

The Art of Forgiveness and Love

Forgiveness helps us on all levels physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. If you want to experience good health, happiness and general well-being, you will have to make use of the amazing power of forgiveness. Doctors, psychotherapists, scientists, philosophers and spiritual masters have all emphasized on the importance of forgiveness. In fact, your entire life may depend on your ability to forgive!

This is what the experts have to say. Dr. Kathleen Hall, founder of the "Stress Institute" in Atlanta, Georgia has worked with many clients suffering from diseases such as cancer, heart disease, insomnia and hypertension. After many years of observation, she came to the conclusion that if there is one essential attribute that creates health and well-being, it's the practice of forgiveness.

Dr. Herbert Benson of "Harvard University" is convinced that the practice of forgiveness is crucial for good health. He has created an entire course at Harvard on forgiveness and health. There is a direct relationship between a physiological response of healing and forgiveness.

Dr. James Carson of "Duke University Medical Center" claims, that individuals with chronic back pain who have forgiven others experience lower levels of pain, depression and anger than those who do not forgive. As you can see clearly, forgiveness is a wonderful and powerful energy that everyone can benefit from in all aspects of their lives!

Many of us carry painful and emotional memories of events that have taken place throughout our lives. It can be from a difficult childhood, unhealthy family situations, struggling with your health, stress from work and conflicts from various day-to-day situations. Painful memories from the past cause very deep emotional scars. These scars can manifest themselves as migraines, fear, anxiety, arthritis, cancer, depression and a number of other illnesses just to name a few.

A lot of us are suffering from psychosomatic disorders. Psychosomatic means that there is a Mind and Body connection. The source of the problem originates in the mind, but the result is a physical illness. There are four essential components to every person physical, emotional, mental and spiritual.

The key to living a life of health, happiness and overall well-being, is to balance all of these four components. If you only focus on one area, for example the physical component and ignore your emotional mental and spiritual counterparts, you will be thrown out of balance.

Currently, there is much research being done in the field of mind-body medicine. Dr. Kathleen Hall of the "Stress Institute" has studied with Dr. Herbert Benson of the "Harvard Mind-Body Institute" as well as Dr. Dean Ornish of the "Preventative Medicine Research Institute".

Dr. Hall states that she has worked with individuals with all kinds of problems. These include terminal cancer, depression, those who are divorced, rich and poor. She is convinced that the root of all problems is a spiritual conflict. They don't know how to live a life of balance. They are living such hollow, busy lives that they don't know how to live an intentional life of happiness.

Dr. Kathleen Hall explains in her book "A Life in Balance" how forgiveness affects your mind. "When someone makes a genuine apology, there is an almost immediate positive impact upon the mind. The person that was not forgiven has lived in your mind, and has actually taken up physical, mental and spiritual space in the unforgiving memory you hold. Remember that a thought creates energy. You carry this negative memory around in your mind and it actually takes energy away from your mind and thus your mental health. Consequently, when you practice forgiveness your mind will signal your physical body, and it has an immediate positive impact"(1).

For thousands of years, all the great Spiritual Masters have been teaching us how important it is to forgive. Lord Krishna, Prophet Muhammad, Jesus Christ, Buddha, Mahavira and various other saints and sages have emphasized on the importance of forgiveness.

There are many aspects of forgiveness. You have to ask for forgiveness from God and you have to seek forgiveness from those people whom you have mistreated. Once you ask for forgiveness, you will also have to learn to return it. You must forgive others for their mistreatment of you.

There are certain acts which God can forgive, wrongdoing which does not involve another human being can be forgiven by the mercy of God. However, if you have inflicted pain on human beings, God may not forgive you on their behalf. You will have to seek forgiveness from the person whom you have mistreated in this life or the next.

The wheel of karma turns forever. The law of karma states that every action has a consequence. One way to escape from this tedious cycle of cause and effect, birth and death, is to use the power of forgiveness. You are not aware of every wrongdoing that requires forgiveness.

Your negative acts like all aspects of your past lives are locked into the subconscious mind. God is very compassionate, he knows that you are not aware of your past mistakes. He will give you many opportunities to seek forgiveness and more importantly to grant forgiveness. Your family members, your friends and your colleagues are around you because you have to forgive them.

In today's society, we hear of many situations dealing with child abuse, being unfaithful to your marriage partner, children abusing their parents and so on. A person you may not know may suddenly appear in front of you and insult you for no apparent reason. The only way to get out of this destructive cycle of pain and retaliation is to learn to forgive. First you must accept and forgive all the harm that has been done to you, then you must steer your free will in the right direction. Once you have forgiven move on, do not continue the cycle by responding angrily to the individual who mistreated you.

Psychotherapy is becoming a very effective therapy for forgiveness. This treatment deals with psychological disturbances that conventional medicine cannot successfully treat. Psychotherapists who use regression therapy to heal agree that many symptoms are the result of early emotional trauma. They also believe that the original suffering may have come from past lives.

These traumas later manifest themselves as cancer, depression, neurosis, arthritis, loss of appetite or various other illnesses. Psychotherapists often tell their patients that they need to forgive a particular person or a particular group in order to heal themselves. Quite often the illness begins to disappear once the patient forgives and let's go. From a spiritual point of view, this therapy makes sense and is very helpful in treating the patient.

The therapist may have to regress the patient far into the past to discover the incident that caused the trauma. The patient has repressed the memory. Even though the patient seems unaware of the trauma, it's part of a deep subconscious memory and it causes serious physical and mental damage.

When you forgive, you have to do so from the depth of your soul. Making the motions of forgiveness does not mean that you have truly forgiven. Forgiving is not as easy as it sounds, you have to go consciously into the depths of your soul to be able to forgive. This is why sometimes you need the help of a psychotherapist.

An individual you knew in a past life thousands of years ago may come into contact with you! This individual may redress past karma with you in the form of forgiveness. You may not be aware of who this person is, but your subconscious remembers from the past.

Usually the person who forgives benefits more than the person who is forgiven! Sometimes when you come into contact with a certain person, you experience an intense sadness, this person may have harmed you in the past! God is giving you a chance either to forgive this person or to compound the injury. At this point, you will have to use your wisdom, you will have to forgive and move on. This will be one of the most difficult decisions you will have to make because your natural tendency will be to retaliate.

You have to learn to forgive first and then forget. How can you forget first and then forgive? By forgetting, you will not know what it is that you have to forgive. The only way to move forward in your journey is to break the ties that connect you to the past. The only way to break them is by consciously forgiving. Get into the habit of asking for forgiveness from God and those around you. More importantly, get into the habit of forgiving others.

You also have to make a conscious effort to forgive yourself. Sometimes we are too hard on ourselves and this can be a cause for serious problems. Be compassionate to yourself and forgive yourself on all levels. You will be many levels closer to enlightenment once you learn how to forgive.

(Part 2)

Unconditional love and forgiveness go hand-in-hand. We come to Earth to experience the different facets of love. The entire universe revolves around various forms of love. The more affection we bring to existence, the more we will receive. Love starts in a physical realm and then blossoms into a spiritual realm. Before we can experience the spiritual bliss of God, we must experience love on a smaller human scale.

Here is what one reputable physician has to say about love. Dr. Dean Ornish, author and cardiologist, in his book "Love and Survival" states...

"Increasing scientific evidence from my own research and from the studies of others that cause me to believe that love and intimacy are among the most powerful factors in health and illness, even though these ideas are largely ignored by the medical profession. I am not aware of any other factor in medicine - not diet, not smoking, not exercise, not stress, not genetics, not drugs, not surgery - that has a greater impact on our quality of life, incidents of illness, and premature death from all causes"(2).

You can heighten the experience of love and intimacy if you are a forgiving person. Your ability to love others, enjoy life, be happy and healthy depends on your ability to forgive and live each moment consciously.

Before we begin to give our affection to others, we are given the opportunity to receive love. From the moment we are born, we have an opportunity to receive love. On the first day of our life, our entire family is present to celebrate our arrival. The baby can feel all the love coming from every member of the family. The body of the baby may be small, but the soul is fully aware of its surroundings. In the first few years of infancy, the baby is bathed in the mother's limitless love. The mother reaches into the depths of her soul and provides immense love for her child.

The mother gives love and the baby receives it. Every cell of the growing child seeks love from the mother. Psychologists claim that whatever children are given in their formative years will be the basis of their future. The way a child matures depends entirely on the formative years.

Recent scientific studies indicate that you will become the same kind of parent as your own parents. If you grew up in an environment full of love, you will also provide immense love for your child. If your childhood lacked affection, you may not be as giving as an adult, unless of course you make a conscious effort to change yourself.

There are different forms of love that one can experience. Each form helps us to grow in different ways. We will experience love as parents, children, friends and companions. Existence has provided us with animals, the outdoors, plants and nature to love.

As we grow, the quality of our love slowly matures. We feel a special type of love towards our mother and father. We begin to follow the rules and principles set out by our parents.

When we communicate with elderly grandparents, we feel a different bond with them. It is said that the bond between a grandparent and a grandchild is even stronger than the bond between a parent and a child. As adolescence, we spend most of our time with our friends, friendship offers a different type of love. We would do anything to help or protect our best friends. We will encounter many situations in the company of our best friends and we will learn from them.

As you approach adulthood, you will learn how to give love rather than just simply receiving it. You were surrounded by the love of your parents, grandparents and friends, soon it will be time for you to become a parent and you will shower your children with the same kind of love that you once received. You have been given an opportunity to receive love as a child and give love as an adult. These two prerequisites have to be fulfilled before you are ready to cultivate spiritual love towards the Divine.

It has been proven that when you give love to plants, they respond in a very positive way. When individuals talk or sing to plants, the plants are happy. When you avoid them, they do not flourish, even plants need love and nurturing.

A house pet can be as close to you as a family member. Whether it is a dog, a cat or a budgie, it also requires love. Have you ever considered why God has given you a pet? It is to help you expand your capacity for love. Existence gives you many opportunities to share love. Extend your love to areas beyond your immediate family. When you go out for a walk, share your love with the flowers around you, be compassionate to the trees around you.

Smile at the grass you walk on. Remember that flowers, plants, trees, animals and nature in general have souls. Those souls are alive and breathing. Up to this point, we have discussed love in its material form. The love you have for your parents, children, friends, animals and nature is a material form of love.

Now, you must focus on the spiritual dimension. This Dimension is hidden, esoteric and unknown. Love for God is the ultimate form of love. Love of God should be unconditional, unbiased and unlimited. Love will give you inner strength, love will give you integrity, love is the preparation for enlightenment. You have been taught to love for many lifetimes.

Before the flower of spiritual love blooms, all the seeds of material love have to bloom. These seeds are the love you have experienced as a child, a parent, a grandparent, a friend and a caretaker.

Now, focus on the spiritual dimension, it is time for the eternal flower of love to blossom. The flower of spiritual love is located in the heart. The only way it will bloom, is if you sprinkle it with the water of meditation. Meditation is a form of spiritual love.

Through meditation, your love for the almighty will grow day by day. We have traveled far and long to experience all the early stages of love. Now, it is time to experience the advanced form of love. The time has come to experience the ultimate secret of God, spiritual love! This love awaits you in the heart! Seek the love of God in your heart!

Love every aspect of this universe. Expand your love to its utmost capacity. Love your neighbor, your family, your pet, your friends and most of all your soul! Love for your spirit is the ultimate form of love. The only way to love your soul is to spend time with it. The more you love your spirit the more you love God. Spiritual love is the most profound form of love you will experience as a human being!

Here are some practical suggestions that can help us to practice forgiveness and love. Practice deep breathing every day for a few minutes. Scientific studies show that oxygen going into our bodies helps us to release negative emotions and negative energy. This can help us on all levels physically emotionally mentally and spiritually.

Analyze each event in your life from a logical and objective perspective. Quite often, we are so biased with our own viewpoint that we fail to see the picture from a larger perspective. A situation often becomes clear when you step outside of it, always seek the truth and the facts.

Practice a little meditation or relaxation techniques every day. This is the key to your personal and spiritual progress. Meditation is the easiest and fastest way to connect with the most important part of you, your soul! Once you connect with your soul, you will be transformed. Every small or big choice in your life will be a conscious moment taking you towards enlightenment.

Take some alone time for yourself. Take a break from your usual routine and be close with yourself. This will give you a chance to reflect, analyze and make changes in your life. Always be honest with yourself and those around you.

Take care of yourself by eating well, exercising regularly and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. It is important to realize that forgiveness is something that takes time to learn. It happens in phases. It is an art that can take your whole lifetime to learn.

First, learn to forgive on a smaller scale. It can be a trivial incident, this prepares you to forgive on a deeper level. Once you learn how to forgive a few times, you will get better at it. As you grow, you will be able to forgive more easily.

The Art of Forgiveness is something that can take a lifetime to learn and it must be gradually perfected!

References

- 1) Dr, Kathleen Hall, A Life in Balance - Nourishing The Four Roots of happiness, pg. 218
- 2) Dean Ornish, MD., Love and Survival (New York: Harper Collins, 1998)