

Thinking About Forgiveness

by Nancy Cohen



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

Paul Boese

Type "forgiveness" on Amazon.com books and over 5000 results appear. Google it and the responses total millions. Different faiths preach it. Workshops about reconciliation abound. Despite this abundance of information, how much do we consider or practice forgiveness as a means to health and well-being?

Old narratives die hard. Still stinging from a comment years ago that you never discussed? Controlling parent/boss you feel stifled your potential? Angry about being cut off in traffic, arguments, betrayal, abuse...? Regretting something you did?

Thoughts and feelings impact well-being. Just notice the difference in body sensations when pondering an upsetting situation versus someone/thing you love. Concentrating on distress, creating identity around resentment, can amplify nervousness, despair, hypertension, digestive and heart issues, distanced relationships, and, intolerance. Anger can occasionally be constructive, an impetus for positive change. However, "demonizing" an "other," perpetuating polarization, keeps us trapped, evoking the quote "Not forgiving someone is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die."

Information from such sources as Dr. Frederic Luskin, the Mayo Clinic, and pubmed.gov, shows forgiveness can: enrich relationships; diminish stress, depression, anxiety, and chronic pain; lessen substance abuse risk; enhance heart function; lower blood pressure; boost holistic well-being; and improve sleep.

So...what is forgiveness? Rabbi Ted Falcon, Ph.D., of The Interfaith Amigos has suggested "Forgiveness means no longer being activated to feelings of upset, anger, disappointment and hurt when painful memories surface. Forgiveness means letting go of resentment, letting go of needing the past to be anything other than it was."

Simple in concept, reconciliation is not always easy to implement and may take time and patience. Yet, only you can cease clinging to, and struggling with, whatever stirs your suffering and transform it to healing.

I remain in awe of a Rwandan I met years ago whose family was killed by neighbors. After intense grieving, he reasoned that if he responded similarly he would become like the perpetrators and simply perpetuate the violence he was decrying. He ultimately moved beyond initial vengeful feelings to become an international peace worker, which involved listening to his "enemies," attempting to understand their perspective(s). No easy feat.

- *Forgiving is not about changing another.* It creates shifts in you, removing the impression another has power over your sense of self and way of being.
- *It does not guarantee reconciliation* or always involve interaction with the perpetrator of your grievance, especially if there's potential for harm, an unwillingness or inability to communicate.
- *Forgiveness doesn't condone wrongdoing* nor minimize responsibility. Neither does it involve condemnation or retribution, which exacerbate stress.
- Per Judith Orloff, M.D., "*Forgiveness is a state of grace, nothing you can force or pretend...Forgiveness penetrates the impenetrable -- the obstinacy that stifles love, the tenacious pain that dams our energy reserves.*"

Pardoning can be challenging, especially when another denies having any part. Impediments may also include your feeling vulnerable, justified (and supported by others) in your rage, or that the wound's so deep you wouldn't recognize yourself without it, despite its burden.

How to shift hurt to vitality? Among forgiveness researchers' advice:

1. In endeavoring to cultivate forgiveness, perhaps consult a friend/counselor/spiritual leader, journal, meditate, or obtain insights by envisioning role reversal. Consider lessons learned, ways the situation affects how you treat others, or deepens awareness about relationships, roles, and perspectives on power.
2. Set your intention to release resentment. Forgiveness is for you, though others (and relationships) may benefit.
3. Acknowledge your pain. Find safe ways to release pent-up ire: hit pillows; sing loudly; dance. Reflect on ways the situation/your reactions affect your life and choices. Suffering is current, despite original offenses. Conciliation helps ease that distress.
4. Visualize what healing you want to occur.
5. Open to change. Forgiveness requires altering outlook. Hardened attitudes only result in more of the same. Get calm. Breathe deeply. Seek new perspectives.
6. Be honest with yourself. Consider the toxicity of righteous indignation or harboring ill will. Might you have had responsibility in the interaction that impacts your suffering? Try releasing any power the offender/situation has in your thoughts. As you unleash grudges, your life is no longer defined by hurt.
7. Recall something good about the person/people. Shortcomings can be a reflection of people's wounds, with behaviors showing more about them than you. That does not excuse conduct, but seeing the whole person and accepting their limitations may help your process.
8. Forgiving involves letting go. Don't expect something someone cannot give. Try de-personalizing the offense, recalling feelings of being forgiven, wishing those who injured you peace and healing. People hurt others when in pain themselves. This isn't justification, but may shed new light on your movement toward forgiving. Or not. You can't force it. However, the intention and quest open the way for healing.
9. Replaying wounding diminishes your power. Reclaim it. Take responsibility for your experiences and healing. Focus on positive goals. Learn to look for love, beauty and kindness around you. Invite vibrancy into your life.
10. Forgiveness (of self and/or other) positively affects health. Practice these approaches. Notice as your perception shifts. Revise your old story to reflect your courageous choice to forgive.

Call for Your Complimentary Consultation

Personal Harmony and Health LLC
Move to the Heart of Healing

REIKI | MEDITATION | INTUITIVE READINGS | ANGELSPEAKE™
EMOTIONAL FREEDOM TECHNIQUE | ESSENTIAL OILS | MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKING

Diane C. Esposito, RMT/Holistic Coach
203-284-1204
personalharmonyandhealth.com

Natural Family Health, LLC
Dr. Leigh H. White, Naturopathic Physician

www.naturalfamilyhealth.net

East/West Healing Arts Center
410 State Street
North Haven, CT 06473
lwhitend@gmail.com
203-980-0465

Supporting the body to heal itself, as it's designed to do.

Final Journey, LLC
(PET EUTHANASIA SERVICE)

Kristen Klie, D.V.M.
and Associates

(203) 645-5570
www.finaljourneyllc.com

Get Rejuvenated and Refreshed
Calm the nervous system.

Ayurvedic BODYWORK Treatments

- Individual Treatment Programs
- Homemade organic skin care products for your Dosha.

203-676-2819
AyurvedaTherapy@comcast.net

Penelope Kenny
Ayurvedic Specialist