

A journey through forgiveness & reconciliation

Exhibition Brochure



GNNSJ

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PARAWAY WEEK

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Exhibition Summary

A Journey of Forgiveness & Reconciliation brings together diverse reflections, historical accounts and artistic interpretations to highlight the choices we make, and the process we follow, in dealing with this complex and enigmatic concept.

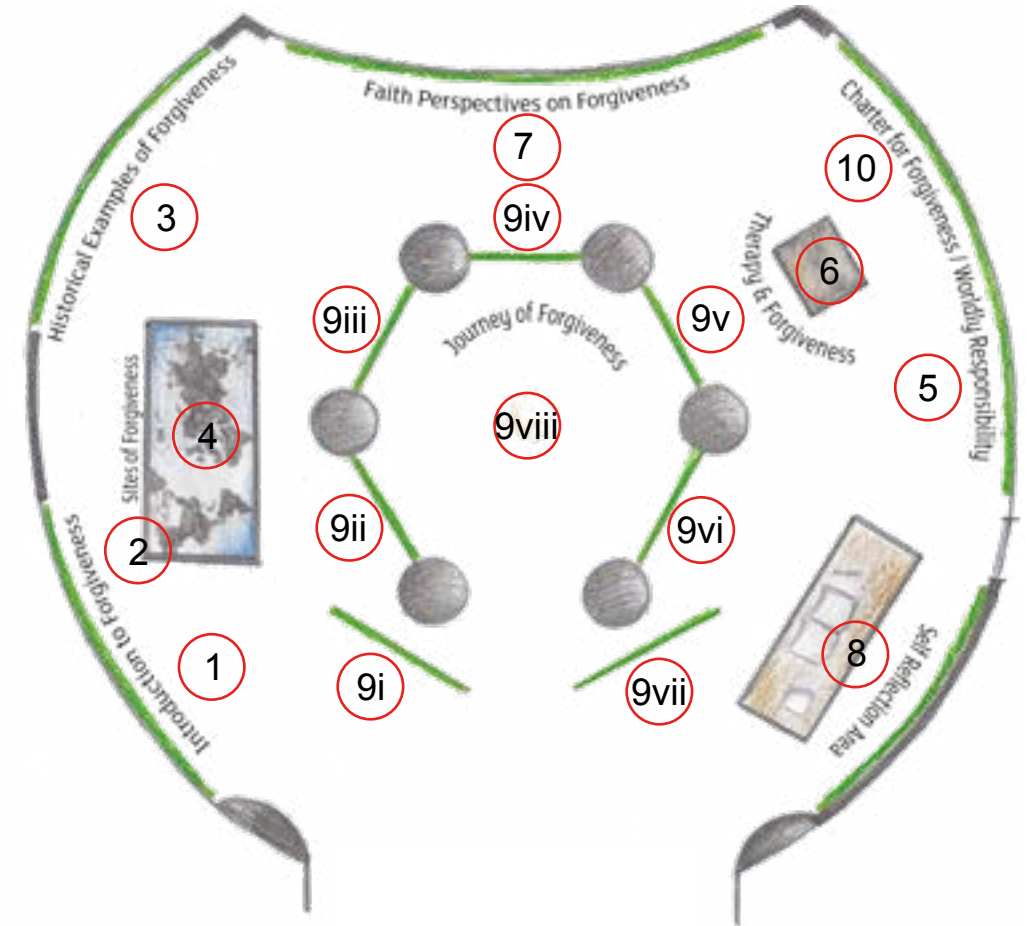
Guided by faith and spiritual traditions, and by people's lived experiences of witnessing the life changing effects of forgiveness and reconciliation, we are inspired to awaken the best of our human potential, and to liberate the body, mind and soul.



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Exhibition layout within the Heritage Centre, Nishkam Centre

Welcome to a journey of forgiveness

Imagine a world where forgiveness happens everywhere

From the moment you wake to the moment you sleep, you are surrounded by loving and compassionate individuals, who willingly free themselves of pain, regret, guilt, anger and suffering, by accepting and forgiving the mistakes they and others have made. Forgiveness is not a result of force or coercion. It is not a duty. It is a choice, that in no way removes responsibility or accountability for the actions of the past. It does not excuse bad behaviour. It simply allows us to move forward with a positive mindset, and free our bodies from negative and harmful emotions.

How do these people know they have forgiven? When the perpetrator enters their mind or vision, they feel no hate, contempt, dissatisfaction or pain. When both parties are able to meet and overcome their differences, they make a choice to reconnect and see the good and beauty in each other. This is when forgiveness transforms into reconciliation.



The path to forgiveness and reconciliation



The journey of forgiveness is an integral part of the journey of life. As individuals we go through painful experiences and we all have reasons to forgive ourselves and others.

We have been taught that forgiveness, like all virtues, is a Godly trait. Whilst we have this innate desire to love and care for each other, at times we can struggle to accept the misfortunes of the past, and often group the sin with the sinner.

After conception the heart is the first organ to fully form. This is symbolic of the love and virtue which is embedded in us before we encounter

any of life's hardships. In some traditions, the belief of reincarnation suggests that we are predisposed to an optimistic or pessimistic view of life. If we listen to our heart, and overcome these perceptions, we make it easier for ourselves to forgive.

We believe there are five stages on the path to forgiveness:

Exposed

Our mind grows throughout life, moulded and shaped by our experiences. We are influenced by vices and virtues, embodied within the company we keep.

Sometimes we make mistakes and harm others. There are other times where we have been hurt or harmed, and we have a choice to retaliate or to let go. The choice impacts our health, wellbeing and overall happiness. If we choose to forgive, we are saved from long-term heartache and suffering.

Consumed

If we retaliate and hold onto this anger, we leave ourselves bitter and consumed by hatred and negativity. This is the most tortured state of mind, where control of our actions is lost, intoxicated by vengeance.

Broken

In every situation, our heart reaches out, reminding us

of the power of love and forgiveness. Full of compassion it urges us to see beyond the current situation to a brighter future.

During this time, we may still feel residual pain and grief. Facing the consequences of our actions, and we must understand that healing is a journey which takes time. We may also be adjusting to the loss we have suffered. Whilst the pain can feel unbearable, acknowledging this is an important step in moving on.

Spark

If we take time to accept the events that have occurred, and strive to see good in ourselves and others, we are actively taking steps towards

forgiveness. Through humility, we slowly let go of anger and pain. The process involves the heart and mind reconnecting with each other.

Flourish

Love and compassion overwhelm the senses, and we are no longer stuck in a state of pain and anger. With the aim to forgive and reconcile, we are still being able to speak our mind and say when we have been wronged. We are building bridges of peace, love and hope.

Our actions and thoughts determine our on-going journey. Faith teaches us to make amends, love and act with goodness and kindness.

Forgiveness and health

In a study by Virginia Commonwealth University, researchers found chronic unforgiveness causes stress. Every time people think of their transgressor, their body responds. Becoming more forgiving cuts down your health risk. If you can forgive, you can actually strengthen your immune system!

Research by various health professionals has also shown that forgiveness has the following scientifically proven health benefits, which improve the social, emotional, mental and physical aspects of life. Some benefits include:

1. Lower blood pressure
2. Stress reduction
3. Less hostility
4. Better anger-management skills
5. Lower heart rate
6. Lower risk of alcohol or substance abuse
7. Fewer depression symptoms
8. Fewer anxiety symptoms
9. Reduction in chronic pain
10. More friendships
11. Healthier relationships
12. Greater religious or spiritual well-being
13. Improved psychological well-being



Forgiveness throughout history

Forgiveness at Standing Rock

On the 5th December 2016, Native Americans conducted a forgiveness ceremony with U.S. veterans at the Standing Rock casino, giving the veterans an opportunity to atone for military actions conducted against Natives throughout history. In celebration of Standing Rock protesters' victory in halting construction on the Dakota Access Pipeline, Leonard Crow Dog formally forgave Wes Clark Jr., the son of retired U.S. Army General and former Supreme Commander at NATO. Wesley Clark Sr. Salon published Clark's apology to the Natives, which read as follows:

"Many of us, me particularly, are from the units that have hurt you over the many years. We came. We fought you. We took your land. We signed treaties that we broke. We stole minerals from your sacred hills. We blasted the faces of our presidents onto your sacred mountain. Then we took still more land, and then we took your children, and then we tried to take your language and we tried to eliminate your language that God gave you, and the Creator gave you. We didn't respect you, we polluted your Earth, we've hurt you in so many ways but we've come to say that we are sorry. We are at your service and we beg for your forgiveness." This was a historically symbolic gesture forgiving centuries of oppression against Natives and honoring their partnership in defending the land from the Dakota Access Pipeline. Chief Leonard Crow Dog offered forgiveness and urged for world peace, responding that *"we do not own the land, the land owns us."*

Pardon of Assisi



‘The path to heaven is through forgiveness and pardon of those who have offended us, just as we have received salvation through the love and forgiveness of the Father’ Pope Francis (Assisi, Italy, Aug 4, 2016)

For over seven centuries the 1st and 2nd August, in Santa Maria degli Angeli, the Feast of Pardon has been celebrated. Visiting the Porziuncola in these two days, the pilgrims receive the gift of the plenary indulgence, the forgiveness of all their sins.

Tradition says that one night in 1216, St. Francis, as he was praying in the little Church of the

Virgin Mary, surrounded by angels. That evening they asked him what he wanted for the souls of faithfuls. Francis requested a broad and generous pardon, with a complete remission of all sins, to all those who repented and confessed. The prayer was accorded on the condition that the Pope, Vicar of God on Earth, was informed about it.

St. Francis went to Perugia, and obtained from the Pope, for those who crossed the entrance of the Porziuncola on August 2nd, the liberation from the guilt and punishment in heaven and on Earth since baptism until the day and time of entry into the Church.

Jesus’ Sacrifice

Jesus’ words “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” are found in Luke 23:34. Jesus looked down from the cross upon a scene that must have been distressing to Him. The Roman soldiers were gambling for His clothing (John 19:23–24); the criminals on the crosses to either side of Him were reviling Him (Matthew 27:44); the religious leaders were mocking Him (Matthew 27:41–43); and the crowd was blaspheming Him (Matthew 27:39). Surrounded by this most unworthy lot, Jesus prayed for them. “Father, forgive them” is a prayer of unmatched mercy and love.

Even in His agony, Jesus’ concern was for the forgiveness of those who counted themselves among His enemies. He asked the Father to forgive the thieves alongside Him on the cross,

who jeered at Him. He asked the Father to forgive the Roman soldiers who had mocked Him, spat on Him, beat Him, yanked out His beard, whipped Him, put a crown of thorns on His head, and nailed Him to the cross. Jesus asked for forgiveness for the angry mob that had mocked Him and called for His crucifixion (Mark 15:29–30).

It is important to note that Jesus’ prayer, “Father, forgive them,” does not mean that everyone was forgiven, unilaterally, without repentance and faith. It does mean that Jesus was willing to forgive them—forgiveness was, in fact, the reason He was on the cross. The words “Father, forgive them” show the merciful heart of God.



Signing the Columbia Peace Treaty

The Colombian armed conflict is the oldest ongoing armed conflict in the Americas, beginning - by some measures - in 1964 with the creation of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the largest of left-wing guerrilla groups, which have operated in the country. In 1990 and 1991, peace negotiations with several smaller guerrilla movements resulted in their demobilization and transformation into civilian political actors. In 2010, former Defence Minister Juan Manuel Santos was elected President. In his inaugural address, Santos had declared that the “door of dialogue” was not “closed with lock and key”, and made clear that his government would be open to dialogue with illegal armed groups who sought negotiations - albeit under certain conditions.

In 2011, Santos’ administration expended significant efforts in securing congressional approval of a landmark Victims and Land Restitution Law (Law 1448 of 2011), which granted official recognition to victims of the armed conflict, and entitled victims to reparation measures including the right to land restitution. Foreign support for the FARC’s armed struggle was therefore at an historic low point, diplomatically isolating the guerrilla in the international arena.

Negotiations began in September 2012, and mainly took place in Havana, Cuba. Negotiators announced a final agreement to end the conflict and build lasting peace on August 24, 2016. However, a referendum to ratify the deal on October 2, 2016 was unsuccessful after 50.2% of voters voted against the agreement with 49.8% voting in favour. Afterward, the Colombian government and the FARC signed a revised peace deal on November 24 and sent it to Congress for ratification instead of conducting a second referendum. Both houses of Congress ratified the revised peace accord on November 29-30, 2016, thus marking an end to the conflict.



Martyrdom of the Fifth Sikh Guru

Guru Arjan Dev Ji's spiritual leadership came at a pivotal point in the line of ten Sikh Gurus. He was the fifth Sikh Guru, and the first to be born into a Guru's household. His father was Guru Ramdas and his maternal grandfather was the third Guru, Guru Amardas; his mother and teachers were renowned Sikh disciples and mentors. During his Guruship, Guru Arjan Dev established two major Sikh institutions which are a testimony to the inter-religious outlook of the Sikh faith: he completed the construction of Sri Harmandir Sahib (known by the British as the Golden Temple) in Amritsar, with its four gates welcoming people from all walks of life, and he compiled the first volume of sacred scripture, containing verses of the Sikh Gurus and those of Hindu and Muslim saints.

A dramatic turning point came when a new Mughal emperor, Jehangir, seized the throne. Following the earlier, more tolerant reign of emperor Akbar, the political climate changed to become more hostile towards Sikhs and non-Muslims. A sequence of events led to the arrest and torture of Guru Arjan Dev, around the height of the Indian summer. He was made to sit on a hot iron plate with hot sand being poured over him. The torture resulted in his martyrdom on 16 June 1606.

Guru Arjan Dev is remembered for his calm serenity in the face of persecution, despite pleas by his devoted friends, such as the Sufi saint, Hazrat Mian Mir, to intercede for his release. To commemorate his martyrdom - and the peaceful and forgiving spirit in which he bore it - it has long been a tradition in India for Sikhs to serve a cool, sweet refreshing drink at Sikh gurudwaras, or on the streets to passers-by. Hymns are always sung to recall the Guru's teachings, as he prayed to be blessed with the peaceful acceptance of 'God's sweet will'.



Building Bridges for Peace

On 12 October 1984, the IRA (Irish Republican Army) exploded a bomb in the Grand Hotel, Brighton, during the Conservative Party Conference, killing 5 people and injuring many more. Amongst those killed was Sir Anthony Berry MP. The family of Sir Anthony Berry were devastated, but for his daughter Jo, it also started a life-long mission for peace.

16 years later, Patrick Magee – the man who planted the bomb – was released from prison and Jo arranged to meet him. As they listened to each other's story, they came to realise that this was the beginning of a journey of peace and reconciliation, to which they were inextricably bound.

The charity Building Bridges for Peace was launched in Brighton in October 2009 – on the 25th anniversary of the bombing. Building Bridges for Peace works to enable divided communities and the general public to explore and better understand the roots of war, terrorism and violence. They promote dialogue and mediation as the means to peace. Jo Berry and Pat Magee have given talks in Palestine, Lebanon, Rwanda and throughout the UK. To be a subject of a grievous wrong is always wounding and painful and can frequently provoke anger. However, anger, if allowed to fester is like a cancer of the soul. It does more harm to those who hold it, than against those whom it is held.

“Jo Berry knows from personal experience what it is to have to face deep suffering as her father was blown up in an IRA bomb. She has let go of personal need for revenge and empathised with Patrick Magee, the man responsible for planting the bomb. To hear her speak alongside the one who killed her father is a living demonstration of the transforming power of reconciliation. When two people who have been on different sides truly listen and can see each other's humanity, it becomes an example this sad world so desperately needs.” Terry Waite CBE – humanitarian and former hostage.



Nelson Mandela

In 1944, Nelson Mandela helped start the African National Congress Youth League. He was soon a high-ranked leader of the group. His government focused on throwing out the legacy of apartheid by ending racism, poverty, inequality, and on improving racial understanding in South Africa. He wanted to free South Africa without violence, but the government started killing and hurting protesters. He then started a guerrilla movement called Umkhonto we Sizwe (English: Spear of the Nation) with Walter Sisulu and other people in the African National Congress that he admired, such as Mahatma Gandhi.

Mandela was on trial because of his involvement in sabotage and violence in 1962. He was sentenced to life in prison, and was sent to Robben Island, but was transferred to Victor Verster Prison in 1988. In 1990, he was released from prison after 26.5 years. He left prison after Willem de Klerk removed a ban on the African National Congress. He ordered Mandela's release. Mandela then received the Nobel Peace

Prize in 1993, with former State President of South Africa, Frederik Willem de Klerk.

Mandela was President of South Africa from 1994 till 1999 when his first term expired, and he chose to step down. During this time, between being feted locally and internationally, he would invite business people on excursions. They knew the drill. They had to take along their cheque books for the honor. Mandela knew there was a sense of guilt lurking there from having made their fortunes during apartheid rule and having objected not too vociferously to it. There was a way for them to make amends, which was by way of donating substantial sums to welfare causes, especially involving the care and education of children from less advantageous situations.

Despite spending the best days of his life in prison, he came out singularly committed to turning South Africa into the non-racist society he spoke of in his statement to court in 1964. He lived by that credo. He personified the power of forgiveness and the best values in humankind.





Coventry Cathedral

On the night of 14 November 1940, the city of Coventry was devastated by bombs dropped by the Luftwaffe. The Cathedral burned with the city, having been hit by several incendiary devices.

The decision to rebuild the cathedral was taken the morning after its destruction. Rebuilding would not be an act of defiance, but rather a sign of faith, trust and hope for the future of the world. It was the vision of the Provost at the time, Richard Howard, which led the people of Coventry away from feelings of bitterness and hatred. This has led to the cathedral's Ministry of Peace and Reconciliation, which has provided spiritual and practical support, in areas of conflict throughout the world.

Shortly after the destruction, the cathedral stonemason, Jock Forbes, noticed that two of the charred medieval roof timbers had fallen in the shape of a cross. He set them up in the ruins where they were later placed on an altar of rubble with the moving words 'Father Forgive' inscribed on the Sanctuary wall. Another cross was fashioned from three medieval nails by local priest, the Revd Arthur Wales. The Cross of Nails has become the symbol of Coventry's ministry of reconciliation.

Jain festival of forgiveness

Paryushan is a celebration of spiritual awareness and forgiveness – the most important annual festival in the Jain Dharam (religion). The word “Paryushan” has several different meanings:

- To stay absorbed in our own-self (soul), read scriptures, meditate, observe austerities, etc.
- To burn (shed) all types of karma. Fasting is just one of many ways Jains use to shed karma.
- To suppress one's passions (anger, ego, deceit and greed).

Paryushan is a period of repentance for the acts of the previous year to shed one's accumulated karma. Jains endeavour to exercise self-discipline and do penance to purify their souls to the best of their individual capacities.

Sites of forgiveness and reconciliation

This map highlights some of the locations in the world where acts of forgiveness and reconciliation have taken place. These include global initiatives as well as smaller acts that individuals have undertaken to forgive indiscretions towards them.



St. Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation & Peace April 1993: London, England

On Saturday 24 April 1993, the South Armagh Brigade of the IRA detonated a bomb in a tipper truck loaded with almost a ton of fertiliser, parked right outside St Ethelburga's.

A coded warning was phoned from a telephone box in Forkhill, near Newry, at 9.17, and the bomb exploded at 10.30, sending a huge column of smoke above the City. Edward Henty, a photographer, was killed and about 40 people were injured. Damage to the surrounding commercial buildings, including the NatWest tower – then Europe's tallest building – was massive and 500 tonnes of broken glass had to be removed.

The damage caused by the bomb cost £350m to repair. The huge payouts by insurance companies contributed to a crisis in the industry, including the near-collapse of the world's leading insurance market, Lloyd's of London. Seventy percent of St Ethelburga's structure was destroyed and in ruins, and was later found to be uninsured.

After considerable disagreement, a proposal was drafted, suggesting that St Ethelburga's should be demolished, but, following a sustained public outcry, it was rebuilt to its original plan, though transformed internally. The building was formally re-opened by Prince Charles in 2002, as the new Centre for Reconciliation and Peace.

Forgiving A Tormented Man's Shootings 2006: Pennsylvania, USA

A 32-year-old milk truck driver lived with his family in their Nickel Mines community. He was not Amish, but his pickup route took him to many Amish dairy farms, where he became known as the quiet milkman.

In 2016 he suddenly lost all reason and control. Tormented over the death of his first child, he stormed into the Amish school and tied up 10 girls, releasing all the boys and adults. He shot the girls, killing five, then took his own life.

This shocking violence caused great anguish among the Amish but there was no anger, and their forgiveness was immediate. Collectively, they began to reach out to the milkman's suffering family.

As the milkman's family gathered in his home the day after the shootings, an Amish neighbour came over, wrapped his arms around the father of the dead gunman, and said, "We will forgive you."
Amish leaders visited the milkman's wife and children to extend their sympathy, their forgiveness, their help, and their love. About half of the mourners at the milkman's funeral were Amish.

In turn, the Amish invited the milkman's family to attend the funeral services of the girls who had been killed. A remarkable peace settled on the Amish as their faith sustained them during this crisis.



The World Trade Centre Monument

September 2001: New York, USA

On September 11th 2001, the World Trade Centre buildings were destroyed after aeroplanes were rerouted to fly into them. The site has now been replaced with a monument in remembrance and reconciliation. The following extract describes how the remains of a Bible were found at the site, opened at these pages:

“Retaliation. Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

So many chapters. So many verses. But these were the words — from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, in the Gospel of Matthew — found permanently exposed at Ground Zero after the Sept. 11 attacks. The pages of the Bible in which they were printed had fused to a chunk of steel as the World Trade Center collapsed, to be found only months later.

A firefighter found the fragment in March 2002, under the Tully Road, a temporary truck route that covered the last remnants of the south tower.

“This shredded, burned and rubble-covered Bible came to me from the loving hands of a fireman who knew that I was the record keeper of ground zero,” Mr. Meyerowitz said.

“My astonishment at seeing the page that the Bible was open to made me realize that the Bible’s message survives throughout time,” he said, “and in every era we interpret its teachings freshly, as the occasion demands.”



Forgiving Loss Of A Child

2018: Leeds, UK

A woman who killed a four-year-old boy with her car when he stepped out into the road embraced the youngster’s grieving mother at an inquest into his death. Naza Ali hit little Yusuf Jatta when he stepped out into the road while waiting at a pelican crossing with his mother and other family members. During the inquest, Yusuf’s father Lamin Jatta, 48 told a distraught Ms Ali: “We forgive you and do not hold any grudges against you or your family.”

Yusuf had been standing on a central reservation with his family when he ran out into the road straight into the path of Ms Ali’s Vauxhall Corsa. Ms Ali would only have had a second to react before the collision on 29 April, the inquest at Wakefield Coroner’s Court, West Yorkshire, was told. She told Yusuf’s parents in court that she is a mother-of-four, adding: “I’m really sorry.”

Recording a verdict that Yusuf died in a road traffic collision, senior coroner David Hinchliff said: “According to CCTV evidence there was a second”.

“That wouldn’t have given an opportunity to stop.” Ms Bojang wrote in a statement read to the inquest: “He was a lovely son and loving brother to his brothers and sisters - we all miss him greatly.”



Genocide Forgiveness

May 2014: Rwanda

The Rwandan genocide took place over a period of 100 days, from April 6th, 1994 to July 16th, 1994. The two ethnic groups, the Hutus and the Tutsis were involved in the mass genocide. The Hutu extremists attempted to carry out their plan to wipe out the entire Tutsi population.

Ethnic hostilities erupted on April 6, 1994, when the plane carrying Rwanda's moderate Hutu president, Juvénal Habyarimana, was shot down, killing everyone on board. Hours after the president's assassination, Hutu soldiers, police and civilian mobs throughout Rwanda began slaughtering Tutsi men, women and children throughout the country—up to 10,000 deaths per day.

In less than 90 days, an estimated 800,000 –1,000,000 Tutsis and a number of moderate Hutus opposed to the genocide were killed by gun- and machete-wielding Hutus, many of whom had once peacefully co-existed and shared cultural practices with their Tutsi victims. Of the Tutsis who survived the slaughter, countless were raped, tortured and maimed, and all suffered horrific psychological trauma. The unprecedented killing-spree ended on July 4, 1994.

Recovery and Renewal

Today, the government of Rwanda continues to work to build a truly unified, harmonious nation, and has made unprecedented socio-economic and political progress, bringing peace, stability and social cohesion to all Rwandans. As a result, Hutu refugees were able to return safely home and take their place in the new Rwanda.

Thankfully, with every Tutsi and Hutu who embraces forgiveness as the pathway to peace, Rwanda is strengthened in that noble goal.



Forgiving Verbal Abuse London, England

A Muslim woman was taking her baby to the park in London when a man confronted her and verbally abused her.

Upset at what she experienced, she called her husband who cut short his shift working as an A&E doctor in order to come home and attend to his wife. After later recognising the man's vehicle, they decided to write him a message:

Dear Sir,

My wife was taking our baby for a walk to the park. Forgive me if this is a case of mistaken identity, but I am pretty sure you are the man that confronted her with verbal abuse.

We are both residents of Zenith Close and I want to say we forgive you for your hateful and unkind speech. For your information, at the time of your actions I was busy at work helping people as an A&E doctor. I had to cut my shift short to attend to my wife who was upset at this situation.

I understand that your anger may be a human reaction, however as a society we must strive to be better than those who want to spread hatred and evil. Happy to speak to you more.

Regards, Ahmed.

Ahmed left his phone number on the note but he was not sure if the man would respond. Within an hour, Ahmed received a phone call from the man who wanted to visit them, Ahmed happily agreed. To Ahmed's surprise, the man brought with him a box of chocolate for Ahmed's wife.

"Within an hour of me placing the letter, the gentleman phoned me and even came to my flat and gave my wife a generous box of chocolates, truly regretful over the whole encounter! May God bless this man." said Ahmed.



Worldly responsibility: A Sikh perspective

For Sikhs, the aim of ‘learning’ is to awaken and exercise attributes such as compassion, integrity, contentment, wisdom, humility and forgiveness.

As the closing message of Sikh scripture informs us, this spiritual awakening enables the mind and body to ‘blossom green’ (*tan man theevai hariaa*). In the inner self, the blossoming of these attributes is endangered by the selfish ego, which fuels traits such as greed, hate, possessiveness, narrow-mindedness and self-gain, which influence how we operate in the world.

As we learn to curb our selfish negativity and mobilise our selfless positivity, this can tangibly transform our environment; beginning with the atmosphere we create through our prevailing values and attitudes - and the sense of hope, trust, faith and ethical responsibility we emit into our surroundings.

In their daily prayers, Sikhs give praise to the life-giving elements which nourish and sustain us, evoking the air as ‘Guru’ (*pavan Guru*), water as ‘Father’ (*pani pita*) and the great earth as ‘Mother’ (*mata dharat mahat*). The planet itself is viewed as a dharamsal - a place to practice dharam - to attune and align ourselves to a ‘right

way’ of being, which embraces and transcends our differences in order to enable personal, social and environmental flourishing. Each time Sikhs stand with folded hands for the *ardas* (prayer of supplication), they ask humbly for the ability to enable ‘*sarbat da bhallaa*’, the universal wellbeing of all. The Sikh way of life also requires the active practice in equal measure of *simran* (prayer and meditation) and *sewa* (serving others unconditionally).

The advent of Guru Nanak Dev Ji (the first in the line of ten Gurus who founded the Sikh dharam between 1469 and 1708) is attributed to a *pukaar* or cry of help from a world anguishing under

the strain of human vice, ignorance and lack of gratitude. Today, once again, the planet’s cry for help is being felt and heard around us, loud and clear.

Despite our continued destruction of the earth, the blessed planet continues to provide for us. No matter how much anguish Mother earth is in, she has never refused us water, land, resources or ideal conditions for survival. Like a mother, the earth is a perfect example of ultimate forgiveness.

This calls on Sikhs to rekindle their relationship with the Creator and creation, with reaffirmed commitment and in the characteristic spirit of *chardi kala*

– or courageous optimism – in the face of adversity. It requires us to forgive and let go of our pain and suffering, so that we can focus on improving ourselves, whilst caring for mother earth and all creation. The inspirational Sikh concept of *sant sipahi*, the saintly soldier, encourages us to be agents for change, based on fusing the qualities of initiative, grit and courage with wisdom, care and responsibility.

Indeed, the outward form preserved by practising Sikhs - with their *kes* or uncut hair and flowing beards – points to a special bond between nature and humans - and the duty we all have to be a particular kind of ‘eco-warrior’, empowered by

spiritual values to safeguard our mother earth.

It is an image which can further spur us to make the shift from being the exploiters of the earth’s resources to being its deeply indebted custodians, so that the legacy we leave for future generations may have the most positive and furthest-reaching effects. By not seeking revenge, and by letting go of our negativity, forgiving ourselves and others for their errors, we are safeguarding our planet and making the world a more peaceful place to live.

- Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh,
OBE KSG
December 2015

A World of Creation : The Sikh Scripture

Sikhs believe that as humans, the Creator has blessed us with the most exalted position out of the 8.4 million species of life – across the realms of matter, vegetation, animals and humans inhabiting this earth. The Sikh scripture informs us that we are honoured and privileged as sovereigns, with all of nature's resources for us to utilise – '*Is dharti mai teri sikdari...*' (Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 374). Beyond living by instinct alone, we have the power to reason and also the opportunity to kindle within us the latent spark of God by cultivating values, virtues and living with integrity.



Actively transforming pain into peace

Sand trays are used in many therapeutic interventions to help explore ourselves, our world, and the narratives of our lives. Sand is a therapeutic material we have often played with as children, and it offers us space to channel our emotions in a safe and contained way.

Using this sand tray is an opportunity to positively transform your emotions. Please feel free to try the following activity in as much or as little detail as you wish, taking as much or as little time as you need:

- 1) Begin playing with the sand. Get a feel for the material and see what you can create. Do any images come to mind?
- 2) Think about something that you are struggling to forgive. Can you create or write something in the sand to reflect this?
- 3) What does this look like? How does it make you feel? Would you like to feel something different? Is it bigger or smaller than you imagined? It is worthy of the power you have given it?
- 4) Destroy or transform the sand image into something that you would prefer.
- 5) How do you feel now? Do you feel a sense of relief or release?



Faith perspectives on forgiveness

[illegible]

Teachings of forgiveness transcend across all faiths in the world

Forgiveness

is a daily choice made by every individual for the benefit of their own mental and physical health, and spiritual progression. Our hearts and minds are in constant flux, and our egos can prevent us from forgiving. We often believe that we were wronged, or that we have done wrong to others.

Do you feel you have been a perpetrator or a victim? Do you feel that seeking justice is justified?

If you were to reflect on one situation in your life that is in need of forgiveness, at which stage do you see yourself now, and where would you like to be?

Please read the following titles and descriptions, and make a decision on what you intend to do to improve your relationship with this challenging world that we live in.

EXPOSED

Our minds are influenced by vices and virtues throughout our lives. At every moment we can choose how we will react. Will you let anger, pain and hatred cause you to act in a negative manner? Or will you choose to be loving, kind and forgiving in challenging situations?

You are contemplating and yet to make a decision...

CONSUMED

When we hold onto negative feelings, and allow them to consume our thoughts, our decisions and actions become vengeful and bitter. In this state, we can behave in irrational ways and commit actions that may appear to bring us freedom, but instead enclose us in a greater prison of pain.

Are you spreading negativity?

BROKEN

After we have acted with rage, or allowed thoughts of vengeance and bitterness to consume our minds, we regret our past behaviour. We can also feel hurt by the actions of others, and have trouble overcoming this pain.

We know deep down that the choices that were made spread pain, distrust, and animosity.

Do you find it hard to live with the pain and grief you've experienced?

SPARK

If we can overcome guilt and pain, we can start accepting and processing our actions and the actions of others. The result of this is the ability to put the past behind us, and move ahead with a strong, positive outlook.

Are you ready to accept and appreciate the past, so you can prepare yourself to make amends and move towards a positive future?

FLOURISH

We flourish when we have forgiven and reconciled with others. This means we actively make amends and attempt to start a new journey full of love and positivity.

Do you feel you can turn negativity into positivity? Are you able to embrace others, regardless of their actions?

A journey of forgiveness created through a labour of love



In 900 hours, volunteers lovingly created this exhibition.

None of the volunteers are professional artists.

They dedicated evenings and weekends over one month.

The team collectively donated £1,360, via money and materials for this project.





A journey of forgiveness

The journey of forgiveness has been interpreted through five stages, with birth and after life bookmarking them. Here are seven pieces of art depicting all the stages, which we explore in more detail over the next few pages.



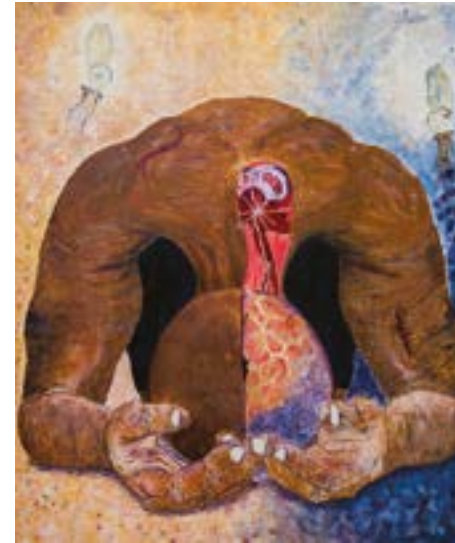
Stage 2 : Exposure



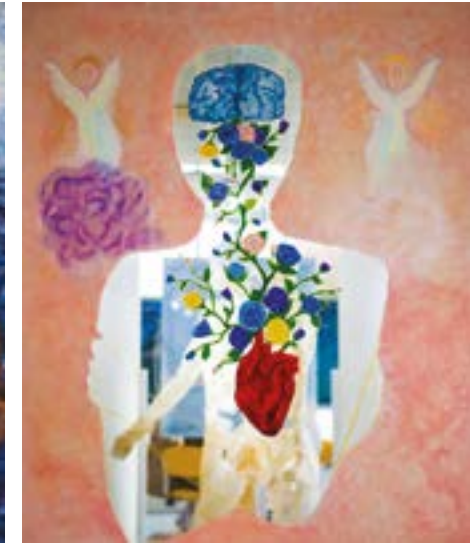
Stage 3 : Consumed



Stage 4 : Broken



Stage 5 : Spark



Stage 6 : Flourish



Birth



After Life

A journey of forgiveness: Birth

This piece of art was inspired by the following parable about two babies in their mother's womb:

In a mother's womb were two babies. The first baby asked the other: "Do you believe in life after delivery?" The second baby replied, "Why, of course. There has to be something after delivery. Maybe we are here to prepare ourselves for what we will be later."

"Nonsense," said the first. "There is no life after delivery. What would that life be?"

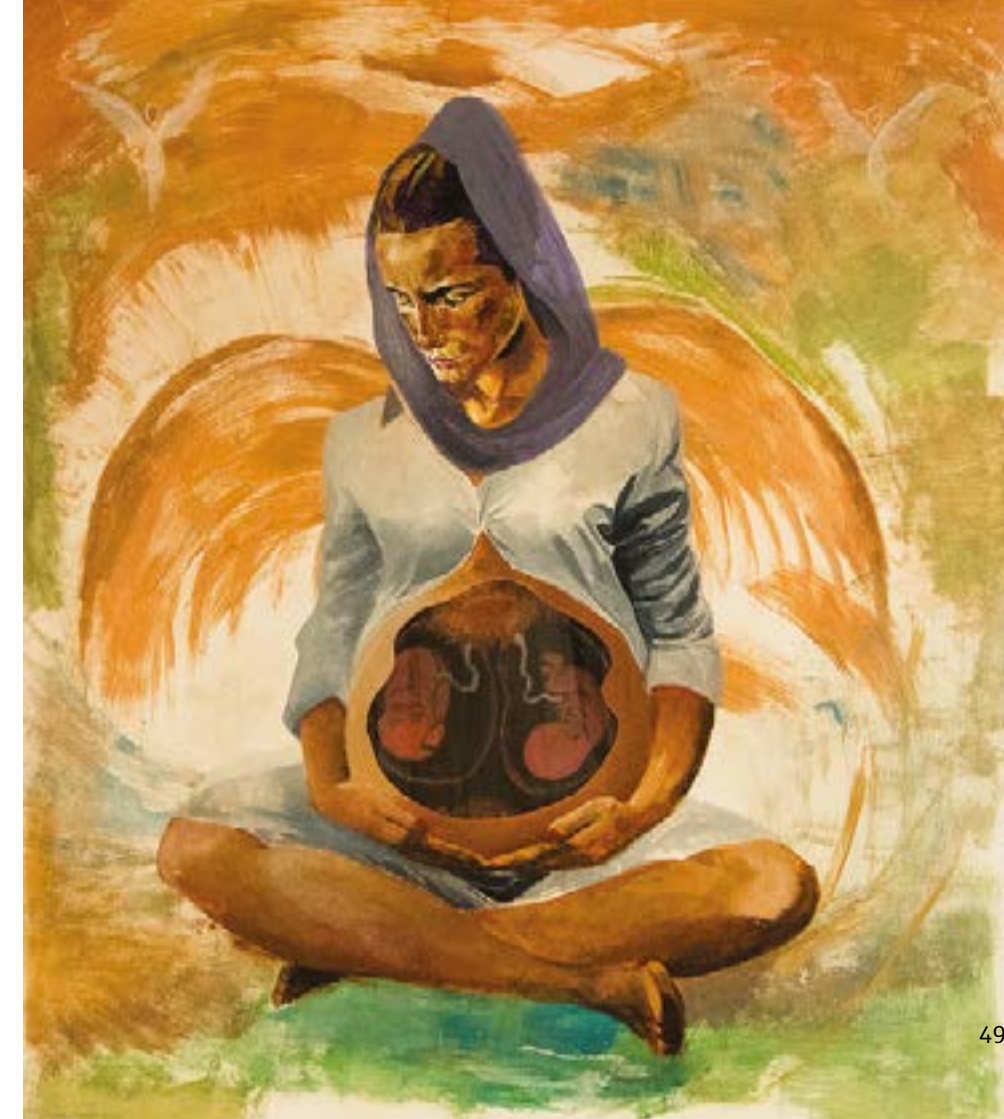
"I don't know, but there will be more light than here. Maybe we will walk with our legs and eat from our mouths." The doubting baby laughed. "This is absurd! Walking is impossible. And eat with our mouths? Ridiculous. The umbilical cord supplies nutrition. Life after delivery is to be excluded. The umbilical cord is too short."

The second baby held his ground. "I think there is something and maybe it's different than it is here." The first baby replied, "No one has ever come back from there. Delivery is the end of life, and in the after-delivery it is nothing but darkness and anxiety and it takes us nowhere."

"Well, I don't know," said the twin, "but certainly we will see mother and she will take care of us." "Mother?" The first baby guffawed. "You believe in mother? Where is she now?"

The second baby calmly and patiently tried to explain. "She is all around us. It is in her that we live. Without her there would not be this world." "Ha. I don't see her, so it's only logical that she doesn't exist." To which the other replied, "Sometimes when you're in silence you can hear her, you can perceive her. I believe there is a reality after delivery and we are here to prepare ourselves for that reality when it comes...."

(Extract from "A Matter of Life and Death" by Rosalind Bradley)



Artist's interpretation

The artist reflected on this parable. In doing so he also added a strong heart for each of the babies, as this is the first organ to form in the womb, and is believed by many to be representative of the virtues of love and compassion. The mind is still in formation, and faith teaches us that this will be influenced throughout our lives. The many angels in the image represent the two angels that Sikhs are taught each individual has. These angels record our actions and thoughts, both good and bad. They are said to be with us throughout our journey of life, presenting their recordings for judgement.



Artist's perspective

In this painting, I worked on setting a scene for the conversation between the two babies in the womb, as they wonder whether 'mother' really exists or not. From the very start, I chose to have the mother as the centrepiece of the composition.

This let me 'zoom out' of the babies' conversation to bring the mother fully into view. Using warmer, lighter colours in the background, such as pinks, greens and yellows, I tried to give a nurturing feel to the art piece.

The mother's figure stands out, dressed in pale, cool blues to contrast with the view inside the womb. I have been told it is a dark and uncomfortably hot place to be, so I used black hues for the interior of the womb and reddish pink hues for the babies as they are suspended upside down.

I also conveyed faint expressions on the babies' faces as they ponder about 'life after delivery'. One is smiling, to represent the optimist. The pessimist is tucked away and looks in the opposite direction. The mother gazes down at them in a quiet and forgiving way, cradling the womb in her steady hands.



A journey of forgiveness: Exposure

Artist's perspective

This painting reflects the influence of the world on individuals. It stems from the idea that children are innocent until they experience what the world has to offer. They are affected by the way they and others are treated, through what they see, hear, interpret and think.

The child in the image has a strong heart which encourages love and compassion. This heart is connected to the child's mind, which in contrast, is being influenced by the world around him.

The trees in the image represent the world the child is surrounded by - equally balanced in vice and virtue. The resulting spectrum of traits can be seen engraved in the roots of the trees.

At first glimpse, the child looks happy and content, open to exploring the world. However, if the image is viewed from the other side, an expression representative of the internal struggle can be seen. This struggle arises from trying to decide what choices to make in response to all of these different stimuli.

This painting also depicts the two angels who are understood to record all our thoughts and actions. Their presence reminds us that we are accountable for everything we do, and every choice we make.





A journey of forgiveness: Consumed

Artist's perspective

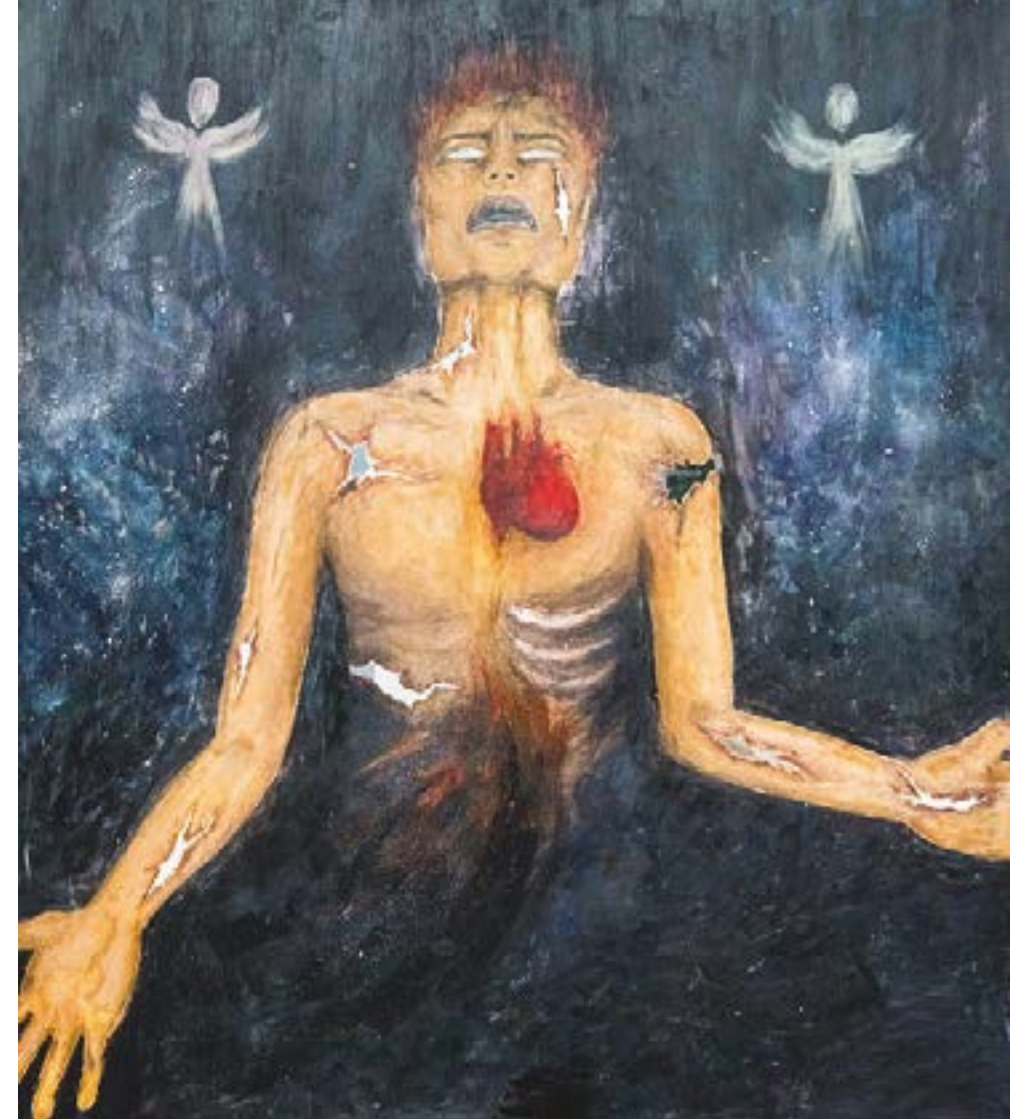
Depicted here is the state of the individual, consumed by rage, vengeance, bitterness and hatred. His heart has lost all connection to his senses. This is due to the overwhelming nature of the vices, which have caused his mind to burn.

The artist wanted to show that, in such a state, we are unforgiving of the actions of others. The image portrays how the individual's internal darkness and pain have begun to reveal themselves outwardly. The negative emotions that he has long held on to have left physical scars and wounds and his body is becoming slowly destroyed in the process.

A broken rib represents the heart's lack of protection. It is in a vulnerable position, and may have been hurt, harmed or broken to some degree for the individual to react in such an extreme way.

The connection between the mind and heart have severed - likely because the pain is so great, the mind does not want to cope with it. Instead the mind focuses on re-directing the emotions onto others, in an attempt to gain retribution.

In this state of mind forgiveness feels impossible. However, whatever actions or thoughts we have towards another are still being captured and recorded. This is indicated by the motif of the two angels, who have not left our side since our birth.





A journey of forgiveness: Broken

Artist's perspective

The emotions we feel after we have acted out of vengeance, or after someone has acted out towards us, are strong and vicious.

This period is a decisive time in our journey on forgiveness; we can choose to listen to the heart, the source of compassion and humility and goodness, or continue to listen to the vulnerable and overpowered mind which, at this time, is being clouded with negativity.

If we do not let go of the past, this negativity of anger, grief, regret and depression will haunt us for the rest of our lives.

At the same time, it becomes very difficult to repair all the bonds and relationships that have been shattered by this event. It is time for us all to reconnect our minds with our hearts.





A journey of forgiveness: Spark

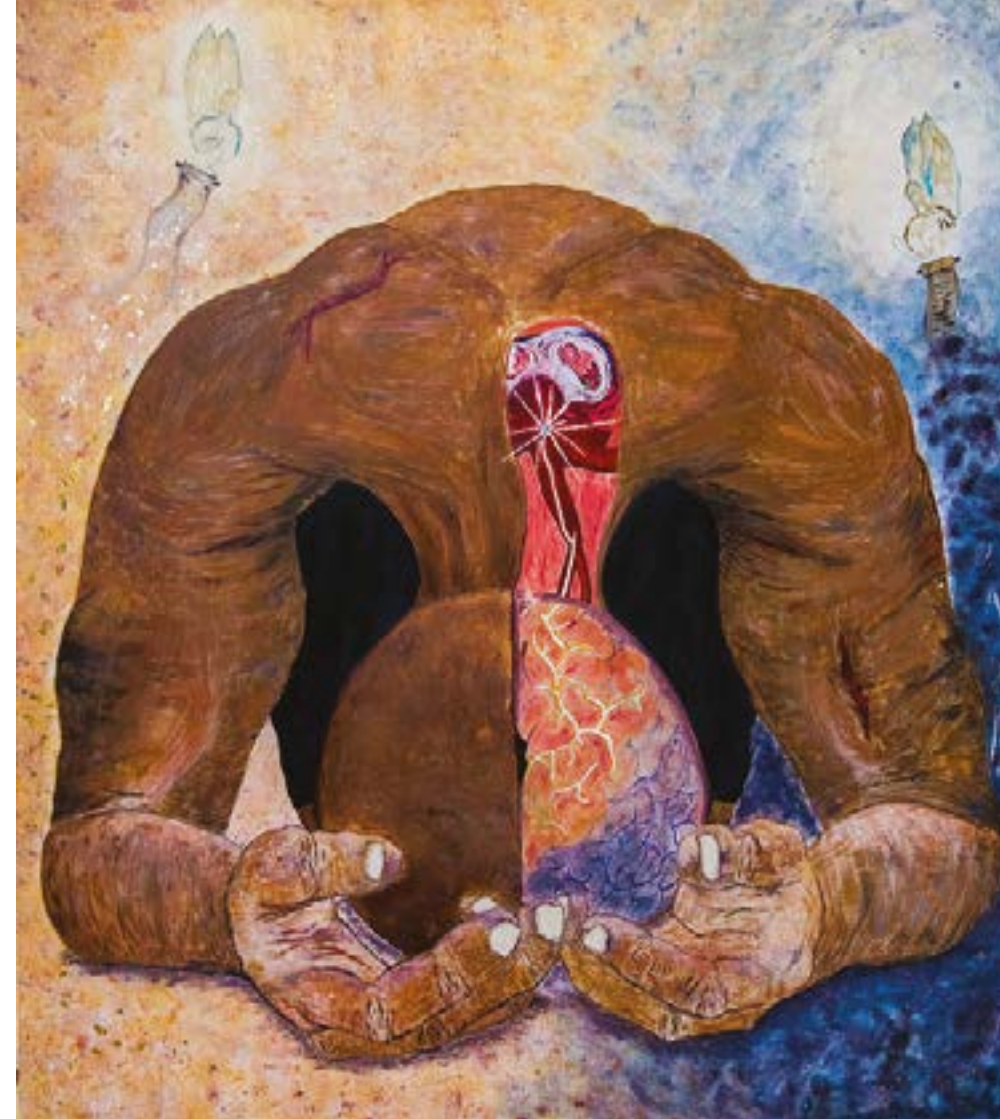
Artist's perspective

Grief-stricken distress and despondence are conveyed here through a crouched figure bent forwards. Hands form tightly clenched fists chained at the wrists, supporting a lowered head. Tones include deep reds, oranges, and browns with hints of burgundy and black. Wounds on the figure's torso are still apparent, but they are minor in comparison to the complete internal broken-ness which is being depicted in the mental, emotional and spiritual layers of the self.

Ripples of optimism and faith echo from the heart driving a connection forward like a match being struck. Some might see this as a trigger from our subconscious or our gut instinct. A light ensues, guiding us in times of sorrow. As it shines, a degree of empathy unfolds across our conscience.

Portrayed through a spark etched into the perspex, with no colour being overstepped in this portion, the spark travels from the heart directly through the artery which is linked to the brain stem. Areas of the brain become more willing to respond to the signals resonating from the heart.

The wrists and forearms are released from the chains, rendering a sense of liberation. In addition, the fingers are outstretched and more relaxed, and the head is lowered even further. This lowering signifies surrender and renunciation of the past.



A desire ignites within the mind to begin to let go and initiate the steps to recovery. Lighter notes of peach and gold surround the figure with accents of white.

These represent empathy, benevolence and good virtues from the heart as they begin to take hold. These lighter notes filter into the dark grey, blue and black hues as the virtuous heart of the self regains dominance.

The natural healthy tones of the brain permeate the temporal lobe, spreading to the frontal areas. Some areas remain shaded in grey-blue hues, as the figure has yet to resume a healed equilibrium across the conscious and subconscious dimensions of the self.



A journey of forgiveness: Flourish

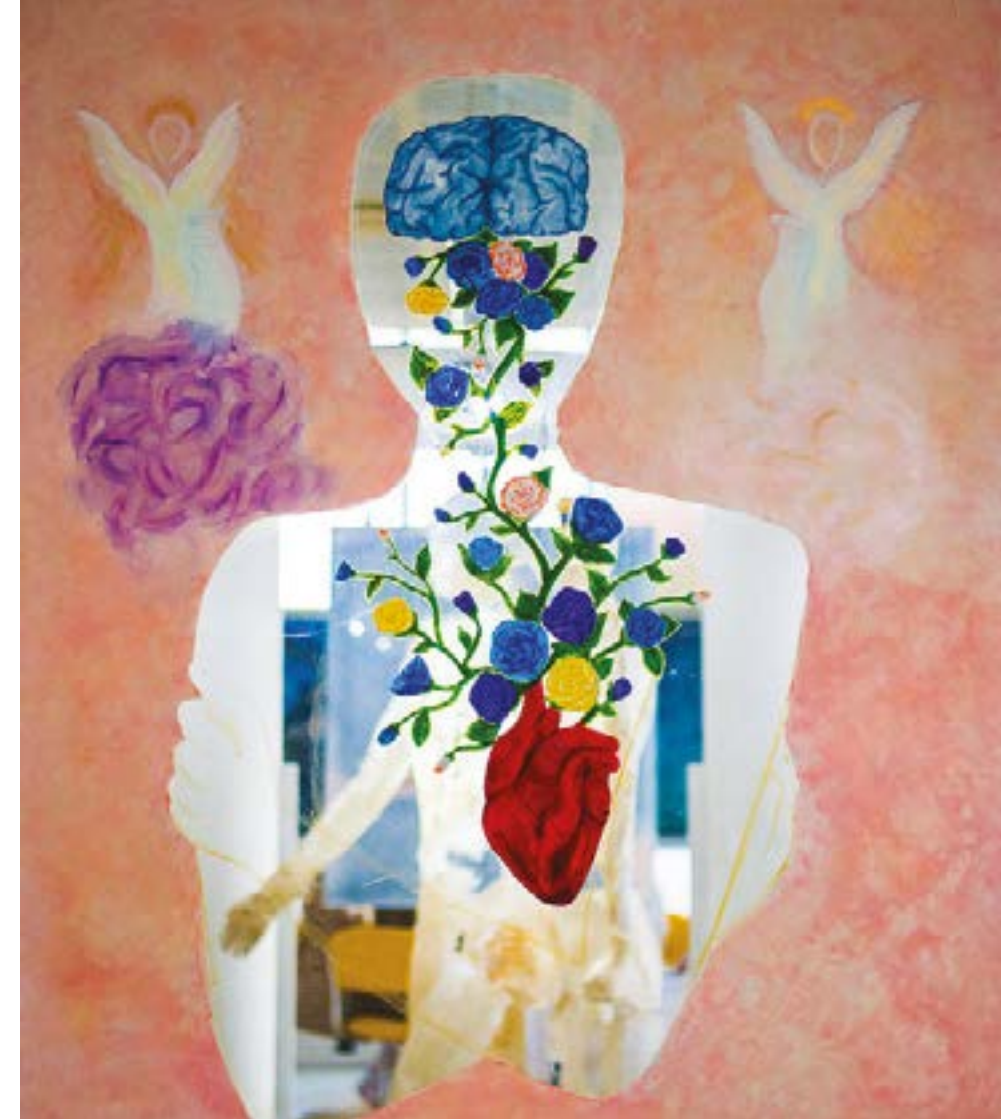
Artist's perspective

Once we have let go and forgiven ourselves and others, we can step towards reconciliation. In this moment we are freed from the influence of all the negativity that clouded our thoughts and actions. The heart actively connects with our mind so that we feel and act with the virtues of love, compassion, humility and forgiveness. This allows us to flourish in all that we think and do.

The artist portrays the connection between the heart and mind as blossoming, flourishing flowers. This depicts a positive relation between the heart and the mind. The mind has now learnt to listen to the heart when faced with situations that are hurtful and painful.

The figure is giving herself a 'self-hug'. This shows the importance of forgiving yourself, and the power of a loving embrace.

The image is largely transparent as the mind is no longer clouded. Light shines through the figure, representing the loving light from the heart. Once again, the motif of the two angels appears to signify the recording of our thoughts and actions as they evolve and change through our lifetime.





A journey of forgiveness: After Life

Artist's perspective

Once we take our last breath, the factories of our vices and virtues in the form of the heart and mind remain, as well as our now soulless body. The Earth was our home and our place of learning.

Since we are shaped, in part, by our surroundings, the people we associated with inevitably influenced our good and bad doings. These were recorded all the while by Chittar and Gupat.

According to Sikh teachings, they leave along with the soul once its expedition on earth has ended. The account they recorded is presented to Dharam Raj, who, weighing out our deeds, decides our next direction.

For Sikhs, however, the ultimate aim is not to reach a heavenly place based on carefully calculated life deeds; rather it is to live a life 'in God's image', by embodying compassion and forgiveness and becoming 'one' with the Almighty, both in the 'here' and the 'hereafter'.....





A journey of forgiveness: 'Forgiveness Man'

'A human being is part of the whole, called by us Universe. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures.'

Albert Einstein



Every interaction we have, every word we read, every video we watch, adds to the constant 'movie' that plays in our mind. The continuous streams of thought that pass through our minds determine how we feel and how we see ourselves and the world around us.

Since you began reading this, you would have had

between 35 – 50 thoughts, most of which you wouldn't have even been aware of. They are like small pockets of energy that are either working for you or against you, depending on whether they are negative or positive. In Sikh teachings, it is believed that this internal 'thought movie' – which is unseen to others - is being captured by Gupat a small guardian type figure that resides just over one shoulder. Our more visible actions, in the meantime, are being recorded by Chittar, who resides on our other shoulder. The footage they capture forms the negative and positive accounts which get carried forward when we die.

Chittar and Gupat are constant reminders to ourselves that all our thoughts are being recorded, we may forget about the decisions we make or why we chose to act in a forgiving or unforgiving manner... however recalling Chittar and Gupat we can begin to become more



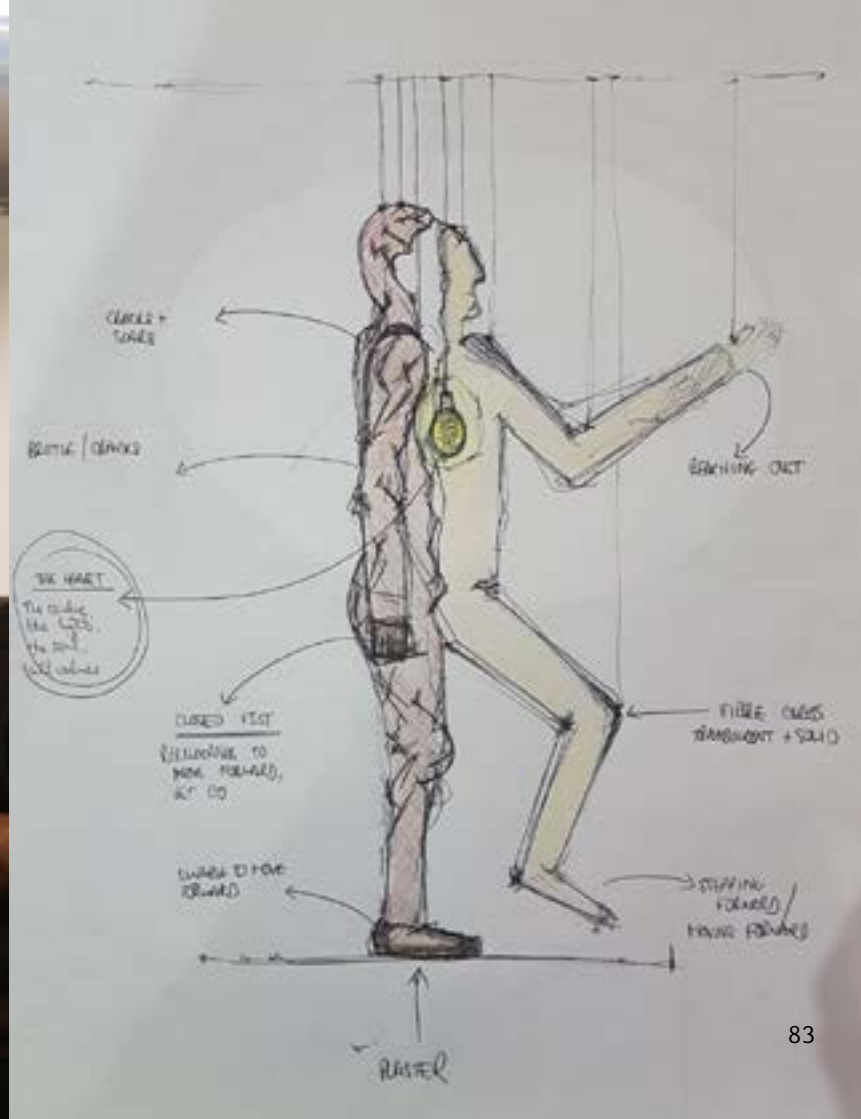
consciously aware of both our thoughts and deeds.

With this awareness may begin question our own motives for the decisions we make and further realise that there is always an alternative. By

choosing never to forgive either ourselves or others, we form a barrier that separates us - not only from others but from our true self as well. This barrier 'skin' may at times appear solid in appearance, however it is fragile and dissolvable in its form. This skin is formed through our thoughts and emotions which are all.

This new found realisation of the ability to be in control of conscious choices we make can help us to reach insights such as that by choosing to not forgive we are actually choosing to imprison ourselves as a part of the negativity purveyed towards others. Underneath this barrier lies a solid core, which is transparent in its essence. It is through the act of forgiving that we are able to 'shred' the constricting layers of vengeance, guilt, hate and fear. We then allow our hearts to shine and our true being to reach out, step forward and connect.

Thus we can effectuate a release from our shackles or impermanent barriers...







Charter for Forgiveness & Reconciliation

The Purpose: We, people, mindful of our shared humanity, commit to practise and nurture forgiveness and reconciliation, to foster healing, harmony, justice and sustainable peace in our world.

The vision of the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation is that the process of forgiving is vital if healing and reconciliation are to take place, as part of our collective efforts to seek justice, harmony and sustainable peace.

Fostering and practising forgiveness has the power to transform memories and deep-seated responses to legacies of injustice, conflict and war. It can liberate people from being imprisoned in their pasts and long ingrained mental and emotional conditions. Faith and spiritual traditions guide and inspire us to awaken the best of our human potential, by practising compassion, mercy, kindness, love, forgiveness and reconciliation, and to positively reshape our destinies.

Forgiveness is understood as an activity arising directly out of a compassionate consciousness, rooted in the awareness that we all belong to one human family. Compassion is an indispensable spiritual disposition in every faith, religion, dharam, or deen, as well as for our everyday human relations. Forgiveness is fostered by our experience of unconditional love and mercy, and an inner calling to live magnanimously and responsibly. It stems from our ability to see a larger context to our individual and collective existence, and from our impulse to lovingly seek and forge genuine and sincere bonds with one another as brothers and sisters.



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The activity of forgiving is vital if healing and reconciliation is to take place, as part of our collective efforts to seek restorative justice and sustainable peace.

Contact us at:
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