, revelling to us the mystery of blissfulness, He shows to us that we can acquire it by believing, despite the “little” we have received.

As long as we will not accept these truths into our hearts, we will not be able to take another step on the road of forgiveness.

But for the next step we stumble over a new question: *“Why doesn’t God interfere when we are suffering unjustly, why does He allow that we are abused and tortured, that we get sick and are being persecuted, and that we later turn ourselves into abusers and persecutors?”* The answer to this question is another mystery, and without understanding and accepting it we will not be able to come forward: the **mystery of Freedom**.

We are born into *this* world and *this world* rejected the Lord. The Lord respects the freedom of the individual and doesn’t interfere with his will unless He is called for. He does so out of love; out of **respect** for the dignity, which He granted the human being from the beginning, and out of **love**. Out of love, because only in this way will man be able to see, feel and understand that he is not complete without God. God, who doesn’t act in the world as an authority that makes justice according to the laws and desires of the fallen man, but inside those, who chose to break apart from this world and to enter into His Kingdom.

God doesn’t change the world, but the individual, who has received Him and has believed in His Name by fulfilling His precepts according to His New Law. By respecting the precepts, the individual acquires the power to become the son of God in spirit and to be free. At this point all becomes new to him and his outside will turn into the mirror of his inside. His purpose will no longer be the search for pleasant and comforting external conditions, but for the opportunity to transform every place and every moment into a chance to meet God, to live in God, to love with Him and like Him, to step with Him towards the final goal, the eternal life of bliss. By first searching for the Kingdom of God, according to His precepts, we will realize with astonishment that **all** our wishes will automatically be fulfilled!

And so, if we suffered abuses and pain, it was because those who inflicted them onto us were free to choose or to obey the choice made by those who brought them into this world – the choice to live without God and without following His precepts. They chose to remain the slaves of the abuses they experienced and to carry them on like a curse. Each of us was or will come to a point where he will have the freedom to choose how to handle life and its events. We all have the opportunity to choose either to be free in and with Christ, or to let ourselves be enslaved by external events, by inner passions and the evil impulse to make ourselves justice or to take revenge when things don’t turn the way we want.

But everyone who has learned the taste and distaste of “I am free to do whatever I want” and has suffered enough to understand that what he seems to wish is not his free choice, will have the courage to choose to become “the slave” of God – that is the slave of love, of forgiveness, of patience and of a bliss that is out of this world.

HOMEWORK

1. Continue to read every day the Akathist of the Holy Spirit, or other prayers to the Holy Spirit.
2. Read the attached materials and write down the impressions and feelings you are experiencing.
3. Choose a moment of the day and stay in front of God to offer Him your heart and its feelings, and to pray Him to turn their pain and sadness into the joy He has promised.

ANNEX 5: SUFFERANCE: A BLESSING OR A CURSE?

Archimandrite Simeon Kragiopoulos, *The Mystery of Sufferance*

“Be blessed, my Lord!” – this is how we benefit from suffering

My dear ones, as I already said at the beginning, one way or another, we are all due to suffer. We are experiencing some pain at every moment of our lives. We could even say that there is no moment in someone’s life when the person is not experiencing some kind of pain, either self induced or caused by someone dear, by children or by other people. And then, when we hear about tragedies that happen in one corner of the world or another, when we hear about the African children, who die out of hunger, or other similar things, a Christian soul cannot avoid feeling pain for everything that is taking place. And so, every moment is full of grief, and whether we wish so, we will all be suffering at some point. We will all fulfill this canon.

And so the question is not whether we suffer, but how we react to sufferance. How wonderful it would be if we didn’t let sufferance be in vain! Because no matter what, we will suffer. But the whole pain will be for nothing if we don’t make use of it, if we don’t make the best out of it. And we take advantage of sufferance, we make the best out of it, when we think along these lines and have a positive attitude. First of all, we should keep in mind that it is better not to show resistance and not to complain. Even when everyone is hurting you, you shouldn’t say: “This person has hurt me!”. That person could not have hurt you if God hadn’t allowed for this to happen. And He let things happen this way because you needed to experience sufferance. It doesn’t mean that the person who hurt you did a good thing. This was the situation that Judas faced. He betrayed Christ and this has been the greatest of crimes, but it was according to the order of God that no one else but Judas be the one to betray Him and that He will die on the Cross. And also those who crucified Him are His true crucifiers. But the betrayal, the Cross of Christ, His death make all together the redemption of the world. And the same happens now. The one that hurt you is an evil-doer and will answer one day for his deeds, but you don’t get any use, don’t come any further if you continue to say: ‘He did so and so to me, the same should happen to him!...’ It’s a sin! God allows someone to hurt you and to make you suffer. Ignore that person, pay attention to your suffering and keep thinking of God at all times. So you shouldn’t resist any tragedy and any pain, but, if possible, you should suffer by saying: “My Lord, be blessed, your will be done!” In this way the suffering will not be in vain, but we will get something good out of it, it will be of use to us and it will become for our souls the great benefit that I mentioned before.

The shortest road to redemption

People nowadays are generally very busy, so Christians would like to find shortcuts for redemption, would like not to have to waste too much time to get where they want to get, to reach their goals immediately and straightforward. Well, one of these shortcuts for redemption is sufferance. I already said earlier that each individual, at every moment in time, has to face sufferance. But instead of letting sufferance waste in vain, you could have a positive attitude in front of God, no matter whether you are at home, at work or in any other place. Even when you feel like sighing, thank God and unexpectedly, silently, you will feel inside of you the blessing, which you cannot experience in any other way.

One Avva⁷ used to say in the Patericon that: “You can be in Hell in the morning and in Heaven in the evening”, meaning that a person can sin during the morning, but has the chance to regain his awareness during the day, to come back to wakefulness, to repent and to cry – and God can easily bring him back to Heaven. Things are not complicated and the road to redemption is short, but we have the tendency, through our wrong attitude, to make them difficult and to set hurdles on the road to redemption.

Man, wherever you are, if you repent, God accepts your repentance and you can be redeemed – but only if you truly repent. It is possible to repent also if your ego was hurt! Pay attention to this aspect: someone can go and confess because his ego was hurt and not because he committed a sin.

Many times a person feels bad for the sins he committed and he regrets what he did, but not because he feels he saddened God; rather, because his ego had been hurt. That is, before the person committed the sin, he had a good opinion of himself, but after sinning, he no longer feels the same and this makes him suffer. In which case we are no longer talking about a true repentance. The repentance wished by God, the true repentance, springing from deep inside, doesn't ask anything for itself at the time it occurs; rather, the attitude of man in front of God is this: “My Lord, if I were to die this very moment, let me die for Your love! And if You want me to live for thousands of years, let me do so for Your love! Don't let me fall again into the sin!” And then, indeed, in that very moment, the individual passes from one stage into the next, may climb from Hell to Paradise, and the road to redemption is the shortest, as it was for the thief on the cross. How many crimes had that thief done in his life! But there, on the cross, next to Christ, when his life was coming to the end, in that very moment, when he had no more hope left, he showed Him his full repentance, hoping for His mercy, and heard the well known words of the Lord. While being sentenced to death, he assumed the right attitude in front of God. How wonderful! How beautiful it is for the human being to stand in front of God like someone ready to die!

This is why the Old Testament teaches us to “remember your last moments and you will never fall into sin!”. Remembering that you will die helps you stay away from sin. Something similar is mentioned in these spiritual books. Man sins because he wants to enjoy this life. However, when he is prepared to die at every moment, when he realizes that he can die at any time, he then no longer commits a sin. The criminal on the cross, when he realized there was no hope left for him, in those very few moments, said the words that none of Christ's disciples had said and understood things that none of them had been able to understand.

After first rebuking the other criminal, by saying: “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong!” (Luke 23, 40-42), he goes on, pronouncing those remarkable words: “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom!”. And in that very moment he receives the promise from the Lord Himself: “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise”.

And so, my brothers, we have the certitude of suffering, which tears apart our existence deep inside and makes us suffer unknowingly. Maybe it even terrified us once and our mind came to the point of realizing that we will die. It is the most beautiful realization! And pardon me for saying so. We should live the way I mentioned above. It is truly wonderful when someone can suffer and feel what I said earlier, and take things the way I said. True, it is not the right

⁷ Avva – Greek for Holy Father

time for me to say these things tonight because I feel ill. This is why I said we should take the conversation into this direction, because my illness influences me.

The best thing that can happen is for someone to realize and to believe that he may not be in this world for much longer, that he may leave for the other world at any time. In that very moment the soul unlooses, it unbinds and frees from all things that kept it tight, and remains alone with God. And with the help of things he had heard, which he knows, man repents in front of God and, in this way, saves himself and his soul, feels that Heaven really comes inside of him and becomes aware of the great benefit of sufferance. And as strange as it may sound, man says: "Nothing else helps mankind more than suffering!". And when we say suffering, we understand all together illness, deterioration of the human body, and death. Without this sufferance, it would have all been a jungle. But it exists and it quiets us, people. Christianity, especially, should see things this way, should take advantage and make the best out of sufferance, so that the believer may always feel in Paradise.

When will God lift sufferance away?

There is one other thing you should know: once sufferance has done the work it was meant to do, God will lift it away. It isn't hard at all for God to take away every kind of sufferance. For this reason, when we suffer, when a pain continues to stay with us, we should think this way: "God wants to do me good, but, instead, I pretend that I don't understand, and I moan and suffer." This is what you should see, that God wants to do you good.

I tell the same things to parents about their children. Sometimes there are some faithful believers and good people, who pay attention to their Christian duties, that come to me to complain about their child that wandered away from the right way onto a path they would have never expected him to follow. I try my best and tell them the following, not just to make a simple conversation with them, but because I believe – and I have already seen this thing – that things are this way: "Pay attention, maybe you consider yourselves good parents and you care about what is happening to your child, who is taking a wrong path, but you should know that God allows this to happen just so you can realize some things that you haven't yet realized. Maybe you have inside of you a strong ego, a good opinion about yourselves, or something else that you are not aware of. Once you will realize this and your soul will heal of these sins, of these passions, your child will also be healed. God will bring the child back to the right path, back to you." And, indeed, many times it happens this way.

Generally speaking, I want to tell you that when sufferance is no longer necessary, God takes it away from us. If it continues to stay, if it persists, it means that we still needed it. Also the fact that I am not feeling well tonight must be of some use and this is why God allowed it to happen. So I shouldn't have said anything else than I just said. Because otherwise, if I had not felt the way I feel, I wouldn't have said the things I said. We would have spoken about other things, but probably these are the words we should have heard tonight.

My dear ones, I hope that if you paid attention, if you understood a little bit from what I said, you will begin to take this attitude towards sufferance and will find out that things are the way I described them to be.

But be careful that none of you should get distressed, because when we listen to a predict everything can be shaken inside of us. And then we say: the Father may speak well, but it doesn't work this way. He puts things in the right way, but how can we do what he says we should do? No, this shouldn't happen! If you see things this way, you have already harmed your soul a great deal. You heard the word of God? Then let It enter into your heart and do Its work inside of you. Don't be shaken, don't chose to take an attitude.

My dearly beloved, I think that these few words I spoke, if we take them seriously, will do us all, myself included, a great deal of good. From this moment on, when we are already in the church and are listening to the Holy Liturgy, which is Heaven, the Kingdom of the Lord, we will feel that we are inside of it and we will keep this feeling for the remaining time of our life. And when we will leave this world, we will be forever with God and with the Saints in Heaven.

Experiencing the sufferance in the spirit of the church

Archimandrite Simeon Kragiopoulos, *The Mystery of Sufferance*

Man lets himself in the hands of God like an offering, in order to be offered

...We spoke yesterday about the need for martyrdom in the spiritual life, starting from the celebration and the life of St. Anthony, who experienced in the desert so many – at a first glance inexplicable – things. What was the meaning of those demonic visions and terrible things that happened to him? And why did God allow that the Saint be tormented by so many awful things, over which he passed so well? Tonight we are celebrating St. Anthony in the first place, but also Sr. Cyril. It is the day of the two holy Patriarchs of Alexandria. But has St. Anthony ever found his peace? Surely, he alone knew what was going through his soul and how he overcame all his inner temptations, but I am now referring only to those from the outside. What a fight he put on! God could have hindered his torment, his oppression, could have kept him away from danger and could have prevented his exile at the age of fifteen, sixteen to far away a corner of the world, during hard times as those were. But God allowed and the Saint drank the large glass, drop after drop.

I already said that God receives a soul when He sees his intention and gives him light from the inside, guides him, supports him, but only so he can drink the bitter glass, drop after drop. In the spiritual life, things are not happening the way man wishes them to happen, where he can say: I will do so and so, relying on his intelligence, on his intentions, on his possibilities and his qualities. None of these happens because you, human being, you will go away, will fall, and, without realizing, will become empty, the slave of your egoism, of vainglory and will eventually lose yourself.

This is the method, the Christian spirit, this is how you will find Christ and will walk the way together with Him. You will know that as long as Christ is with you and guides you, you will be able to overcome everything. Otherwise you will not succeed, because this isn't a matter of force, of speed, of power; rather, man lets himself into the hands of God like an offering, so that the old man can die, can offer himself, meaning that he can quench in his inner self every attempt to save himself. These aren't new things, they have always been and will be this way. It isn't by chance that St. Paul the Apostle says "For Your sake we are killed all day long" (Romans 8,36). And why should someone be killed all day long for the sake of the Lord? Doesn't He master the world? This is the true spirit, the right way that the Lord had walked. Couldn't it have been different? It could, but it was important that He helped the people, that He supported them.

Peter the Apostle sins so he can be redeemed though sin

What did man do? He sinned. And what is the sin? The separation from God, followed by all the consequences upon this life. And what is redemption? Redemption, if you want, in the "homeopath" sense we are talking about, refers to the steps one takes on the way of life, on the way back to God, passing through the baptism of sufferance. Sin makes you suffer and

accept, makes you endure constraints for the sake of redemption, it makes you suffer so you can live.

A typical example was St. Peter the Apostle. He was next to the Lord and so dear to Him! He was the best of all, and the Lord chose him, kept him next to Him. How many things had Peter seen and heard when he was with the Lord!!! But in order to cure himself from the plague of sin, he also had to suffer. And Christ didn't send him straight to crucifixion, didn't make him feel the pain straightaway. No. This will also happen, but much later. He first let him experience sin for himself. And Peter behaved as if he were blind, as if he had understood nothing. While God Himself tells him what he will suffer, he pays no attention to His words. He first had to sin profoundly, to sink into the swamp of sin, into emotions that separate man from God and leave him alone.

When man is no longer united with the source of his existence – with God, after Whose image he had been created – and remains alone, without the embrace of God, he sinks into the hell of his being. Throughout this life, man is seduced by the pleasures of sin, but when the frightening moment will come, when naked and terrified, sank deep into the dumps of his own self, man will face God, what will he do?

So God allows that Peter is tempted, that he denies Him three times. Had he been out of his mind and he still should not have done so! But he was blinded and overcome by his fallen nature! So Christ doesn't tell him: "Come, Peter, look how down you have fallen! Let me clean you!". Healing doesn't work this way; this doesn't seem to be an efficient method. Peter's healing will come through a different method, a "homeopath" one, we may say.

The sinful human being is proud and selfish, like Peter was, and it is through pride and selfishness that God wanted to heal him. He lets him sink into this state of sin from which he had to heal himself. It is as if He wanted to tell him: 'Are you the one who will not get frightened, the one who will witness, are you the one who will remain next to Me and will suffer when all others will run away, are you the one? Here is your chance, do what the most common of men had not done; you, who had no fear, feel scared; fall lower than the lowest of men had ever fallen.' And Peter denies Him three times. He denies Christ, he curses and swears, and so he reaches the inmost depth of the reality called sin. He leaves the state of sin. He alone knows what he experienced! Pay attention, Christ didn't allow that Peter harms someone else, but that he denies Him, the Christ Himself. The Lord didn't suffer, but Peter healed himself from torments by being tormented – meaning that he was healed through homeopathy.

This kind of good refers to the crushing of one's ego and pride, Peter's greatest thorn, which shows itself when Peter tries the sin without any restraint, without any doubt, when he drinks the glass to the last drop – and then, like a miracle, the sin is followed by the healing.

Of course, it is not the experience of sin that brings the healing; sin itself cannot cure the human being, but it can force him to run to Christ in a state of repentance, of humbleness, aware that everything inside of him has fallen to pieces and that he no longer has a reason for self-pride. And then the miracle happens: Peter experiences the sin, or rather he sins in the order of God. He makes a sin through which he only harms himself and no one else; he lives inside of himself the experience of sin as something awful, of something shameful that separates him from God.

God allows that things happen this way so that eventually the soul is healed and ready to crucify itself.

So this healing lesson in front of God, of Christ, of the Holy Spirit has to take place, because the human being will not get healed until he suffers. No matter how much man suffers, alone

through his will, he will not heal himself. The cure arrives only when man suffers in the order of God, because He will choose what each of us should suffer and will open the way towards redemption, the way to His Grace (see note 83, page 170).

Since childhood Peter had had a temperamental nature, but otherwise he was pure. Deep inside he was proud of being different than the others. Although he had been next to Christ, although he had lived next to Him, although he had seen so much, despite all these, pride remained deep inside of him; he never lost it. It was because of pride that he boasted to the Lord: "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be" (Mark 14,31).

This was the conviction he had since he was a child and; and, if I may say so, the Lord "kept" it inside of him not to torture him, but because he wanted to heal him.

We don't want to understand how sin can be healed, because this hurts

This method is right for all of us. One suffers in one way, the other in a different way, but it is only through various downfalls and failures, through repentance that we can heal from our passions.

We will not take advantage of our Christian life as long as we live it in order to feel well, to be pleased. We want to be good Christians, but at the same time it should all be beautiful and pleasant in our lives. We are not ready to accept that by living this way we are pleased with ourselves, and, in this way, we are pleased with the sin.

As long as we still don't know what sin is, the Lord, Who loves us, waits for the proper hour to come, so he can heal us. He knows us, he knows the dimension and the depth of the sin inside of us and, before we are even given birth, he settles how things will go for each of us, he knows what each of us needs to be able to free himself from sin.

My feeling is – just by taking myself as an example, if you want – that man is willing to do everything wholeheartedly, except for drinking the glass drop after drop, for becoming aware of the sin that lies inside of him and for facing the bitterness that tears his soul apart. In this way, he tries to avoid, in one way or another, seeing his sins, and he deludes himself by thinking that he is a good man, that he does good things, while the evil kicks and strikes inside of him. Why are our souls this way? Why? Why are things different in the soul of a saint? Why is it that things are different inside of those who follow Christ, who step His way, who have denied themselves and have taken their cross, while the inner side of most of us is ruled by sin? It is exactly because we don't understand what sin is and how we can heal ourselves from it. We don't want to be healed. The healing is painful.

The wonder lies in God's intention that we stand solid, that we follow Him and remain close to Him. It didn't matter what Peter and the other Apostles did. They remained next to Christ and He found the way to do the work of healing in their souls. He let Peter be full of himself, he let him taste the sin he kept inside of him without his knowing. When Peter realized what happened, all he was able to do was to cry bitterly. In this way the Lord puts His hand over each of us, if we want to behave like those who remained next to Him as if they wanted to say: "Our Lord, we don't understand anything, but, look, we stand in front of You. Break us to pieces to redeem us, according to the needs of our soul!"

To make things clearer, I will tell you the following: I have encountered many cases when a person refused to accept the sufferance that was needed for his healing, but God arranges things in such a way that the person arrives exactly in the situation that he tried to avoid. And so he drinks the bitter glass that he didn't want to drink and feels the pain that he didn't want to accept. He frees himself from the sin in a shameful manner. This is the order of God. Man

should admire the wisdom and the love He uses to guide each soul to redemption. Of course, these things scare, trouble and sadden the individual, but this is the only way.

The human being goes through many hurdles, just as the homeopath medicine exhausts the patient, but also heals him. We shouldn't get scared, we shouldn't run away! Before us thousands of souls understood and saw things this way, thousands of people denied themselves, put themselves into the hands of God and drank all the way to the bottom the glass of sufferance, the glass of Christ's cross. "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

For Your Sake we are killed all day long...

St. Athanasius, whose day we are celebrating today, went through so many hurdles that he wouldn't have survived had he not put himself into the hands of God, had he revolted against those who did him injustice, against the heretics, had he revolted against God, Who allowed his sufferance.

But he remained faithful and followed the Lord. When Arius died, the Saint is known to have said: "For each of us comes a time to die!" – and nothing more. There was no need for revenge in his soul, no intention to say "Good that he died!"

How much we harm ourselves when Christ comes to us and wants to put His hand on our shoulder, but, instead of accepting him, we blow hot coals! So what can the Lord do? He lets us have our way and waits for another moment to come to us, to see if we have grown wiser, to see if we have realized that He is the Way.

Even at monasteries, if the monks or the nuns don't learn the lesson. "For Your Sake we are killed all day long", no one can know what will come of their salvation.

There is something that gives us hope. Although we think that nothing is happening as if we couldn't understand what the Lord said to us, He will begin to bring us proofs.

We may end up fewer than we are at this point in the church, but this doesn't matter! If only two people are left, that is enough. The problem is not whether we are many or few, but whether we find the Truth of God, the right Way, if we walk as He walked so that our soul can heal, so that the Truth of the Lord can shine inside of us, so that the Spirit of the Lord can be with us, so we can have the hope of the eternal redemption.

THE LITURGY OF FORGIVENESS

- The word liturgy has a Greek origin and it means “public work”, a work for the benefit of people.
- In Romanian the word liturgy refers the “Divine Liturgy”, the central mass in the tradition of the Orthodox Church.
- The Church is the kingdom of God on earth and its services are the doors through which we enter into this kingdom, the actual living and sharing of the new life in Christ, of the “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”, which define the kingdom of God (Romans 14, 17).
- The tradition of the Church brings us in the direct presence of God, allowing us to participate in the joy of the Resurrection. The Church is, foremost, a praying and prising community, which lives its new life in a liturgical manner – that is in communion with God.
- The mystery of the redemption in Christ is the mystery of the Church, in which God shares His godly life with man, and so He redeems him from sin and from death, and pours over him the joy of the eternal life. This mystery becomes concrete through the specific works of the Church in which Christ offers and shares Himself through the services conducted by the officiants and through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Through His incarnation, His death, His Resurrection and His ascension, and through His seating to the right side of the Father, the Saviour Jesus Christ reinstated the human nature and freed us from the ruling of sin and of death, granting us eternal life in the kingdom of God. Each of us received this gift of the eternal life through the Holy Baptism when “we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6,4).
- At the centre of the Mystery of the Church stands the Holy Eucharistic Liturgy, the Mystery of all Mysteries as St. Dionysius the Aeropagite calls it, because it is the crowning of everything that has been shared through other services and Holy Mysteries.
- The Divine Liturgy is the Mystery through which the redemptive work of Christ and our complete union with Him take place in our present-day. It is the Mystery through which the Church is the fulfilment of the body of Christ and the entrance into the Kingdom of God. It is during the Divine Liturgy that the Holy Spirit brings into the present time and in history the eschatological reality of the Kingdom that will come.
- The Divine Liturgy is the service during which the bread and the wine from the “Presanctified Gifts” brought to the Lord are turned through the work of the Holy Spirit, at the prayer of the bishop or of the officiant priest, into the Body and the Blood of our Saviour, for the Holy Communion of the faithful, “for the remission of sins and into life everlasting” and for immortality!
- The purpose of the Divine Eucharistic Liturgy is the healing and consecration of man in Christ and his accession to the Kingdom of God. Through this, the entire existence of the Christian may and has to become a liturgy after the Liturgy, in order to fulfil the words of St. Paul the Apostle towards the Romans: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” (Romans 12,1).

- The liturgy of each Christian as an inner offering takes place through the offering of one's self to Christ, Who resides in our hearts like in an altar. We offer ourselves, our entire being, with all our thoughts, feelings, sensations, desires, needs, fears, passions and pains, asking Him to turn them, through the power of His Grace, into "His". According to the teachings of St. Mark the Anchorite, the liturgy of the inner offering performed by our universal priesthood does not imply the denial of our worldly life, but our willingness to offer it to Christ. It is through this offering only that we can find the healing our heart has been longing for and which is nothing other than consecration and the retrieval in God, which is the reason why we have been brought into existence.

Forgiveness as an inner liturgy

- In order to perform properly and to our benefit the inner liturgy, I think that we have to follow the model of the Divine Eucharistic Liturgy, at least its central point, the consecration of the "Presanctified Gifts" into the "Divine Gifts", into the Body and the Blood of Christ, Who has risen from the dead.
- In the Divine Eucharistic Liturgy, before the Epiclesis, which is the invocation of the Holy Spirit for the sanctification of the gifts, the priest recites the Anamnesis. This is a prayer which recalls the redeeming deeds of the Father from the Genesis to the End of this world and to the Second Coming of the Saviour and the final resurrection. At the centre of this prayer stands the recollection of all the healings of the Lord until the Parousia⁸. This remembrance is not just a simple commemoration, but rather a prayer for bringing into present the events we are witnessing in an effective manner. Through the Liturgy we are witnessing an *epiphany*, an increasing *revelation* of the presence of Christ the Embodied, the Crucified, the Resurrected, Who has risen to the right side of the Father, but also Who is to come again. The Liturgy is the "the constant actualisation of the Holy Gospel."
- We need to do the same thing in our inner liturgy for the forgiveness of those that have hurt us, which is to first do an anamnesis through our prayer, than an epiclesis, offering to God, like a living offering, our entire pain and sufferance for the work of forgiveness and for its transformation into the promised bliss.

In order to achieve this, we should do the following steps without trying to separate them from one another

1. A proper seating in front of the Lord

During the Divine Eucharistic Liturgy we hear the priest calling: "Let us stand well. Let us stand in awe. Let us be attentive, that we may present the holy offering in peace". We should do the same now: we should stand well in front of the Lord, meaning that we should pay attention to the way we hold our body in front of Him, but that we should not "freeze" in fearful or fearsome positions. "Let us stand in awe" teaches us to adopt a psychological-emotional attitude centred around the fear of God, which should be understood as a state of veneration or at least as an awareness of the glory of the Lord. "Let us be attentive" encourages us to leave aside all thoughts that could prevent us from standing "face to face" with God. To do so, we should kneel down, sit on a chair, on a stool or in any other position of prayer.

⁸ Reference to the Second Coming of Christ

2. Placing oneself in the prayer of the Holy Church

Read the Akathist of the Holy Spirit or the prayers you have used throughout the Seminary. Ask for the help of the Virgin Mary, of the patron Saint or Saints, and of the guardian angel. In this way you will enter into the great prayer of the Holy Church and will be guarded and guided by it.

3. Placing oneself as a living offering to God and doing the inner anamnesis

After the prayer, breathe deeply and quietly from the diaphragm, and pray for those who hurt and made you sad throughout your life. Ask God to help you forgive them and pray to Him to bless them. Admit in front of the Lord that you cannot forgive and ask Him to do so from your heart. Bless all those that come to mind. If you sense any resistance, pain or fear, accept them and offer them to God, praising Him. Accept the sufferance and praise the Lord through it until you will understand its meaning and the role it has played in your life and your development. Don't forget that the scope of the human life is becoming one with God and acquiring the life in the divine joy. Analyse your entire experience from this perspective. The events can no longer be changed, the evil cannot be removed from this world, but it can be lived the way God has taught us, so we can free ourselves from its fatal consequences. Offer this sufferance to God and ask Him to bestow His grace upon it and to turn it into comfort, joy or inner peace, after His great mercy.

Continue to breathe quietly and deeply, turning your attention towards your body as towards a "living screen" of your soul (to use the words of Father Daniel Staniloae). Our body holds "the book of our life". Every pain we sense is a message that needs to be listened to carefully; all that we have refused to acknowledge and to tell God, ourselves or those around us, "embodied" in our bodies and "manifests" itself as pains or even serious illnesses. So we should acknowledge the *signs* that the prayer has tried to bring up to our consciousness level and accept them. Everything that lays in our subconscious and torments us is nothing but pains that we have not suffered all the way through, sufferings that have been buried in oblivion and suppressed in denial because they could not have been lived through without the power and presence of God.

To be able to perceive the body pains as messages, we need to relax by breathing calmly and profoundly, and not to resist by cramping ourselves. Every cramp is an interference of the "old man" that tries to make use of its schemas of adaptation and "remediation" of sufferance.

Breathe quietly, in front of God, and, without putting any resistance, notice the pain that will grow to a certain point that will appear unbearable and offer it to God, with patience and trust. Don't allow any thought of revolt or resistance to settle in. Don't be judgemental. Don't be afraid. Continue to breathe quietly and the pain will begin to decrease until it will fully disappear.

The pains and the traumas of the past are written in the book of our lives not only as pains and illnesses, but also as visual and audible recollections – as what we call memories. During this stage of acceptance, we should treat the memories that come up in the consciousness the same way we treated the pains and body sensations, by breathing in quietly, without cramping ourselves, accepting and offering them to God in front of Whom we are standing.

We can help ourselves to accept the thought by pronouncing: "I accept this pain" or "I accept that this thing happened to me and that it made me suffer!". What matters is that the acceptance also becomes an offering. We offer ourselves to God, we present Him with our pain and hand it to him for relief.

4. Praying for the grace of God as inner epiclesis in the liturgy of forgiveness

It is God Who does the work of forgiveness and the healing of our wounds inside of us. Ours is the calling of His grace and His receiving, and the faith that He alone can turn our sufferance into joy and comfort. The transformation will be done by the Holy Spirit through our calling formulated in the blessing commended by the Lord. He asked us to bless those who have cursed us and those who have harmed us. It is according to the same commandment that the Holy Spirit is and works, and that God is and works and heals and consecrates us.

So now we will bless the Lord asking Him to bless all that we have offered to Him for healing. This is an offering dear to the Lord and through it we experience His Holy Blissfulness that no one can take away from us.

We should do this liturgy, as often and as needed, at least once a week, if possible at the same time of the day. It is not mandatory, but useful. Gradually it will become a permanent attitude, a continuous process, a life style. Slowly all the wounds of the past will be healed and will be turned into signs of the redeeming work carried by God in us. And although our problems and sufferings will not be the same, they will not cease as long as we are in this world. This is why our life will be as an endless liturgy of the love for the neighbour as forgiveness. The living in this joy that cannot be taken away from us, no matter what happens, will be the sign of the constant work together with the Living God!

I remember you in my prayers and look forward, with love, to hear from you some of the joys of this wonderful liturgy as we have also experienced together the pains of walking on the wrong way. And, when possible, please, give me your blessing for sharing them with those, who are still at the beginning or have not yet taken the first step.

I will end this last session of the Seminary with a word of Father Teofil Paraian about the life of the Christian as an extension of the Divine Eucharistic Liturgy:

“An orthodox life should be a life that extends the Divine Liturgy in the social life, in the daily life. In the Divine Liturgy the priest says: “Let us go forth in peace” and the believers answer “In the name of the Lord”, meaning that the Divine Liturgy will be followed by another liturgy, a service of praise to the Lord and of transfiguration of nature, transfiguration of our life, of our consciousness, transfiguration of our present being towards a better being. If we live liturgically in the social life, if we make the effort to live liturgically, then we will be able to also experience the Divine Liturgy in its true intensity (at the level at which we should experience it), but if we consider the Divine Liturgy as separated from the social life and from the other services, and if we neglect the other services of the Church and only value the Divine Liturgy, then we are not living in Orthodoxy, because Orthodoxy implies a way of living which enables the Divine Liturgy to unfold at the full intensity at which it can unfold in our consciousness.

For example, when the priest performs the service with a deacon, the latter, before the beginning of the Divine Service, says to the priest: “Pray for me, holy Master” and the priest answers: “The Lord may guide your footsteps towards all good things.” Which means that this guidance towards good, the general guidance towards good is a continuation of the Liturgy. If servicing with a deacon, after entering with the Holy Gifts and laying them on the Holy Table, the priest says: “Remember me, brother and concelebrant” and the deacon answers: “May the Lord remember thy priesthood in His Kingdom. Pray for me, holy Master”. The priest follows: “The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee” and the deacon answers: “The same Spirit shall minister with us all

days of our life. Remember me, holy Master.” And the priest answers again: “May the Lord God remember thee in His Kingdom, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.”

This liturgical dialogue is one that enables us to understand that the most important wish one can make to someone else is that “the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee”, the way it was spoken to the Mother of our Lord, the Virgin Mary, at the Announcement, and that “the Spirit shall minister with us all days of our life”. So it is not only during the limited time of the Divine Liturgy, but in all days and aspects of our life, if the study life, even in the social life that we should carry a liturgy after the Liturgy, that we make the effort to bring God, our Lord Jesus Christ, in our middle, as it is said in the Divine Liturgy when several priests are servicing together and after embracing one another, one says: “The Lord in our middle” and the other one answers: “Is and will always be”, and the first one continues: “Now and forever and to the ages of ages” and the second one answers: “Amen”.

So this awareness of bringing the Lord Jesus Christ from this world in our consciousness, in our life, also in the social life, is an orthodox awareness, an orthodox way of thinking, that is labelled, that it is identified, if I may say so, through the Divine Liturgy, which should not remain in the church, but which we should take, according to our possibilities, wherever our life takes us and we should avoid everything that might prevent the praise of the Lord, because when we cannot praise the Lord, we cannot live a liturgy, and we cannot live a liturgy because the Orthodox spirit is missing. May God help us! (Romanian source: www.nistea.com/teofil_paraian.htm)

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