

Reverend Billy Graham, went to the Soviet Union, instead of taking the side of his tortured coreligionists, he repeatedly took the side of the Soviet authorities, telling churches that "God gives you the power to be a better worker, a more loyal citizen because in Romans 13 we are told to obey the authorities." Had a rabbi made a similar pronouncement in a speech in a Soviet synagogue—something altogether unimaginable—he would have been read out of Jewish life.

None of this is meant to denigrate Christians; indeed I hold Christians responsible for the greatest social experiment in history, the founding of the United States. Nor is it an ode to Jews; their preoccupation with fighting evil has too often led to embracing terrible ideologies such as Marxism and its myriad nihilistic offshoots. It is only meant to explain why to Jews it is so patently obvious that it is morally wrong to forgive a man who has burned families alive, and to Christians it is equally obvious that one ought to.

DITH PRAN

Simon Wiesenthal's dilemma gets to the core of the issue of forgiveness. Can we as humans forgive people who have caused us such grief?

As a witness to and survivor of the Cambodian killing fields, I could never forgive or forget what the top leadership of the Khmer Rouge has done to me, my family, or friends. It's impossible. I blame the dozen leaders, the brains behind a sadistic

plot, who ordered the deaths of millions of people, including the disabled, children, religious people, the educated, and anyone who they thought was a threat to their ideas. My father died of starvation, my three brothers and sister were killed, along with many nieces, nephews, and cousins. Friends I had known all my life and who worked beside me in the fields were taken away and killed. We lived in constant fear in the labor camps. There was no sympathy for us. We were in a cage with tigers and there was no way out. All we could do was pray to God.

When I talk about not forgiving the dozen leaders of the Khmer Rouge, I include Pol Pot, Khieu Samphan, Leng Sary, and their entourage. They are the ones who had the plan of ridding the Khmer population of unwanted elements like people who were unable to work, people with ideas, or anyone who would get in the way of transforming Cambodia into an agrarian society. Not only did they kill a massive number of people, but they destroyed all institutions including the family, religion, and education. We had to pledge allegiance only to Angka, the Khmer Rouge politburo.

Pulling away from the Khmer Rouge leadership, I can forgive the soldiers of the Khmer Rouge, those who actually did the killing, although I can never forget what they did. Placed in Simon Wiesenthal's position, I would have forgiven the soldier. Why? I have always felt that the soldiers were trapped. Most of them came from the jungle, were uneducated and very poor. They were taught to kill. They were brainwashed. More importantly, they were forced to kill. If they didn't follow the orders of the Khmer Rouge leadership, not only would they have been killed, but their entire families would have been killed. They feared death.

I'm not saying what the soldiers did was right and I'm not

offering them excuses, but at least I understand why they did what they did. I think the key to forgiveness is understanding. I just will never understand why the Khmer Rouge top leaders did what they did. What was the purpose? Where was their humanity? They had the option to stop the killing, to give people more than a spoonful of rice to eat, to end the fourteen to sixteen hours a day, seven days a week forced labor. It took an invasion by the Vietnamese army to stop their atrocities.

I could never forgive or forget what the Khmer Rouge leadership has done to my family. Would my siblings have been ruthlessly killed if it weren't for them? No. Cambodia had many years of peace before the civil war and eventual Khmer Rouge victory. Would my father have died from starvation if it weren't for the Khmer Rouge leaders? No. There was plenty of food in Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge leadership decided to withhold it from the people.

We need to learn to separate the true culprits from the pawns, the evil masterminds from the brainwashed. We cannot label everyone the same. There is a world of difference between the leadership of the Khmer Rouge and the individuals who followed their orders. Yes, none of them are moral beings, but there is a chasm between someone who intentionally plots to destroy the very souls of people and someone who is not only stupid and brainwashed, but fears death enough (which is very human) to be forced to do wrong.

I cannot morally judge Simon Wiesenthal for silently walking out of the room after the soldier asked for forgiveness. But I feel this action has nagged at him because he has asked others what they would have done in his place. I feel that forgiveness is a very personal thing. I know some people won't understand my thoughts on this. But ultimately we all have to answer to God

for our actions and we have to live with ourselves.



treatment: not absolution, of course, but recognition for embarking on that specifically human activity which consists of changing for the better (what Rousseau called our perfectibility).

Neither can I ignore the fact that we are raising these questions today, more than fifty years after the event. We are not contemplating an action in the present, but the place of a past action in our memory. What can we do with evil in the past, how can we put it to use in the service of our moral education? Nazi crimes are the sort that render it impossible to confuse values: that evil really did exist and is in no way relative. For that reason alone, we must preserve a living memory of it. The second step in this education would then consist of rejecting the tendency to identify evil pure and simple with the Other, and good with ourselves, and recognizing, as Romain Gary said, that inhumanity is part of being human. Rejecting relativism does not mean embracing a Manichean split between good and evil. It is the complementary interplay of these two aspects of moral judgment, it seems to me, that alone permits us to make judicious use of the past in the present in order to fight today's evils, and not only yesterday's.

DESMOND TUTU

I have been overwhelmed by the depth of depravity and evil that has been exposed by the amnesty process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission appointed to deal with the gross human rights violations that happened in our apartheid past.

I am devastated to hear police officers describe how they drugged the coffee of one of their charges, shot him behind the ear, and then set his body on fire. That is bad enough, but it is all made more appalling by the police describing how while this cremation was taking place, they had a barbecue—turning over two sets of meat as it were. That is the one side.

There is also another side—the story of the victims, the survivors who were made to suffer so grievously, yet despite this are ready to forgive. This magnanimity, this nobility of spirit, is quite breathtakingly unbelievable. I have often felt I should say, “Let us take off our shoes,” because at this moment we were standing on holy ground.

So, what would I have done? I answer by pointing to the fact that people who have been tortured, whose loved ones were abducted, killed, and buried secretly—a young widow whose husband’s brains were blown out by a booby-trapped tape recorder, a father whose son was killed in a Wimpy Bar bomb explosion—can testify to the Commission and say they are ready to forgive the perpetrators. It is happening before our very eyes. But there are others who say that they are not ready to forgive, demonstrating that forgiveness is not facile or cheap. It is a costly business that makes those who are willing to forgive even more extraordinary.

What would I have done? Our president, Nelson Mandela, was incarcerated for twenty-seven years and not mollycoddled. His eyesight has been ruined because he had to work in the glare of a quarry; his family was harassed by the state security police. He should by rights be consumed by bitterness and a lust for revenge. The world watched with awe when he so magnanimously invited his white jailer to his inauguration as South Africa’s first democratically elected president. I could tell of

others, both black and white and less well known, who if asked, "What would you have done?" would have done the same—they have forgiven amazingly, unbelievably. Many claim to be Christians. They say they follow the Jewish rabbi who, when he was crucified, said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." I sit and marvel at it all as I preside over the process of seeking to bring healing and reconciliation to a deeply divided, wounded, and traumatized nation.

It is clear that if we look only to retributive justice, then we could just as well close up shop. Forgiveness is not some nebulous thing. It is practical politics. Without forgiveness, there is no future.

ARTHUR WASKOW

I need to address not Simon Wiesenthal but the Nazi he addressed: What would it mean for me to "forgive" you?

First, someone has—you have—shattered the Ultimate Unity by breaking the connections that hold it together—those connections through which human beings and the earth share the world. You have shattered the Four Worlds that are the One World—the Four Worlds our great mystics the Kabbalists used as a profound and convenient map of God's Reality: the Worlds of Doing, Relating, Knowing, and Being. When these are healthy, there is physical wholeness and material sharing; emotional love; intellectual communication; and the spiri-

HARRY WU

Reading Simon Wiesenthal's autobiographical story brought back a flood of memories about my own experience in China's prison labor camps. I was instantly transported back to my nineteen years in those camps, and I allowed myself to remember some of my experiences with those who were responsible for my imprisonment and with the camp prison guards.

In 1957, everyone at my university, the Geology Institute in Beijing, was forced to participate in "struggle sessions" in which we were to talk about our "capitalist" tendencies and backgrounds. A woman named Comrade Ma led these sessions with a vengeance. In April of 1959, she became insistent that everyone in our class speak out to contribute to the Party's efforts to "rectify" its previous errors. She held a series of meetings for us to air our views in the spirit of the One Hundred Flowers Campaign. During the first meeting, I managed to avoid speaking out my personal opinions.

For the second meeting, I asked to be excused to attend a baseball game as at that time I was the captain of the university's baseball team. When I tried to get out of the third meeting, Comrade Ma became angry and refused to grant me a leave. From that point on, my fate was out of my hands. Comrade Ma had singled me out and repeatedly accused me of "anti-rightist" tendencies.

On April 27, 1960, I was called to attend another struggle session. My heart stopped in fear when I saw on the blackboard the words: "Meeting to Criticize Rightist Wu Hongda." The person in charge of political education in my department got

up and announced: "I now denounce, separate, and expel the rightist Hongda who has consistently refused to mold himself into a good socialist student and has chosen to remain an enemy of the revolution." That night, I was taken to a local detention center and began my nineteen years of imprisonment.

It was much later when I learned that over one hundred teachers and four hundred students from the Geology Institute had been arrested as rightists. Comrade Ma had been the one chiefly responsible for my imprisonment and those of many others.

During my nineteen years in prison, I often experienced harsh treatment at the hands of guards and prison officials. I was beaten and degraded and to this day, I suffer injuries from the abuses that I suffered. In 1962, I was transferred to Tuanhe Farm labor camp. The conditions were so bleak and horrible that two friends and I attempted to escape. Our failure resulted in harsh punishments for all of us. I was thrown into solitary confinement, a cell that was six feet long, three feet wide, and three feet high, slightly larger than a coffin. I was not given any food or water for three days. When the captain in charge came on the seventh day to hear my "confession" to my crime, he kicked me in the side of my body and left. On the ninth day, when I became too weak to eat any food, the captain ordered the guards to force a tube down my throat to feed me. Finally, I was released back to my barracks.

There were, however, several instances when I was shown kindness by prison guards, which helped me survive such brutality. I remember one winter in 1962—the coldest winter I have ever experienced—where I was imprisoned in Section 585 of Qinghe Farm. We were all huddled in our barracks trying to seek warmth from our thin quilts. All of a sudden, we heard

the voice of a new guard, Captain Cao, calling us from outside. We dragged ourselves out of the barracks and braced ourselves against the outside walls. We expected to hear some new form of hardship to add to our horrible situation. But instead, Captain Cao announced that we would be receiving an extra ounce of food rations. He also encouraged us to walk outside in the sun every day to regain our strength. As I would take my short walks, Captain Cao would often encourage me: "You're doing very well. You'll be fine. That's enough for today. Go back to rest."

I don't know why Captain Cao showed us such kindness. In reality, his acts were small ones, but to us prisoners, who had not been shown any human kindness for months and even years, his acts were enormous. How could someone like Captain and Comrade Ma exist in the same society?

When I was released in 1979, I felt compelled to look up Comrade Ma in Beijing. She had been promoted for her faithful service to the head position of the Political Work Section of the Beijing Geology Bureau. When I met her in person, I realized that I had nothing to say to her. I did not feel the need to reproach her or accuse her of her wrongdoing toward me. I just wanted her to see that I had survived and had not given in to despair and suicide. She never apologized to me or asked for my forgiveness. "It's over, it's over," she said to me. "All that happened is in the past. The whole country has suffered, our Party has suffered. There have been terrible mistakes. I'm very happy you have come back. We can do something together in the future."

I looked at her and concluded in those few moments that Comrade Ma was so typical of the kind of people that the Communist society had produced. She believed in everything

that the Party had done in the name of its people. As I looked at her that day, I felt a brief moment of triumph. You could not destroy all of us, I said to her silently.

In regard to Mr. Wiesenthal's story and in comparing his story to my own, I must first state that it is inconceivable for me to believe that anyone in the People's Republic of China would ask for such forgiveness as the Nazi soldier did to the Jewish prisoner. In China, there was no understanding that what the Communists did to their own people was in any way morally wrong. People like Comrade Ma were so typical. They had no regard for an individual's well-being. There was no value put on a human's life because, quite simply, the leaders of the country placed no value on human life. In order to survive in China during these times, one had to give up one's own conscience and humanity.

Captain Cao was an aberration of that time. To this day, I do not know how he could have existed and acted in such a way without being caught and punished.

Instead, the society that the Communists founded was designed to drain any remnants of humanity out of a person. Like Mr. Wiesenthal, I would not have forgiven the Nazi soldier on his deathbed, but I would have been able to say to him: "I understand why you were a part of a horrible and vicious society. You are responsible for your own actions but everyone else in this society shares that same responsibility with you."