




BEYOND FORGIVING

A SOUTH AFRICAN STORY

Study Guide



for use with the film



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Produced & distributed by

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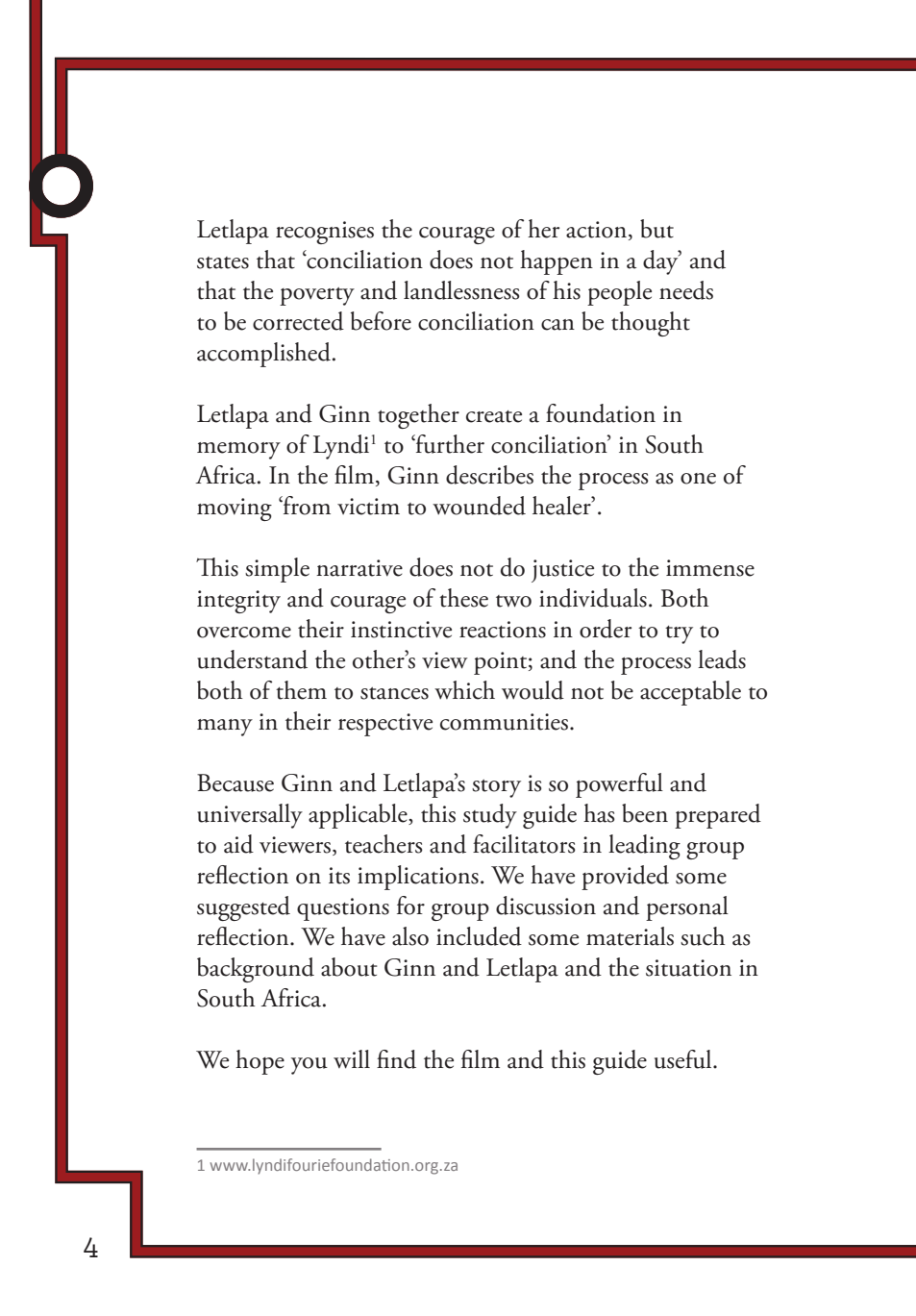
Introduction

Beyond Forgiving documents the true story of Ginn Fourie and Letlapa Mphahlele's journey to bring healing and reconciliation to post-Apartheid South Africa. It depicts an encounter between two people who both have every reason to see themselves as victims. Their story of tragedy, forgiveness and reconciliation brings hope to humanity.

As South Africa emerges from the Apartheid era, Letlapa, a black South African Liberation army commander, is consumed with anger at his people's suffering. He sees himself and his people as victims of a war being waged by an overwhelming force, and sees no alternative but to respond with all the violence at his command.

In what became known as the Heidelberg Tavern massacre, Letlapa orders an indiscriminate gun attack in reprisal for the killing of black teenagers by state security forces. One victim is Lyndi, the beloved daughter of Ginn, a white South African.

Ginn confronts the perpetrator of her daughter's death. To her surprise, she finds that he accepts responsibility and is willing to engage with her. She tells him that she forgives him. Moved by the generosity of Ginn's statement, Letlapa invites her to accompany him to his village. In front of the villagers, Ginn is moved to apologise for her people's responsibility for the oppression of Letlapa's people.



Letlapa recognises the courage of her action, but states that ‘conciliation does not happen in a day’ and that the poverty and landlessness of his people needs to be corrected before conciliation can be thought accomplished.

Letlapa and Ginn together create a foundation in memory of Lyndi¹ to ‘further conciliation’ in South Africa. In the film, Ginn describes the process as one of moving ‘from victim to wounded healer’.

This simple narrative does not do justice to the immense integrity and courage of these two individuals. Both overcome their instinctive reactions in order to try to understand the other’s view point; and the process leads both of them to stances which would not be acceptable to many in their respective communities.

Because Ginn and Letlapa’s story is so powerful and universally applicable, this study guide has been prepared to aid viewers, teachers and facilitators in leading group reflection on its implications. We have provided some suggested questions for group discussion and personal reflection. We have also included some materials such as background about Ginn and Letlapa and the situation in South Africa.

We hope you will find the film and this guide useful.

1 www.lyndifouriefoundation.org.za

Message from the Film Makers

We first met Ginn and Letlapa in 2004 at the Agenda for Reconciliation international conference organised by *Initiatives of Change* in Switzerland. We were deeply moved by their story and we developed a conviction to make a documentary film about them.

For Imad, the film's director, it has been a privilege to work on this inspiring story because as a Palestinian I can draw a parallel between the Apartheid period in South Africa and the situation in my country. To see that people who used to be completely at odds in extreme positions are able to look back and feel how horrible it was, gives me hope that one day in Palestine we could see a peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians.

There are many conflict areas in the world where there is deep pain on a vast scale. We hope our film can make a difference if people can be inspired to see that forgiveness, healing and reconciliation are possible even in the most dire circumstances.

Wherever there is pain, living into the other person's situation through listening and empathizing is key to reaching forgiveness and reconciliation. That is what happened with Ginn and Letlapa. We hope that this film will stimulate thought, touch hearts, and lead to action which restores relationships.

Imad Karam PhD
Director

Howard Grace
Executive Producer

Historical Background

Apartheid² was a system of racial segregation in South Africa enforced by governments between 1948 and 1990. Legislation classified inhabitants into four 'racial' groups, Black, White, Coloured and Indian. The system was designed to maintain minority White rule by restricting the rights of the rest of the population to different degrees.

The African National Congress³ (ANC) became the leading movement for resistance to these measures, instigating strikes and boycotts. Nelson Mandela⁴, later to become President of South Africa, was already prominent among the ANC leadership in the 1950s.

In 1959, due to disagreement within the ANC, a group formed the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania⁵ (PAC) with the three principles of African nationalism, socialism, and continental unity⁶. Following the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 both the ANC and PAC established bases in neighbouring countries. The PAC established a military wing, the Azanian People's Liberation Army⁷ (APLA). Letlapa joined the PAC in 1978⁸, and eventually became APLA Director of Operations, ordering attacks and couriering arms destined for South Africa from Zimbabwe to Botswana.

2 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apartheid>

3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_National_Congress

4 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nelson_Mandela

5 Ancient name for south-east Africa <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azania>

6 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pan_Africanist_Congress_of_Azania

7 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azanian_People%27s_Liberation_Army

8 <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/letlapa-mphahlele>

By 1980 international opinion had turned against the Apartheid regime and in 1985 President PW Botha declared a State of Emergency in numerous districts, which was subsequently extended to the whole country. This continued until 1990 when Apartheid was abolished.

However, Apartheid did not end overnight, and there were incidents such as the shooting of the black teenagers by the security forces which gave rise to the reprisal in which Lyndi Fourie died. This caused particular outrage among the white South Africans, because the country was moving towards democratic elections the following year. In those elections, a Government of National Unity was established with the ANC in the majority, and Nelson Mandela was elected President.

However vestiges of Apartheid still shape South African politics and society, and structural inequalities remain deeply entrenched. It is in this post-Apartheid context that Ginn and Letlapa's stories are especially compelling and in which *Beyond Forgiving* is set.

The Film Protagonists



Ginn Fourie

On the evening of 30th December 1993, a hail of AK-47 gunfire ended Ginn Fourie's daughter's life and dreams. Lyndi had no time to consider why the PAC wanted white people to suffer as black people had suffered under Apartheid, even though she had often wept at the many injustices that black people had endured. It was a time of deep agony for Ginn, her husband and their son.

A couple of years before Lyndi was killed Ginn had given thought to her personal mission statement. This became: "To extend God's grace to each person I meet". She didn't realise to what extent that decision was going to be tested. But maybe it laid the foundation for all that followed.

As a Christian, she says she is deeply moved by the picture of God being willing to come to a rebellious planet and demonstrate what unconditional love is all about. She felt Lyndi was killed by evil men. But her prayer later was inspired by Jesus, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." She gets very frustrated by the trappings of religiosity. Her faith is about the concrete challenges that people encounter.

She posed the question to Letlapa, 'Do you believe in God?' because she wanted to know how to approach him further. He said that he was an atheist yet believed that all humans were spiritual beings, which satisfied her need to know his perspective. She soon discovered that

for Letlapa saying ‘sorry’ was too easy. His committed response is to build bridges between communities to bring conciliation. She knows his comrades’ bullets killed her daughter, and that terrible pain will always be with her. But she has forgiven the man who gave the command, who now says, ‘I see that in Lyndi, we have killed a comrade.’

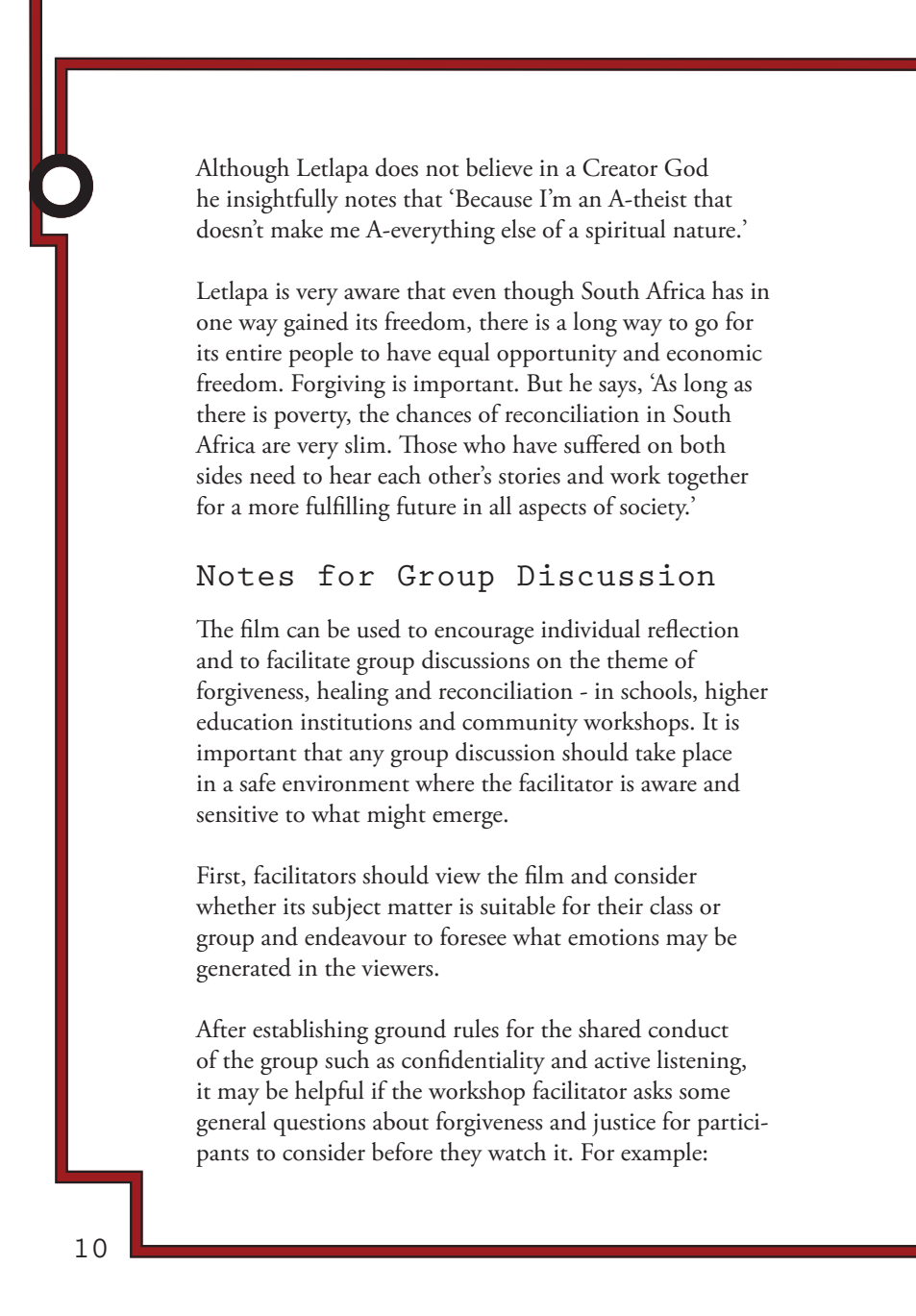


Letlapa Mphahlele

Like many other South Africans fighting against Apartheid, Letlapa was prepared to sacrifice his own life for racial equality. At the age of 17, after suffering humiliation and brutality, Letlapa joined the freedom struggle and went into exile. The slaughter in June 1976 of hundreds of black school children, who were merely boycotting the imposition of Afrikaans as their language of instruction, solidified Letlapa’s commitment to overthrowing the ruling National Party government.

Moreover, the oppressive practices of a white nominally Christian government disillusioned him, and he became an atheist. Yet, even as he fought for his people’s liberation, becoming the director of operations of the military wing of the Pan Africanist Congress, Letlapa was aware of his need for spiritual connection and expression.

Letlapa recalls that when Ginn communicated her forgiveness to him for ordering the Heidelberg Tavern massacre in which her daughter died, her forgiveness touched something deep inside and restored his humanity. For him, it was a spiritual experience.



Although Letlapa does not believe in a Creator God he insightfully notes that ‘Because I’m an A-theist that doesn’t make me A-everything else of a spiritual nature.’

Letlapa is very aware that even though South Africa has in one way gained its freedom, there is a long way to go for its entire people to have equal opportunity and economic freedom. Forgiving is important. But he says, ‘As long as there is poverty, the chances of reconciliation in South Africa are very slim. Those who have suffered on both sides need to hear each other’s stories and work together for a more fulfilling future in all aspects of society.’

Notes for Group Discussion

The film can be used to encourage individual reflection and to facilitate group discussions on the theme of forgiveness, healing and reconciliation - in schools, higher education institutions and community workshops. It is important that any group discussion should take place in a safe environment where the facilitator is aware and sensitive to what might emerge.

First, facilitators should view the film and consider whether its subject matter is suitable for their class or group and endeavour to foresee what emotions may be generated in the viewers.

After establishing ground rules for the shared conduct of the group such as confidentiality and active listening, it may be helpful if the workshop facilitator asks some general questions about forgiveness and justice for participants to consider before they watch it. For example:

- *Is it always best to forgive? Or does it let the perpetrator off the hook?*
- *How do you know when it is right to forgive?*

Participants can be encouraged to record their thoughts on these questions prior to watching the film. The facilitator may wish to give some words of introduction, drawing on the historical background above, and highlight for subsequent discussion the key themes of forgiveness, justice, healing, reconciliation, and storytelling.

It can be very helpful to have a couple of minutes of silent reflection immediately after the screening of the film - in which case it should be signalled in the introduction. Participants could be encouraged to write down their thoughts, feelings or questions during the silence.

The following are examples of questions that can focus discussion:

General questions:

- *What struck you most about the film?*
- *Who do you identify with mostly, Ginn or Letlapa? Why?*
- *Who is the perpetrator and who the victim in this story?*

Questions about steps in the journey:

- *Ginn says: 'I made a conscious and a principled decision to give up my justifiable right to revenge.' Do you think that revenge is a justifiable right? Do you think that Ginn was right to make that decision?*

- *What factors might Ginn have taken into account before deciding whether or not to forgive Letlapa? Were those conditions actually fulfilled? Do you think that he needed to be forgiven? If so, for what?*
- *What was the effect on Letlapa when Ginn said she forgave him?*
- *At Letlapa's homecoming, what do you think the assembled people were expecting Ginn to say? What did she say? What was the effect?*
- *What does Letlapa mean when he says, 'We have not taken the exercise of healing to its logical conclusion.'*

Wider issues:

- *Why do you think the film is entitled Beyond Forgiving?*
- *What is the role of courage in the story?*
- *Ginn is a Christian and Letlapa is an atheist. Do you see any wider significance in Ginn and Letlapa working together in common cause?*
- *Is the film mainly relevant to South Africans or does it have wider significance?*

The facilitator can close the workshop by summarising and highlighting the key points and acknowledging all contributions as being of equal value and worth.

A poignant quote/thought/comment may be chosen to end the session.