

Women of Enlightenment Support Group



**True forgiveness is when you can say...
"Thank you for that experience."**

- Oprah Winfrey (American Talk show host & Media mogul)



<http://spiritual-artwork.org>

December: Forgiveness

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Forgiveness: Letting go of grudges and bitterness

When someone you care about hurts you, you can hold on to anger, resentment and thoughts of revenge — or embrace forgiveness and move forward.

Nearly everyone in this room has been hurt by the actions or words of another. Perhaps your mother criticized your parenting skills, your colleague sabotaged a project or a teacher said you would end up nowhere in life.

These wounds can leave you with lasting feelings of anger, bitterness or even vengeance.

But if you don't practice forgiveness, you might be the one who pays most dearly. By embracing forgiveness, you can also embrace peace, hope, gratitude and joy. Consider how forgiveness can lead you down the path of physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

What is forgiveness?

Generally, forgiveness is a decision to let go of resentment and thoughts of revenge. The act that hurt or offended you might always remain a part of your life, but forgiveness can lessen its grip on you and help you focus on other, more positive parts of your life. Forgiveness can even lead to feelings of understanding, empathy and compassion for the one who hurt you.

Forgiveness doesn't mean that you deny the other person's responsibility for hurting you, and it doesn't minimize or justify the wrong. You can forgive the person without excusing the act. Forgiveness brings a kind of peace that helps you go on with life.

Here are some benefits of forgiving someone

Letting go of grudges and bitterness can make way for happiness, health and peace. Forgiveness can lead to:

- Healthier relationships
- Greater spiritual and psychological well-being
- Less anxiety, stress and hostility
- Lower blood pressure
- Fewer symptoms of depression
- Stronger immune system
- Improved heart health
- Higher self-esteem

Why is it so easy to hold a grudge?

When you're hurt by someone you love and trust, you might become angry, sad or confused. If you dwell on hurtful events or situations, grudges filled with resentment, vengeance and hostility can take root. These feelings will eat away at you. If you allow negative feelings to crowd out positive feelings, you might find yourself swallowed up by your own bitterness or sense of injustice.

What are the effects of holding a grudge?

If you're unforgiving, you might:

- Bring anger and bitterness into every relationship and new experience
- Become so wrapped up in the wrong that you can't enjoy the present
- Become depressed or anxious
- Feel that your life lacks meaning or purpose, or that you're at odds with your spiritual beliefs
- Lose valuable and enriching connectedness with others

How do I reach a state of forgiveness?

Forgiveness is a commitment to a process of change. To begin, you might:

- Consider the value of forgiveness and its importance in your life at a given time
- Reflect on the facts of the situation, how you've reacted, and how this combination has affected your life, health and well-being
- Actively choose to forgive the person who's offended you, when you're ready
- Move away from your role as victim and release the control and power the offending person and situation have had in your life

As you let go of grudges, you'll no longer define your life by how you've been hurt. You might even find compassion and understanding.

Does forgiveness guarantee reconciliation?

If the hurtful event involved someone whose relationship you otherwise value, forgiveness can lead to reconciliation. This isn't always the case, however.

Reconciliation might be impossible if the offender has died or is unwilling to communicate with you. In other cases, reconciliation might not be appropriate. Still, forgiveness is possible — even if reconciliation isn't.

What if I have to interact with the person who hurt me but I don't want to?

If you haven't reached a state of forgiveness, being near the person who hurt you might prompt you to be tense and stressful. To handle these situations:

- Remember that you can choose to attend or avoid specific functions and gatherings. If you choose to attend, don't be surprised by a certain amount of awkwardness and perhaps even more intense feelings.
- Respect yourself and do what seems best.
- Do your best to keep an open heart and mind. You might find that the experience helps you to move forward with forgiveness.

What if the person I'm forgiving doesn't change?

Getting another person to change his or her actions, behavior or words isn't the point of forgiveness. Think of forgiveness more about how it can change your life — by bringing you peace, happiness, and emotional and spiritual healing. Forgiveness can take away the power the other person continues to wield in your life.

What if I'm the one who needs forgiveness?

The first step is to honestly assess and acknowledge the wrongs you've done and how those wrongs have affected others. At the same time, avoid judging yourself too harshly. You're human, and we all make mistakes.

If you're truly sorry for something you've said or done, consider admitting it to those you've harmed. Speak of your sincere sorrow or regret, and specifically ask for forgiveness — without making excuses.

Remember, however, you can't force someone to forgive you. Others need to move to forgiveness in their own time. Whatever the outcome, commit to treating others with compassion, empathy and respect.

Forgiveness Affirmations

1. The past is gone. I live only in the present.
2. I live in the now and design my future. The past has no effect on my present.
3. I follow the principle of live and let live.
4. I realize that my parents gave their best to me. I forgive them for any wrong that they unknowingly did to me. I also forgive myself for holding a grudge against them.
5. I forgive myself for being imperfect like everybody else. However, I still manage to live the best life that I can.
6. As I forgive myself, it becomes easier to forgive others.
7. As I follow the path of forgiveness, life becomes a new, clean slate on which I can draw my new life plan as I wish.
8. Each day is a new opportunity. Today is the first day of my new life.
9. I forgive everyone from my life in the past and love myself into the future.
10. I move beyond forgiveness to understanding and I have compassion and kindness for all.
11. I am forgiving, loving, gentle and kind and am safe in the knowledge that life loves me.

Forgiveness Meditation

Forgiveness of others, forgiveness of yourself

Get into a comfortable position allowing your eyes to close and your breath to be natural and easy. (PAUSE...)

Let your body and mind relax. (PAUSE...)

Breathing gently into the area of your heart, let yourself feel all the barriers you have erected and the emotions that you have carried because you have not forgiven - not forgiven yourself, not forgiven others. (PAUSE...)

Let yourself feel the pain of keeping your heart closed. (PAUSE...)

Then, breathing softly, begin asking and extending forgiveness, letting the images and feelings that come up grow deeper. (PAUSE...)

Let us begin our FORGIVENESS OF OTHERS

There are many ways that I have hurt and harmed others, have betrayed or abandoned them, caused them suffering, knowingly or unknowingly, out of my pain, fear, anger and confusion.

Let yourself remember and visualize the ways you have hurt others.

See and feel the pain you have caused out of your own fear and confusion.

Feel your own sorrow and regret.

Sense that finally you can release this burden and ask for forgiveness. (Pause...)

Picture each memory that still burdens your heart. And then to each person in your mind repeat: I ask for your forgiveness, I ask for your forgiveness. (PAUSE...)

Picture them in your mind forgiving you for any wrong doing you may have done. (PAUSE...)

Keeping your eyes closed and breathing deeply once again opening your heart, we move on to

FORGIVENESS FOR YOURSELF

There are many ways that I have hurt and harmed myself.

I have betrayed or abandoned myself many times through thought, word, or deed, knowingly or unknowingly. (PAUSE...)

Feel your own precious body and life. Let yourself see the ways you have hurt or harmed you.

Picture them, remember them.

Feel the sorrow you have carried from this and sense that you can release these burdens.

Extend forgiveness for each of them, one by one.

Repeat IN YOUR MIND: For the ways I have hurt myself through action or inaction, out of fear, pain and confusion, I now extend a full and heartfelt forgiveness. I forgive myself, I forgive myself.

Keeping your eyes closed and breathing deeply once again opening your heart, we WILL GIVE

FORGIVENESS FOR THOSE WHO HAVE HURT OR HARMED YOU:

There are many ways that I have been harmed by others, abused or abandoned, knowingly or unknowingly, in thought, word or deed.

Let yourself picture and remember these many ways. (PAUSE...)

Feel the sorrow you have carried from this past and sense that you can release this burden of pain by extending forgiveness when your heart is ready. (PAUSE...)

Now say in your mind: I now remember the many ways others have hurt or harmed me, wounded me, out of fear, pain, confusion and anger. (PAUSE...)

I have carried this pain in my heart too long.

To the extent that I am ready, I offer them forgiveness. To those who have caused me harm, I offer my forgiveness, I forgive you.

Let yourself gently repeat these three directions for forgiveness until you feel a release in your heart. (PAUSE...)

For some great pains you may not feel a release but only the burden and the anguish or anger you have held. Touch this softly. Be forgiving of yourself for not being ready to let go and move on. (PAUSE...)

Taking deep breaths keeping the warmth of love in your heart, allow yourself to return to full consciousness and open your eyes when you are ready.

Forgiveness cannot be forced; it cannot be artificial. Simply continue the practice and let the words and images work gradually in their own way.

In time you can make the forgiveness meditation a regular part of your life, letting go of the past and opening your heart to each new moment with a wise loving kindness.

Acknowledgements

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Information from:

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/forgiveness/art-20047692>

<http://www.self-help-and-self-development.com/forgiveness-affirmations.html>

Graphic from <http://www.lovetispic.com/image/235094/true-forgiveness>