

## Forgiveness

Forgiveness is the name of love  
Among people who love poorly.  
The hard truth is that all of us love poorly.  
We need to forgive and be forgiven –  
every day, every hour, unceasingly.  
That is the great work of love  
among the fellowship of the weak  
that is the human family.  
Henri Nouwen (Dutch priest)

### 1. Forgiveness means giving up all hope for a better past.—Jack Kornfield

Forgiveness is the capacity to reclaim our peace of mind when something has happened to disturb us. As we go through life it is inevitable that we are going to hurt one another. In fact, as our world becomes more complex and interconnected, the opportunities for conflict increase. We have the choice whether to respond to these hurts and conflicts with anger and bitterness, or with forgiveness.

*We all have been hurt. And at one time or another most of us have made the mistake of trying to run away from the past. The problem is that no matter how fast or how far we run, the past always catches up to us—and usually at the most inopportune time. When we forgive, we are dealing with the past in such a way that we no longer have to run. (Michael B. Ross)*

### 2. Forgiving is not the same as forgetting.

Forgiving does not mean that we gloss over the harm that has taken place, or pretend that it never happened. What it does is to allow us to let go of the destructive attitudes towards the past that imprison us and the person who harmed us in a cycle of recrimination and guilt. When our desire for reconciliation and peace is stronger than our anger, disappointment or pain, then forgiveness offers the opportunity to make a new start.

Forgiveness can seem insurmountable, and has vast consequences, but in essence it is nothing more than a shift of mind. The motivation to forgive has to come from a genuine wish deep inside to relieve the pain and discomfort of ourselves and of others. It cannot be forced. (16guidelines.org)

*Forgiveness is a form of realism. It doesn't deny, minimize, or justify what others have done to us or the pain that we have suffered. It encourages us to look squarely at those old wounds and see them for what they are. And it allows us to see how much energy we have wasted and how much we have damaged ourselves by not forgiving. (Michael B. Ross)*

### 3. Forgiveness is an antidote to suffering and is demonstrated through loving kindness and compassion

Perhaps one of the commonest places we get stuck, and consequently one of the places that most prevents happiness, is in holding onto resentments. If there is even one person that we can't forgive, it closes our hearts in bitterness and will prevent us from experiencing the equanimity of genuine happiness.

Forgiveness is actually an inherent quality of the awakened heart. Unfortunately, it doesn't come to us naturally; it is hard work! Consider how tenaciously we hold on to being right when we feel that someone has done us wrong, even when that stance obviously brings us unhappiness.

Can forgiveness and apology take place without facing up to the person who either harmed us or bore the impact of our own unskillful behavior? It may make sense to hold back for dealing directly with the person or institution that hurt us. When the real work has taken place, inside us, in private, then we can decide whether an outer show of reconciliation is necessary or helpful.

*Forgiveness is an internal process. It can't be forced, and it doesn't come easy. It brings with it great feelings of wellness and freedom. But we experience this only when we want to heal and when we are willing to work for it. (Michael B. Ross)*

#### **4. With forgiveness, it is not necessary to be loyal to your suffering.**

It is so painful to carry a grudge. To water the seeds of our anger and continue to dwell in the pain of a real or imagined wrong. The suffering that we neglect can lead to generations of unhappy relations. Simply becoming aware of its poisonous power can help us find the motivation to seek relief.

*Forgiveness is a sign of positive self-esteem. We no longer identify ourselves by our past injuries and injustices. We are no longer victims. We claim the right to stop hurting when we say, "I'm tired of the pain, and I want to be healed." At that moment, forgiveness becomes a possibility—although it may take time and much hard work before we finally achieve it. Forgiveness is letting go of the past. It doesn't erase what happened, but it does allow us to lessen and perhaps even eliminate the pain of the past. The pain from our past no longer dictates how we live in the present, and it no longer determines our future.*

*It also means that we no longer need resentment and anger as an excuse for our shortcomings. We don't need them as a weapon to punish others nor as a shield to protect ourselves by keeping others away. And most importantly, we don't need these feelings to identify who we are. We become more than merely victims of our past. (Michael B. Ross)*

#### **5. Start small and accept forgiveness as a process which may need time.**

Every time we manage to forgive makes it a little bit easier the next time around. It is reassuring that we can do it, however confused and vulnerable we feel. We may surprise ourselves, and gain the confidence to deal with fresh and perhaps greater hurts. "I managed to forgive that...so now I can forgive this." How can we make this a habit?

The key to forgiveness is giving—what we value, the best we can do. And the main commitment is to pay attention—to ourselves, and then to the person or situation that we feel has harmed us. It is an act of generosity and surrender to suspend our judgments and preoccupations, and to listen closely to another person's story. To put all our energy and attention into this process, and not be distracted by the cynical dimension of our won mind.

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*Forgiveness is no longer wanting to punish those who hurt us. It is understanding that the anger and hatred that we feel toward them hurts us far more than it hurts them. It is seeing how we hide ourselves in our anger and how those feelings prevent us from healing. It is discovering the inner peace that becomes ours when we let go of the past and forget vengeance.*

*Forgiveness is moving on. It is recognizing all that we have lost because of our refusal to forgive. It is realizing that the energy that we spend hanging on to the past is better spent on improving our present and our future. It is letting go of the past so that we can move on. (Michael B. Ross)*