



Q&A with Colin Tipping, author of Radical Forgiveness: Making Room for the Miracle

Q: What brought you to write this book on radical forgiveness?

It was a slowly evolving thing, really. When I came to the U.S. in 1984, I really had no idea about any of this at all. I was very, you might say, naïve about spiritual matters, but at the time, there was a lot of spiritual awakening going on. I had learned a little bit about Eastern philosophy, that kind of thing, but it was all pretty much “head stuff.” I got in with a group of friends who went to Unity Church. There was a really good teacher at the church, and I think she was instrumental in seeding these ideas for me. And then, I think the person who I would now regard as my mentor, was a guy called Arnold Patent, who wrote a book called, “You Can Have it All” and, “Money and Beyond,” and others. He was the one, really, who opened me up to these ideas. I was listening to a tape of his at that time, and I think this was probably the closest to what you might call a “spiritual experience” –

Q: An epiphany?

Yes. I was listening to the tape and happened to be ironing a shirt at the time, getting ready to go somewhere, and I heard him say, so clearly (I can hear his voice saying it now), “Forgiveness is not letting bygones be bygones. It’s recognizing nothing wrong ever took place.” And, it sort of hit me, right there. I understood it immediately, even though I didn’t understand it intellectually. Of course, being a somewhat mental person at that time I didn’t really understand it. What did that mean? I really got it at a deep level that that was so, but I had absolutely no idea what that meant. I started to really look at it and savor that idea. Of course, what he really meant was, if we knew what the real big picture was, if we could see how this little thing that’s happened to us in the past fits into the overall mosaic of the big picture, then we could see how it fit in what we would see as the perfection that would be beyond our ability to understand. So, when he meant that nothing wrong had happened, what he was saying was that if you could see that big picture, you would see that there was nothing wrong. Nothing wrong was happening here because it fit into a larger picture, and everything within that picture is designed to fit everything else and is purposeful in every sense. So, that’s what I think he meant by the universe being a place of perfection. Everything works. Everything is purposeful, and everything that happens to us is purposeful in that sense.

Q: By purposeful, do you mean “good?”

Yes. Everything, really, is moving us in the direction of raising our vibration . . . I played with that idea for a little while, and then, my wife, Joanna, and I started doing workshops for people who had cancer. I had become a hypnotherapist by that point, and was

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working specifically with people who had cancer – I didn't really know why at the time – but I just seemed drawn to it. We started to do these retreats in the north Georgia mountains – five days, Sunday night through Friday – and people who had pretty bad cancer or other life-threatening diseases (it wasn't just cancer, they had chronic fatigue syndrome and things like that, mostly immune system disorders, which cancer is, of course). Once we started working with these folks, what we realized was that the thing that was common to all of them was that they had a real problem forgiving -- holding resentments really, really deep down – they didn't even know they had them, because people who have cancer, don't *seem* like angry people, but really, deep down . . .

Q: Well, often times we're discouraged from showing our anger, so we cover it up by wearing a mask.

Yes, it's covered up and deeply buried. So, JoAnn and I were excited to learn that, because we thought, if lack of forgiveness is the problem underlying the illness, then forgiveness must be part of the solution. So, what if we taught these people how to forgive? When we started to look at forgiveness from a normal standpoint, what we realized was that that was too long-term for these guys. Research shows that it typically takes an average person 20 to 30 years to really forgive something of any seriousness. Some people never get beyond it, even if they really want to. A lot of people do recognize the value of forgiveness, in that it helps them feel happier, gives them better health, more energy, that kind of thing, but if they're still holding onto the idea that something terrible happened, then nothing much happens even though they want to forgive. We were a little disheartened by that, because we thought, well, we really had an answer, but, if somebody's only got a year to live, and they've got something that's going to take 20 years, then it doesn't really offer them much of a solution.

Q: When you were working with these cancer patients, were you doing something other than the forgiveness work when you first started?

We called it “emotional healing.” Bill Moyers did a show, back in 1990 I called, “Healing of the Mind.” It was a wonderful show with five, one-hour programs. The last one was about a cancer retreat in Salinas, California called, “Common Wheel.” It was about a little place in Salinas that people would go to who had cancer, and they could just be in that space with love and healing for those seven days. The cameras were there, watching what went on, and there were so many beautiful, healing moments that the camera was able to capture. It was beautiful. We were crying, just watching the show, because we had this interest in people who had cancer. We said, “What a shame that there's only one of these in the country, and they've got to go all the way to California to get it, and that only 12 people can get it at any one time. Why don't we start one of those?” We knew just the place. We had a wonderful retreat center that we had been using for workshops, and we knew that we were good at running groups, so it didn't matter that we knew nothing about cancer, because it's more about people than it is about cancer. JoAnn and I said to each other, “We're not doctors, so let's disregard the cancer, and see how we can help them heal emotionally and spiritually. So that's what we did. We got them together, and very quickly got to the idea that the ordinary forgiveness -- traditional forgiveness -- wasn't going to work, but *radical* forgiveness, the kind of forgiveness that Arnold talked about way back – now *that* could work.

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Q: How did you come up with the title, “Radical Forgiveness?”

It’s a very simple idea, but a very radical idea. For 7,000 years, we’ve been addicted to the victim archetype. And now, with the “eye for an eye” justice and all those kinds of structures around the victim archetype, for us then to shift over to this idea of there being a spiritual perfection in everything that happens where nothing wrong has taken place is an extremely radical idea. That’s really how I came to that, to kind of encapsulate that idea that “forgiveness” was a very soft, feminine word, whereas “radical” is a more masculine word, so there’s a tension between those two words that cause people to think, “Well, what is *this*?”

Q: What else is “radical” about it?

When we started working with the cancer patients using the “forgiveness” idea, what we found was that this form of forgiveness -- the radical form -- was absolutely fast, if not instantaneous, and have since come to the conclusion that it is instantaneous in many regards, so rather than it taking 20 years, it’s very quick, instantaneous, very easy to do, and not difficult like traditional forgiveness is. People say, “I could never forgive a murderer -- A Pope could do it, but I can’t.” The Pope got shot one time, and he went and forgave the man the next day. There is this sense in which you have to be very pious and spiritual to even get close to forgiveness. But with this particular form of forgiveness, it’s something that you do in a very practical way. I actually call Radical Forgiveness a “spiritual technology.”

Q: How is it a technology?

Because it includes specific tools that you can use to move the “stuck energy” virtually instantaneously. It requires no intelligence or any specific belief system whatsoever. It requires no therapy, which is a big one for a lot of people, because one of the reasons I couldn’t get people to come to the cancer retreat is that they really didn’t want to go into the realm of emotion. They’d spent a lifetime avoiding it; so why would they want to come and play with me for five days in the emotional field? It was anathema to them. So, when I was able to offer them something that didn’t require them to dig up the past -- you don’t have to go and dig up the past with this form of forgiveness, you don’t even have to know what it is that’s making you unhappy -- there are lots of clues that will help you along the way, but you just deal with what’s going on right now at this moment, and that, in itself, clears up the past.

Q: Don’t we have to delve into the past to find out what’s making us unhappy?

What I find from a practical standpoint is that things that happened in the past keep on happening to us, because things that happen to us early on in life that traumatized us or caused us to feel a lot of emotional pain have a tendency to keep repeating themselves throughout our lives. If, for example, we were abandoned when we were two years old, there will be a tendency for that to crop up regularly in our lives in some form of event – the loss of a job, the loss of a relationship, and so on – there’s a pattern. And the pattern is there to help us heal that original pain.

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Q: How do we know that we're dealing with the old abandonment issue? And how can we get the courage to look more closely at the pain we're feeling?

Sometimes you have to be hit in the back of the head with a spiritual two-by-four. And that might be the time you pick up the book. (laughs) Hopefully! And get to understand that there is a reason why this is happening. Then, if you work on the latest painful incident and heal that, and recognize that here was something working for you to try to heal you, that it was a healing opportunity, you might say, "Okay, I'll buy that, I'm just willing to buy that" (because it takes a little willingness), it tends to heal all those other times you were abandoned. It heals the pain way back without your having to go through therapy after therapy digging up the past, going back to when you were 20, going back to when you were 14, going back to when you were 10. You can heal it all in one go. It's pretty amazing. It amazes me every day. I try to keep this as simple as I can, and I try to keep it as practical as I can. So the tools that I give people to use to help them come to a place of forgiveness. Actually, it's a bit more than forgiveness. It's really changing one's world view.

Q: So if people use the Radical Forgiveness tools at the moment they feel emotional pain, they'll automatically heal their repressed pain?

I give tools to help people to go through a little process that will move the stuck energy. That's what forgiveness is, really. When we hold grudges and keep hold of stories about what happened to us and keep repeating these stories over and over again, what we're doing is blocking our energy all the time. What these simple little tools do (and I really can't explain how it works, because I'm not a physicist – but I know that physicists can explain it, and there are good theories that would explain exactly how it works from an energetic standpoint). What happens when we use these tools, it somehow (quite miraculously) releases the energy that you've got blocked in your physical body, or in your emotional body, and after that has happened, life takes over, or spirit takes over, and the energy opens up around the situation, and it becomes open and healed. The analogy that I often use, which I think is a good one, is that of a homeopathic remedy. The way that they make a homeopathic remedy is that they take some water and they put into that water a tiny, little piece of the substance that may have upset you in the first place. And then they dilute it over and over and over – thousands of times – so that if you were to look at that, put it under a microscope, to see whether there were any molecules left, there'd be nothing there. To all intents and purposes, there would be nothing there. A skeptic would say, "How could that possibly heal you? You're taking snake oil." But what is really in that water is an energetic imprint of that substance, that substance that was at one time a poison for you. There's a tiny energetic imprint, and your body recognizes it and knows what to do with it, and then goes into a healing mode. The energy then starts to move through the body, and that's how a homeopathic remedy works. Well, the same is true when you do a Radical Forgiveness worksheet, for instance, the worksheet in the back of the book (and really, the book is nothing more than an explanation of how this worksheet works).

Q: What is the Radical Forgiveness worksheet?

It takes you through five basic steps, which are: First of all, tell me the story. If, for instance, I was doing one-on-one coaching with you with Radical Forgiveness, I would say to you, "Now

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tell me the story. Tell me what happened.” You would tell me that your friend has just betrayed you, and you just can’t get over it, you’re mad at your friend, and you just can’t let it go. It’s really getting you down, it’s making you depressed, and you can’t trust people anymore, and all that kind of thing. That’s the story. I would sit there and listen, just being there with you in your pain. I’d witness the story and validate it for you. That’s the important part about this whole process. Coaching is 99 percent of just listening, really. The second step is to actually feel the feeling, asking something like, “What is it like to feel betrayed?” That would be the next one. The worksheet is just another form of this, those same questions: Tell the story. How did you feel about it? And then we start to move into the Radical Forgiveness part of it, saying, “Would you be willing to be open to the possibility that there may have been a healing opportunity in this for you?” What it requires is just a little willingness to go there. Would you be willing to just be willing?

Q: We just have to be willing, even if we don’t really feel it?

Yes, because that’s all it takes. It just takes that tiny amount, just like a homeopathic remedy. Really, what we’re doing is asking the person to connect with the truth. Our own bodies really know the truth. It’s our minds that keep us out of it. It’s our minds keeping us wanting to analyze, and make things the way they are, and rely on our senses . . .

Q: Our conscious minds?

Our soul, our body, our deep subconscious knows the truth, so if I can get you to connect with that truth in just a very tiny way, it’s enough. It’s enough. Just like the homeopathic remedy. Your energetic body, and the energies of the people connected with you, feel that shift. There’s a shift in perception, but the energy starts to move, and your friend, who you’ve been talking about, the one who betrayed you, she would feel something, too, very subtly. There would be a healing between you and her that is unexplainable.

Q: Really? Have you actually seen this happen?

We do these workshops weekend after weekend after weekend. I wrote the book in 1997 and started doing the workshops in 1999, every single weekend, and haven’t stopped since. I’ve been around the world twice, and every weekend we see this happen. People come on Friday night, and they’ve got lots of things that they’re worried about, things like their relationships aren’t working and haven’t worked for years, they’re loveless, haven’t been able to create a relationship, create any money, they’re depressed, they’re unhappy, life’s not working. They go out of there on Sunday night high as a kite, because their energy has changed altogether, all their blockages are gone, they’re light as a feather, and then Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, all sorts of things break loose for them. Can I tell you about this vest?

Q: Yes, I was going to ask you about your vest. It’s a very unusual vest.

It is, and this vest illustrates my point about how this technology works, because there’s nobody more skeptical than me about this whole thing. As I told you, when I came over from England I had none of this spiritual background. I wasn’t brought up in it or anything like that. I sort of

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picked up as I went along, but I've always been a scientifically and mentally oriented person. So, I'm the first one to say, "Well, you're just telling a story." My belief in it, even though I wrote the book about it, was fragile at the beginning. I was doing a workshop in Melbourne, Australia. As you can imagine, we hear some pretty horrendous stories as we go around weekend after weekend. Things that happen to some people just make your hair curl. You wonder how people can live through it. The stories about little children, those are the ones that get you the worst, how they've been abused, beaten, day after day, it really pulls at your heartstrings.

Q: Horrible things happen in the world every day. And you hear these kinds of stories every weekend?

If I really believed that that's all there was, that there was no greater meaning behind it, I couldn't do it. Well, this lady in Melbourne told a story on Saturday morning that was just unbelievable -- the pain in it! -- of what had happened to her children. As she spoke, I felt my belief in this training leaking away. It was alarming. I felt like I was losing what I thought I had. I'm supposed to be "The Forgiveness Guy," and I wasn't feeling it.

Q: What went through your mind?

I was asking myself, "How can this be perfect? Would God do things like this to people?" I wasn't angry, I was just so touched by her pain and the story. I couldn't imagine myself going through it. I shared this with the group. I said, "You know what? You're a leaderless group right now. I've lost this. I'm having real trouble holding onto the idea that there's any perfection in any of this."

Q: That's really brave of you to admit this in public.

I had to. I mean, I just *had* to, to be honest to myself. So someone said, "Well, what do we do now?" They'd all paid money, and there were 12 of them sitting there, and I asked them, "What do we do? Do we go home, or do we push through anyway? Should we just push through and do the work and do the tools, and see what happens?" And they all said, "Well, there's not much choice, really! We're here for the weekend." So we worked through, used the technology, used the worksheets, and did everything that we would normally do in the workshop, except we were faking it. (And this is, actually, a "fake it 'till you make it" thing.)

Q: At that point, it was pretty real, wasn't it?

It was. But we got to the end of the weekend, and this lady who'd told her story was in such a state of surrender and bliss that it was unexplainable, unbelievable that she could have gone from where she was Friday night to this place of total and complete acceptance of what is, just the way it is. I have never yet seen anybody else able to accept this idea of everything being perfect just as it is, in spite of everything, in spite of how it seems (because she had lost two children, and, I

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mean – I can't tell you her whole story . . . it was horrible) yet she went to that place of total surrender saying, "I know, I *know* that this is how it should be. I will never worry again about what has occurred." That lifted everybody. And she saved my life. I mean, how could I ever believe in this book again? She really proved to me that this is possible, to go to that place of total surrender in spite of everything. Well, this vest turned up in the mail two weeks later. She had made it that night, for me. She said she had so much energy, so much creative energy, that she made this for me. It has everything to do with Radical Forgiveness on it, pieces of chapter headings and other details. So, wherever I go, I wear this vest as testimony to two things: Number one, the fragility of our belief system, because it's such a radical belief system. And, it's testimony to the fact that people can make it, do it. They can really go from the absolute pits to total peace. That's the experience of most people in the workshops, but that was the most dramatic of all of them.

Q: How would a grieving mother come to such a state of forgiveness?

The forgiveness comes as a consequence of your choice to choose peace. Because what you're saying is, out of that willingness to accept that in spite of all evidence to the contrary, given to me by my senses, which makes it look as though something terrible is happening, your willingness to see the perfection in it means you're willing to say that in spite of all that evidence, it is, in fact, fitting into a larger spiritual picture (like a mosaic or a jigsaw puzzle), and if we could see all the parts together we would realize that this is perfect just the way it is, and that the event needed to happen for my growth, and furthermore, that I actually created it that way. My soul brought that experience to me in order that I would be able to have that soul lesson. It's much more than forgiveness, it's a whole different world view, because once you shift your perception in that direction, you never think the same way again. Every time you see the evening news you will see it in those terms, how everything fits together and there's a purpose and a reason behind everything.

Q: So people need to take responsibility for whatever happens in their lives?

Absolutely.

Q: And to be the observer?

Of life.

Q: And of themselves?

And to give up the need to know why. That's what keeps us stuck in the victim role.

Q: How did you come to realize that the "why" was so detrimental?

Because if we could see the big picture, we'd know why. But our consciousness as it stands at the moment only allows us to see a very small part of that total picture. We trust that there might be a picture there, that if only we could draw the veil aside we would see it. Some people have

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seen the truth in a flash. Most of us haven't. We're still in that place of thinking, "This looks to me to be all that there is," but yet knowing there's probably much more than we're seeing.

Q: What about the perpetrators? What about the people who hurt us? Don't they deserve some of the blame?

A lot of people want more than just the blame game. They know that the blame game hasn't got them anywhere. They're still unhappy, their life still isn't working and the more they try to blame everybody else for what's going on the worse they get. Sooner or later, they're going to turn around and say, "this isn't working. I need to have some other model." So when they come to my workshop on Friday night, I can tell you they're in the blame game. They're making everybody responsible. "My husband did this to me, and I'm unhappy because he's doing this to me." And then we shift it over the weekend to see that there is something else happening here. Now, sometimes we're actually able to plot what is actually occurring from a spiritual standpoint. "Your husband is actually doing this in order to mirror for you your core belief that you're unlovable, and in playing that out, he's actually giving you the gift of seeing that you have created relationships in such a way that everybody teaches you that you're unlovable." That's how it works.

Q: Sometimes it's hard to let go of our pain. We're used to it. It's part of who we are.

That's right. Some people will stay stuck there and they won't want to give it up. This is why I wrote the book. I get emails every day from people who tell me that they picked it up and read "Jill's Story," which is in Chapter One, and it was their story. They're in tears. They suddenly see their life in a whole new way. "My God, that's my story! That's what's been happening to me all these years, and I didn't get it. I was making my father wrong! It wasn't about him, it was about me!" That's when the light comes on, when people either read that or they listen to someone else's story about how this affected them when they opened up to the possibility. It's not that I'm hoping that anyone will believe a theory. I'm not a theorist. What I'm asking people to believe is the evidence of their own lives. If they would only just try this thing where they'd be willing to look at the possibility for a few moments, that what has occurred for them is actually what they want.

Q: What they want. How interesting.

When they do that, though, when they say, "Okay, I'll buy that for a moment," and they do the worksheet, the evidence of their life shows that something has happened. Something has shifted there, and their lives become different as a consequence of that one, little moment. It's just what shows up when you do this work.

Just to come full circle on the cancer story, what we realized was that the stories that people held onto all their lives, about blaming and everything else, they're highly toxic. That's why so many people are on drugs and Prozac because they're holding onto those things. I liken it to trying to keep a balloon under water. It's all the time trying to come up, and that's what happens.

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So what I'm saying is, this is a way to motivate people and to inspire them, that by taking that first step and opening the door and walking through to another perspective that their lives will change.

Q: What happens after we've done our forgiveness work? Will we still have bad feelings and negative emotions?

Humans were given the full range of emotions, and we need them. It's only when we repress them that they become toxic. I believe there's no such thing as a negative emotion. No such thing. It's only negative when we don't express it. Of course, we need to know how to manage our emotions. I'm not just saying that you can get angry willy nilly and just express it whenever you want to. You've got to be able to manage those emotions and express them in the appropriate manner and in a safe way. If I'm feeling passionate I might buy a bunch of flowers, or if I'm feeling angry I might go home and beat a cushion or two, just to get it moving. Life is about feeling the feelings. All this mental stuff? It just gets in the way.

Q: So it's okay for people to feel the depth of their emotions?

Yes, but to have some support in doing so.

Q: And to be able to accept responsibility for their emotions.

And to use them as feedback. When you're out of alignment with spirit, your emotions will tell you, and your body will tell you.