

FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness comes first in the lessons along the way of life because it seems to me to be the most important lesson of all. Without it there is heart ache, pain, ill-health, and a world full of war; with it the opportunity for liberation.

In the Christian tradition Jesus spoke so beautifully about the power of forgiveness and asked God to forgive even those who hung him on the cross. He included in that forgiveness the need to love even our enemies. Certainly we need to learn to forgive our enemies, but we must also forgive those we love, our friends, and ourselves.

When we are wronged, there is pain. Some of those wrongs are horrendous acts of war and injustice that seem to be unforgivable. Some wrongs, though small by comparison with the inhumanity of war, affect us deeply. Without forgiving those who wrong us we are burdened with the vibrations, the emotions, that lead to our own demise. Hatred, resentment, anger, revenge and the myriad other emotions that come with being wronged, are a burden our mind-body system cannot easily carry.

I think the way most of us are taught to forgive misses the point. I was taught that it is not right to feel hatred or anger towards another, not because of the effect on me, but because Jesus taught us not to. Consequently I recall as a child, feeling guilty for even having negative emotions. In my later reading of Jesus' words and life, I realized that indeed he felt strongly, both negatives and positives. His outbursts with the moneylenders or towards the Scribes and Pharisees, were angry and powerful. It is recognizing the emotions and then finding the reasons to release them that liberates us. Very often we need to forgive those who in some way took our power from us and mistreated us or someone we love. Recognizing the negative emotions involved allows us to make the internal statement..."though for what you have done to me I have the right to feel anger, resentment and even hatred, **I choose** to release these emotions, and thereby release any power I have allowed you to have over me". An additional reason to release these negative emotions and intentions is the understanding that I too have the capacity to do whatever it was that was done to me. Forgiveness cannot be fully achieved from a place of self-righteousness, only via the recognition of our own capacity for mistakes and even cruelty.

Forgiveness needs to be done on a conscious and subconscious level. Consciously we must make the choice to let go the anger, hatred, pain, disappointment and desire for revenge that may come when we are treated badly. We must also "re-educate" our subconscious in order for forgiveness to be complete. Although intellectually the importance of forgiveness is not so difficult to grasp, actually achieving it can be profoundly difficult.

I have already spoken about the role of the subconscious, but it bears repeating. Our subconscious records the events and experiences of our lives, and it does so faithfully. On an emotional level, the "attachment" that is filed together with an experience is the emotional state that was engendered at the time of the experience. The greater the emotional impact of the experience at the time, the more important and powerful the attachment. When that file of our life experience is activated, the emotional impact in the present, and on our body system is strong or not, depending on the attachment. In the extreme, some experiences are so traumatic that it takes almost all the energy the mind-body system can muster to prevent experiencing that trauma again...people literally shut down with the effort of it, or find diversions that distort their life tragically. Our institutions and streets are crowded with many of these folks.

Therefore, when we are hurt by someone, we must not only consciously make the choice to forgive them, but we need to make sure our subconscious has released the emotional attachments connected to those experiences. This process is aided by the fact that our

subconscious is a faithful recorder of experiences **and does not easily distinguish between what is "real" or what is imagined.** This has the down-side of making movies like Jaws actually keep people from swimming in the oceans ever again, and the up-side that we can use our own imagination to re-educate and instruct our subconscious.

I give my clients a guided imagination experience which allows them to recognize the emotional attachments they have connected to a particular person and experiences, and supports them to release these attachments from their system. It is not memories we are changing, but the emotional state that goes with the memory. It is the failure to release the emotional state that rocks people and sabotages their very good intentions.... "I thought I had forgiven him, but when I saw him I just felt hatred again and was fearful and anxious." When people have that experience they begin to doubt themselves, question their own intention, and often encouraged by their religious belief system, feel guilty because they didn't really forgive that person yet. I tell my clients to always trust their sincere intention and work with their subconscious to make sure it has caught up with their conscious commitment. That process of working with the subconscious may be instantaneous or take time, but in the forgiveness stakes, it is a crucial activity.

To help you with this I have outlined that imagination process at the end of this chapter. It is a simple process made popular by Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP). If you don't like the process I have come up with, make up one of your own. The trick is to actually do it.

Another key in the forgiveness process is to actually identify the emotions that are connected to a person or experience. In our culture there are many emotions that are deemed inappropriate and out of bounds for many of us. Hatred is an example. Because of our cultural structures we are really only "allowed" to hate certain people and situations. In my Christian upbringing even feeling hatred was evidence of my own sinfulness and inadequacy. Consequently I would do whatever I could to avoid facing the feeling, even if I was actually experiencing it. If you can't face it and identify it for what it is, you cannot release it. This is crucial in the art of forgiveness!

Let me use an example. There are women who have experienced sexual abuse as children at the hands of their fathers, step fathers or family members. In my experience we are not "wired" to feel hatred towards our parents or parent figures without it causing us a great deal of distress. The distress is so great that we will go to great lengths to avoid it. In the case of my clients in this kind of situation, they often make excuses for the activities of their parent figure throughout their lives, and therefore don't actually face the feelings that come with the actual experience they had. "My father had such a difficult childhood, and alcohol clouded his judgment so much". This may be true, but it does not alter the fact of the abuse, and that the act or acts of abuse were absolutely devastating. Putting the excuses in front of the experience is a way to avoid recognizing and identifying the actual emotions that are filed in the system.

Identifying the emotional state is much more difficult than it sounds. Take it from a recovering expert in denial! In order to help my clients actually forgive their abusers I will often reframe the abuse in the present so they can get access to the emotions. I ask them.... "If the uncle of your nine year old daughter was to do what your uncle did to you, what would you feel?" In that case their love for their daughter, and their protective instincts rapidly eliminates all excuses for the abuser. It is an emotional process these women seldom allow for themselves.

So in the imagination process I outline later, when you bring the one you want to forgive up on to the stage of your life, don't make any excuses for them and their actions. It is not the excuses you need to forgive and release, it is the actual emotions engendered by the experiences you had.

Forgiveness then is a liberation process...and you have complete control over the liberation. Without forgiveness you allow someone else to decide your emotional state, and you allow the past to dictate you present. A key to health and happiness is to feel that you have some control over your destiny and your daily life. Forgiving those who have wronged you is regaining control over your emotional and spiritual life.

Forgiveness must be seen in the light of justice. Forgiving wrongs does not mean that we must tolerate injustice or pretend such wrongs do not continue. It is in the presence of injustice when forgiveness is most crucial. If we look at the Middle East we see the tragic example of decisions made again and again in the heat of anger, resentment and hatred. The outcomes of such decisions are always negative, always destructive, always life-denying. Only with forgiveness as the foundation can injustice be addressed. True leaders are those that can forgive and work to right injustice. Such leaders are often killed. Peace will only come to this region when at least two leaders capable of forgiveness and with the tools to recognize the real roots of injustice, work towards peace. I pray for such leadership.

When I don't Accept This Lesson

On a world-wide level the effects of not learning this lesson are in the news every day. War and inhumanity towards each other continue.

On an individual level I see the effects of not accepting this lesson in the mind-body systems of many I work with. Part of forgiving is choosing to release negative emotions. Not releasing them is to hold on. Holding on to negative emotions is the holding on to vibrations that cause us harm. The information of our life is stored in the cells and our energetic field. As we continue to hold on to the negatives our mind-body system begins to manifest the effects of this information. How this information begins to show will always depend on what the experience not being released is, or how the person not being forgiven relates to us, but here are some examples from my experience:

One of my clients held in the reality of her abuse as a child by an uncle for more than twenty years. I was the first person in her life she had spoken to about the situation. As in so many cases of sexual abuse she could not speak to anyone about this, she felt nobody would listen, her abuser threatened to hurt her if she spoke to anyone, and as she got older she feared that confronting the issues in her family would destroy her parents, destroy her relationships with her siblings and be completely unproductive. She came to me frightened that she was having a relapse of mouth and throat cancer that she had been operated on for only two years earlier. In her case, the cost of holding on to this painful information had caused the cells in her throat and mouth to be harmed. How could forgiving her uncle be helpful here you say? Because even twenty years later the trauma she experienced at his hands still had power over her. Whether the best external course of action for her was to confront the issue with her family or even with the police, was something she would have to decide, but holding on to the emotions was killing her, not him. Step one in even making the decision about the best course of action was to forgive her uncle. It is here that the approach to forgiveness is crucial. Forgiveness is not about saying, "I forgive you, what you did is OK, or I understand what caused you to do such a thing, so I forgive you". This is making excuses, not forgiving. What is really crucial is to allow the actual emotions experienced as a result of this abuse to be recognized and released. She had to confront within herself the emotions she experienced as a child, and the emotions she compounded again and again throughout her life as the impact of the abuse played its part in relationships with men, with authority figures, with herself, throughout her life. Using the kinesiology techniques I employ in my clinic, we discovered the most powerful unreleased emotion was terror. Of course there were other emotions experienced such as fear, disgust

and guilt, and later on, anger, resentment, hatred and revenge, but these all paled, in her system, next to terror. In fact all of the emotional attachments need to be released, but it is crucial to discover the core emotion, because so often it is the foundation point, that when released allows so much else to go as well. You can imagine that a mind-body system rerunning terror again and again and again, especially in situations that have anything to do with intimacy, relationship or family, will find it difficult to stay healthy and balanced. We are in our physical nature, fight-flight beings. This natural response is healthy and sometimes life-saving in infrequent dangerous situations, but if repeated again and again, is taxing to the system, to say the least. First and foremost this woman had to recognize her terror and forgive her uncle for violating his sacred position to protect her from danger. It is this emotional impact that is the most important issue. Though the extent of the abuse in the physical sense, is important, it is the emotional impact that is critical to recognize. The issue is not how horrific the experience would be by some objective measure of one kind of abuse being more severe than another. The issue is the subjective experience of the victim of abuse, no matter what the actual experience was.

In the case of this woman, one consequence of not being able to forgive on every level was on a physical level, throat cancer, and on an emotional level the inability to form and hold an intimate relationship with a man.

Sometimes to discover who or what experience you need to forgive and release, look closely at the areas of your life where you struggle. One of my struggles has been with financial matters. In order for me to take full responsibility for changing that, among other things I needed to forgive my father. In this case it is not my father's "fault" that he had issues with money, because he grew up through the Depression, but I needed to forgive the wrong, not the excuse. As a father he wrongly modeled fear of poverty to me his son. This, and the fears that I learned and experienced from him, need to be forgiven and released. I know very well that my own children will have much to forgive me for. Loving my own father is not the issue here...forgiving his limitations is.

When I Accept This Lesson

When I accept the lesson of forgiveness I provide a liberation for my spirit and a healing for my body. The scientific and medical research indicating the negative effects of stress on the body is now well established. The impact of negative emotions as part of this stress is the key issue forgiveness addresses.

The detrimental effects on our bodies of stress related to the long working hours, financial challenges, sedentary life styles, poor diet, increased work pressures etc. are documented in scientific and medical literature. Those of us who actually live these lives know that it is not the physical stuff that causes the greatest stress, it is the emotional baggage we carry as a by-product of lives out of balance. Show me a modern western individual, and I will show you someone with first-hand experience of the emotions....trapped, pressured, hurried, frustration, inadequate, overwhelmed...etc. etc. These are *emotional* experiences, not merely time management issues. It is the burden of the emotional and vibrational imbalance that causes our mind-body systems to deteriorate and manifest the diseases of imbalance.

Forgiveness as a means of actually releasing the hold negative emotions have over our system is therefore powerful and critical. For an individual the acceptance of the lesson of forgiveness allows them to be more present centred and less controlled by the cellular memories of the past. This has immediate and long term effects on improving health. The results for a society are the same.

On the spiritual level, accepting this lesson of forgiveness liberates not only ourselves, but those we are connected to. If you think you live your life only for yourself then you are living in yet one more illusion. All parents know that their lives, thoughts and emotions impact on their children profoundly. Spiritual teachers merely expand the sense of connection, and therefore the impact, beyond the family. We are all family, right down to the DNA connection. Clearly the closest circle of connection is my immediate biological family. Beyond that, we create our own circles by the steps we take in our lives, friends, loved ones, people we identify with. Beyond that there are circles of connections we may or may not be aware of. If I am a male struggling with intimacy in my life, I am connected to the many other males in the similar struggle. If I am a veteran of war, I am connected to those like me. If I cry for my lost opportunity, I join those who cry like me. These connections are not only in this lifetime, but to those I share these connections with in the past, and will share with in the future. **Therefore my forgiveness of another, not only impacts on me, but all I am connected to.** It is therefore not only the messianic figures of history who "take on the sins of the world" but you who do so also. As you take on the pain of the world in the circles of connection you have in your life, and as you release it, so to you effect all those to whom you are connected to. Jung's collective unconscious was one way of expressing this vast interconnection we have with each other and all things. The act of forgiveness therefore is not a singular and individual activity, though at its heart it is that, but it is also an historical event, whose impact should not be underestimated. To underestimate the power of forgiveness in your life is to misunderstand the consciousness that underpins who we all are.

Physically and energetically

When forgiveness takes place, the organs, glands, body system and chakras that enshrined the negative emotions and energies will be free to heal. Which part of the system that is healed will depend on the kind of experience being forgiven, or if it is a person being forgiven, the kind of relationship that person has to you. For example, if the person being forgiven is a parent, so often this effects the heart, on the physical level, and the heart chakra.

Because forgiveness is probably the most powerful tool of personal and spiritual liberation, its effects can be massive. One woman I have worked with came to me with pain in her feet that was almost debilitating. Using kinesiology we could discover that her experience with her own mother of "not being able to stand up for herself" was a root issue in this pain. Forgiving her mother for not standing up for herself or her daughter in the face of a domineering father was a fundamental step. In her case it triggered the release of the pain in her feet. She had never even considered forgiving her mother because she always saw her as the victim in family. This is an example of the need to get rid of the excuses so the forgiveness can occur.

Every case is different. Forgiveness opens an archaeological dig into your life, and into those you are connected to, that can take some time. Use the charts at the back of this book to understand some of the emotional connections to organs, glands, body systems and chakras. These are only indicators, your life will always have its unique place, unique connections and unique consequences. Trust your intuition and your own power to forgive.

A Forgiveness Exercise.

The following process is one that I use with my clients. I have put this on a CD so that my clients can just follow along without having to remember or think through the process. At its heart it needs to be an imagining, day-dreaming type process. It is the imagination aspect of it that provides the healing, because the sub-conscious experiences imaginings, and the emotions associated with it, as real. This is a way of instructing the subconscious to

release the emotions imagined. I have written this in a way that guides you along. You might want to read it onto a tape and follow along, or have someone read it to you. Once you have done it a few times, and you should, it will be an easy process to just create for yourself, without outside voices guiding you.

*Begin by sitting or lying down in a quiet and safe place where you will not be disturbed.
Bring yourself into a quiet meditative state....*

*Now, I want you to create in your mind a big stage...either this stage is in a huge theatre,
or outside....it can be wherever you want it to be.*

Imagine you are standing on this stage.

*Now I want you to float up and back from this stage, so that you are floating in the air
maybe 50 metres back from the stage, and up from the stage at an angle...suspended in
the air looking down on the stage.*

*Now I want you to invite on to that stage, someone you need to forgive. Let them come to
the centre of the stage, or to the side...wherever you want them to stand.*

*Little by little I want you to become aware of all the cords that are connected between this
person and yourself. See these cords like fibre optic cables between the two of you. Maybe
some of those cords are emotions...anger, resentment, hatred, sadness, lost love, a feeling
of being lost or hurt....maybe in amongst all the cords are cords of love, confusion, pain...*

*Whatever they are....just become aware of them, be aware of the feelings, don't run and
hide, don't judge the feelings...just accept that they are there.....remember, you are not
your feelings, you are not the events of your life....you are the one who will be free of all
this in just moments.*

Take time to be aware of all the cords....

Now that you are aware of all these cords....I want you to say to this person.....

"I forgive you...and I release you to your highest path".

*At the same time you are saying this, from above comes safe but gigantic scissors, and
with one beautiful and powerful snip...all the cords between you are cut.....*

"I forgive you, and I release you to your highest path"

*Now if this person is someone who is now longer in your life, or you no longer want in your
life, then tell them to leave the stage...see them leave by the left, the right or the back.*

*If this is someone who is in your life, and you want in your life...ask them to stay on the
stage....and float back down to the stage, and stand next to them...embrace them, shake
their hand, or whatever greeting you feel able to give them....notice that no cords now bind
you to that person, and notice how free you feel.*

*Now return to your place in your seat or where you are lying down....notice the inflow and
outflow of your breath...*

When you are ready....open your eyes....