

The Blessings of Forgiveness

"Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future." ~Paul Boese

"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." - Mahatma Gandhi

Forgiveness

When you forgive, shame, sadness and guilt are released and your capacity for joy is increased.

Forgiveness isn't for the other person. We don't forgive to let others off the hook. We forgive to be free from the endless cycle of pain and resentment that fuels the war within us. We forgive and gain our power back.

Don't live your life with hate in your heart. You will end up hurting yourself more than the people you hate. Forgiveness is not saying, "What you did to me is okay." It is saying, "I'm not going to let what you did to me ruin my happiness forever."

Forgiveness is the answer... let go, find peace, liberate yourself! And remember, forgiveness is not just for other people, it's for you too. If you must, forgive yourself, move on and try to do better next time.

If you harbor deep resentment, if your life is scared by the pain of past offenses, if hate is eating you up, you know that forgiveness has the potential of being hugely transformative.

You can **Chose to Forgive** someone (and it's the best gift you can give yourself), but Reconciliation takes two.

Reconciliation takes two because it must be a mutual agreement of peace. Just because you have forgiven someone does not insure their willingness to be at peace with you. After you both accept the peace-treaty (reconcile), you can make plans to live peacefully apart from each other or plans to peacefully cooperate within approved arenas.

Reconciliation is not necessarily restored relationship. Reconciliation is the removal of blockages to relationship, with repentance and forgiveness as its tools. Reconciliation is settling a dispute, or peace-making. Relationships require a degree of trust and vulnerability. A relationship may or may not ensue after reconciliation.

Reconciliation must include an admission of guilt, know did something wrong & a promise / commitment to never do it again.

Recognizing the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation is an important concept.

It allows us to protect ourselves from further harm, while still letting go of the hurt. It allows us to move on from hurt and no longer be tied to the person. Boundaries in relationships protect us and they protect the relationships.

Many people have a problem determining the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. They fail to deal with external resistance (to boundaries) because they feel that they have to give in to the other person again or that they are not being forgiving. In fact, many people are afraid to forgive because they equate that with letting down their boundaries one more time and giving the other person the power to hurt them again.

Forgiveness is something that we do in our hearts; we release someone from a debt that they owe us. We write off the person's debt, and she no longer owes us. We no longer condemn her. Only one party is needed for forgiveness: me. The person who owes me a debt does not have to ask for my forgiveness. It is a **work of grace in my heart**.

We do not always have to achieve reconciliation. Forgiveness takes one: reconciliation takes two.

We do not open ourselves up to the other party until we have seen that she has truly owned her part of the problem. True repentance is much more than saying "I'm sorry"; it is changing direction.

You need to clearly communicate that, while you have forgiven her, you do not trust her yet, for she has not proven herself trustworthy. There has not been enough time to see if she really is going to change.

Forgiveness and opening up to more abuse are not the same thing. Forgiveness has to do with the past. Reconciliation and boundaries have to do with the future.

One of the reasons that we struggle to forgive is that we still feel as if we want something from the person that has wronged us. And often the simple question, "What do I still want from him/her," gives us good insight into our hurt and our expectations.

Grieving the loss, the reality of the relationship, that what we want ... is not going to happen ... letting go of it, and then forgiving, sets us free. Giving up our desire to "collect", recognizing that we cannot have what we wanted, is a good starting place.

Forgiveness sets us free. It provides the "closure" without the rehashing that is so often mistakenly done. "To err is human, to forgive is divine." And to live without forgiving and letting go, will keep us bound to the person that had hurt us.

What Forgiveness Does

The greatest gift of forgiveness is not to the forgiven, but to the forgiver. It is for you to cherish and feel and enjoy. It is *your* freedom you are offering yourself.

Forgiveness frees you. It lifts you. It throws off a weight that has weighed you down and robbed you of even elusive peace and infrequent joy.

Forgiveness opens you to leaving behind the pain and sorrow and guilt and anger and all the ugliness that is associated with the offense and the offender.

It also allows you to move on. To finally breathe. To begin life again, almost as if being reborn into a new, cleaner life, stripped and washed clear of the grey ooze of resentment.

Resentment and all that comes with holding onto the pain of not forgiving is understandable, of course, but it's also deeply self-destructive. It's hurting you more than it can ever hurt the offender. Every second you continue to hold onto the pain, you continue to drag yourself under the crushing wheels of life's bus.

Sometimes we think forgiveness is letting the offender off the hook. But just what hook are they being let off? Just because you spend so much time feeling the pain doesn't mean they do. They may be *in* the bus, but only you are stuck under its wheels.

Nothing clarifies boundaries more than forgiveness. To forgive someone means to let him off the hook, or to cancel the debt he owes you. When you refuse to forgive someone, you still want something from that person, and even if it is revenge that you want, it keeps you tied to him forever.

If you do not forgive, you are demanding something your offender does not choose to give, even if it is only confession of what he did. This 'ties' him to you and ruins boundaries.

The wrong can never be undone. But it can be forgiven and thereby rendered powerless.

To forgive means we will never get from that person what was owed us. And that is what we do not like, because that involves grieving for what will never be: **The past will not be different.**

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What Forgiveness Is Not

Forgiveness is not pretending the people or person in your past never really hurt you. It's not accepting them fully into your life either. If they are hostile people, it would be very unwise to bring them too close no matter the relation.

It's not closing eyes or being naïve or putting on rose-colored glasses.

Forgiveness, is NOT based on the other person's repentance: While reconciliation may be based on another's repentance, **forgiveness is a gift you give yourself which sets you free from the hurtful actions of others. It has little to do with the other person because it's an internal matter.** It is an act that releases that person's hold on you for the wrongs committed against you. To choose not to forgive leaves you forever a victim.

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The Challenge of Forgiveness

But forgiving someone who has legitimately hurt you can be very difficult, especially if the abuse you sustained was prolonged or the person is a family member who should have been your biggest protector.

How do you forgive an offense when it has buried itself deep in the grit of your personality, when it has been mixed into the very mortar between the bricks from which you have built your life?

How do you forgive a person of wrongs when the offense was so intimately personal and intentional and wounding?

How do you forgive the unrepentant, the unremorseful, the unchanged, the unapologetic, when justice was never served, when wrongs were never confessed, when abuse was never admitted or is ongoing?

Strategies for Forgiveness

Forgiving others isn't always easy. It takes strength, bravery and time. We do it when we're ready. When we let go of the ones who hurt us, we also let go of the part of us who was hurt and broken.

Thoughts on consciously relating to people who have hurt you.

What I've come to know for myself is this: When I approach forgiveness as a goal, it actually blocks me from my truth and love. In the past, when I've set out to forgive someone I just get all twisted up with who did what and why, and I start looking to validate my rightness. I distort memories of what happened, sometimes I judge myself even more severely than I do the other person, and the drama loops on.

When, underneath it all, I'm simply just hurting or disappointed.
If you want to consciously relate, then forgiveness isn't the necessity, consciousness is.

If you want the freedom that forgiveness promises, if you want to be liberated, then **acknowledge the divine in the other person — it's in there somewhere**, even in cases of extreme darkness, it's in there somewhere. Acknowledging the divine in someone who has hurt you, no matter how severely, doesn't mean that you condone bad behavior. You are not making a wrong a right, and you're not engaging under false spiritual pretense to "play nice". You're seeing a spark of truth, and **you're making intelligent choices about how to proceed** — all things considered.

Forgiveness mantra:

I bless you, I release you, I set you free. I allow you to be you and me to be me.

Forgiveness allows you to shift your perception and change your story. The person who causes you to suffer teaches you how to love others without conditions. It is actually one of your greatest gifts.

We are no longer a victim. When we grieve our losses, we gain relief, peace and freedom.

Whether you're forgiving yourself or somebody else ask yourself, "What lessons can I learn from this?" "What insight can I take away?"

We are all human. We all make mistakes. Look for the lesson. Learn from it.

The Effects of Resentment

"Choosing not to forgive someone is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die." -- Matthew Kelly

When you hold on to resentment, anger or hatred, letting it eat you up from the inside out, your mind gets stuck in a continuous loop. You replay the offense over and over again, unable to free yourself from the person you most want to get away from. You feel stuck in a dark place and feel like there's no way out of that living hell.

Wish that person well and, if possible, send them your feelings of love. Resentment and anger only hurt the person that is carrying them around. There is no benefit in holding onto these or having a victim story. Stories are pointless. Let go and live in the now.

Experiencing pain makes you stronger, and being wronged by others helps you understand what you believe is right so you can better for the people around you.

Because of your past, you have an inner drive plus emotional empathy, which allows you to be a truly amazing individual. Your painful experiences have given you gifts. Use your courage to explore them.

Tip #1: Write a letter to your offender, whether they are here or passed on doesn't matter because you won't send it. But pour everything out onto the paper. Write the details, the feelings, the effects of the offense, everything. This may fill two-paragraphs or two novels. The important part is to get it all on paper.

Writing can be surprisingly clarifying, putting things into perspective, seeing the whole, possibly for the first time, capturing what may have been brushed under the carpet. It can also be quite cathartic.

This writing exercise is the first step because it forces you to start this process with a very clear picture of what and whom you are forgiving and the circumstances surrounding it.

This step just may be the most difficult step you take because it requires that you relive what you may have spent years trying to forget. Don't be surprised if the floodgates open and the tears flow. Sometimes just writing it down does so much to unstop our plugged up insides because we never allowed ourselves to express the pain in the past.

By the way, this step (and all subsequent ones) **work just as well if the person you need to forgive is yourself.**

Tip #2: When you start to feel stuck on the mental loop, replaying the scene, feeling the acrimony rise, interrupt the scene and picture the offender as a little child, hurt, scared, alone, fearful, unsure, feeling like the world is against them, having nowhere to turn. Now let sympathy or empathy or compassion seep in, even if for a moment. Perhaps your

brain will override the effort. That's fine. If you can even feel it for a moment, that may be enough to crack the hermetic seal on the door to eventual forgiveness.

Now, whenever the loop begins to play, interrupt it again with similar images. Keep at it and let us know how it goes.

Tip #3: Let God or karma or the Universe or Life take over. Let go of the burden of judge and jury. Allow cosmic justice to take the matter into hand and stop obsessing over the need to see light shine brightly on the injustice you sustained.

Tip #4: This is a difficult step to take, but it can be very effective, even if it doesn't change things over night, feels forced at first and even builds some resentment in the beginning. But wishing the ill-doer good will can start to soften the hardened heart you currently feel as a knot in your chest. This may include "sending positive vibes" while meditating or while on a jog around the block, or praying for the person, asking God to heal *their* wounds. But however you do it, putting yourself in a loving role, one of secret spiritual benefactor, changes the relationship and can lead to forgiveness.

Tip #5: For a taste of what forgiving your offender might feel like and as practice, try imagining forgiveness. This may sound strange at first glance, but athletes do this all the time. Studies even confirm that an athlete who imagines practicing his free throws does measurably better than an athlete who simply misses practice. In other words, doing something mentally helps us do it physically. So imagining forgiving someone in great detail, thinking through the words you would say, the feelings you would experience, the release and freedom and joy and everything else you might experience for finally forgiving your antagonist can take you several steps closer to completing the challenge.

Tip #6: Practice empathy. While this may be difficult to do, try putting yourself in their shoes, seeing the cause of the strained relationship from their point of view. The difficulty of this tip is in the nature of the offense. But see the person as fully human, not merely as Enemy Number One. When you can walk a mile in their moccasins, you just may be able to see the offense in a totally different light and take a huge leap to forgiveness.

Tip #7: Practice gratitude. This one is admittedly a difficult one for those who have held grudges and feel deep resentment for deep wounds inflicted by an unrepentant jerk, but give it a try. I know, it can even sound ridiculous at first glance, but it's really not. Think about the relationship and even the conflict or situation or event for which you are most pained. I bet that if you thought long and hard enough, you could discover something you learned or something that led to you becoming stronger in some area, or perhaps it led you to meet someone who has become or is becoming an important addition to your life.

Take the time to think this through and maybe even write a list of benefits that came from the problems you've had. This isn't to discount the negative or even necessarily be thankful the hurtful situation occurred, but it can lighten the load you carry when you can focus more attention and therefore gratitude for at least those benefits that came out of the hurt and pain.

Tip #8: Picture the pain, the hate, the desire for revenge, the resentment and grudge as a ball of fire, or mud or ooze, or whatever you choose to think of it as, as visualize

yourself at the end of a pier, or a cliff, or the edge of the earth (as in the earth is flat scenario), and ceremoniously, remove the ball of negative emotion from a satchel, see the surging anger and feel its enormity, hold it over the edge of the precipice, and drop it over the edge (or watch it flip).

Tip #9: The way we think about an event (or person or situation) creates the internal mood for how we will likely feel about the event (person or situation). So one way to forgive another is to change what and how and how often we think about that person and the circumstances for which we harbor the crippling resentment. I've alluded to this already. Gratitude and compassion are attitudinal shifts. Praying for the person is certainly work at rewiring how you think about the offender. So this tip can be used as fuel to keep at those tips I've already included as you redouble your efforts at extending forgiveness and freeing yourself.

When the angry, hateful thoughts pop up, change them. Recondition your mind to no longer need to hold onto the offense. Stop caring that the event occurred and start looking to recreate something better in your life.

Tip #10: Accept full responsibility for your life and circumstances. You may have had no control over the offense that has brought you to the emotional and spiritual place you're at right now. You may have been young. The offender may have been a parent. You may have lost a job or your self-esteem or the life of a loved one. I'm not suggesting you accept responsibility for the event. You may have truly been victimized. But often, there is more resentment for the life it led to than for the event itself. IN other words, we can sometimes feel more hatred for the person for the life we now live than for the thing that originally offended us. The person is blamed for current life circumstances. And so we hold the person in contempt as we make the link from the offense to our miserable circumstances and level all responsibility for the circumstances on the offense and offender.

But, in almost all cases, that's just not true. You may have been fired by a jealous or vindictive boss. But it was not your boss that let the firing take away your sense of self or self-worth or self-confidence. You may have been abused as a kid, but you choose to allow that fact to affect how you will treat your kids and whom you end up marrying or stay married to. The drunk driver may have totally changed your life forever. But the irresponsible driver is not responsible for how you deal with the tragedy. Once you can accept full responsibility for the life you lead (not all events that happen *in* your life), you will be able to throw off much of the burden of forgiveness because you will finally recognize that much of the effect the offender has had on your life has not been a logical extension of the offense.

Final Tip

The final thought on forgiveness is the **act of final release**. We often harbor the deepest resentment for those who have never admitted the offense, or otherwise never paid for their crime or taken full responsibility for what they did. It grinds on us and keeps the insult or injury fresh in our minds and fresh in our hearts like a knife still stuck in a wound we keep bumping or feeling compelled to twist ourselves from time to time.