

FORGIVENESS

You might be asking yourself, “Why would I want to practice forgiveness?” The answer is simple. Practice develops skill. Skill leads to mastery. When you master the practice of forgiveness, it becomes as natural as breathing. And when you know how to forgive, you eliminate excess mental and emotional weight that keeps you stuck in repetitive situations, circumstances, and experiences that are not healthy or productive. The only true way to create a more loving, productive, and fulfilling life is by forgiving the past. Releasing the past restores us to the full energy of the present moment. Everything we do and experience in life is born from the energy we carry.

People and experiences show up in response to the conscious and unconscious energetic invitations we issue. Many of us believe that what happens to us gives rise to the feelings we experience. The truth is, it's the other way around. Forgiveness addresses how we think and feel about others and ourselves, and how those thoughts manifest within our lives as energy. Every feeling has its origin in a thought, because each thought that we have creates energy. If you can remove the thought, the underlying feeling will bubble to the surface. That's why we are forgiving our thoughts throughout this process.

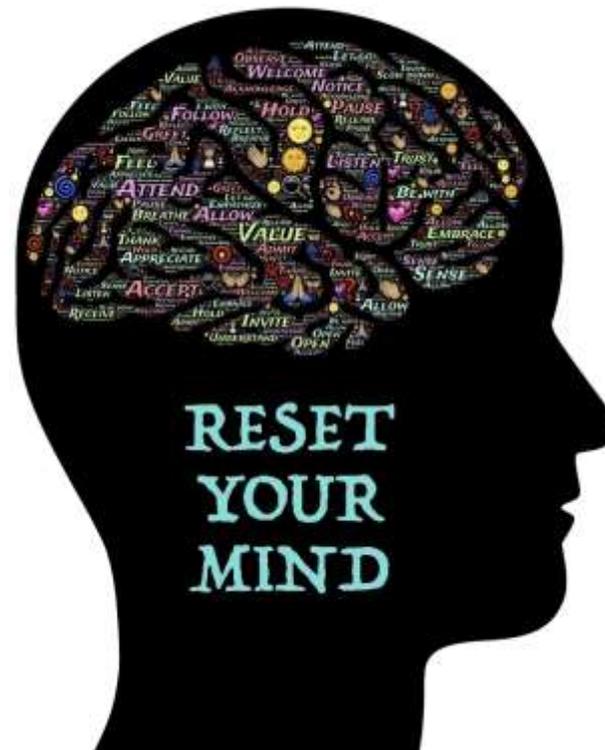
As Michael Grant, author of *The Twelve Laws of Life* reminds us:

“Your mind controls your mood. In fact, it is safe to say that you always have some thought (mind) before you feel something emotionally (mood). The thought might be so fast and seemingly ‘automatic’ that you don’t even see it or think you are thinking it but you are. The truth is that what you think determines what you feel—it’s a basic law of life.”



If you can tap into and identify the feeling, you will discover that there's a thought linked to it. Once you remove the feeling, the thought will also dissipate. Whether you explore the source thought or the feeling doesn't matter. What matters is, if a situation, circumstance, or relationship doesn't feel good, that's a sign that there's someone or something you have to forgive. It's all about energy. The true and pure energy of life, good, and God is positive energy. In this practice we deal with the thought because the mind is a powerful, creative energy. Everything we think, do, and feel begins in the mind. For this reason, we have to address the thoughts, beliefs, judgments, learnings, and perceptions that we hold in our minds. When we can identify the stuck feelings underneath our constant thoughts and neutralize them, we will be good.

Forgiveness helps to transform and eliminate the energy blockages that we hold in our minds about who we are and who others are, and the subsequent issues or upsets that grow from the thoughts, beliefs, and judgments we hold.



Creating a loving, healthy, and fulfilling life plus loving, healthy, and fulfilling relationships begins in the mind. Many of us live in our heads because feelings can be frightening. It's easier to stay in our heads thinking, believing, and judging, since doing so seems safer than navigating through uncomfortable feelings. I refer to folks who live like this as “neck-down-dead!” because there's no life below the neck. They think about everything and often come across as cold, detached, and unfeeling, and in many cases, they are just that. The energy of a feeling doesn't die or go away because we ignore or resist it. In fact, it is the energy of the unacknowledged feeling beneath the distorted thoughts that keeps us stuck. Our feelings send harmonious or disharmonious energy signals throughout our bodies. Yet if we drop our hands to our sides, sit in the feeling for a moment, and just breathe instead of numbing out, the feeling will pass. Too often, we choose to avoid feelings because they frighten us. But once we learn how to harness the energy behind our thoughts, our emotions will no longer be in control of how we feel and what we do.

Forgiveness is a practice that helps us to realign our thoughts and feelings under new conscious management.



Think of it this way: the mind is like a little puppy. A puppy will run around all over the place until we train him to do otherwise. If we don't train the puppy, he'll grow into a full-grown dog that will pee on the carpet, chew on our shoes, and hump our guests. When we train our own “puppy mind” to sit, stay, and roll over on command, our thoughts become clearer and our negative feelings become easier to identify, navigate, and release.

Of course, training the mind can be difficult. That's where meditation and forgiveness come into play. These two practices—meditation and forgiveness—still the “puppy mind” so that the energy blocked in our bodies can bubble up to the surface and be released. Until we learn how to meditate, we cannot clear our “puppy mind” thoughts. And unless we practice forgiveness, we have no way of releasing the hidden feelings attached to those thoughts. Quite often we are stuck in the memories of what we have done or not done; what others have done to us or not done for us. How we think and feel about others and ourselves can keep us stuck in a swamp of toxic emotions. More often than not, we're self-righteous about what we think and feel. We become quick to judge and slow to forgive. We believe what we believe, and we stubbornly stick to it. Unfortunately, our toxic thoughts and feelings do not nurture or nourish us, nor do they make or keep us peaceful and loving. I offer you this simple formula for recognizing discordant thoughts and feelings. First you think, then you feel, and finally you hold the energy in your body.

Forgiveness addresses how we think and feel about others and ourselves and how those thoughts manifest within our lives as energy.

Practicing forgiveness will heal the original experience of abandonment that has resulted in the subsequent detachment from feelings. Our work in this forgiveness practice will be to get to the underbelly of the experience in order to release the thoughts and feelings that perpetuate the merry-go-round ride. Forgiveness is a process that stops the ride and eliminates the wounds of the past from the mind and the heart. Forgiveness supports our growth into a new way of thinking, being, and living. Forgiveness builds mental, emotional, and spiritual muscles. *In today's world, muscle, strength and endurance—is something we can all use a lot more of each and every day. Forgiveness builds mental, emotional, and spiritual muscles.*

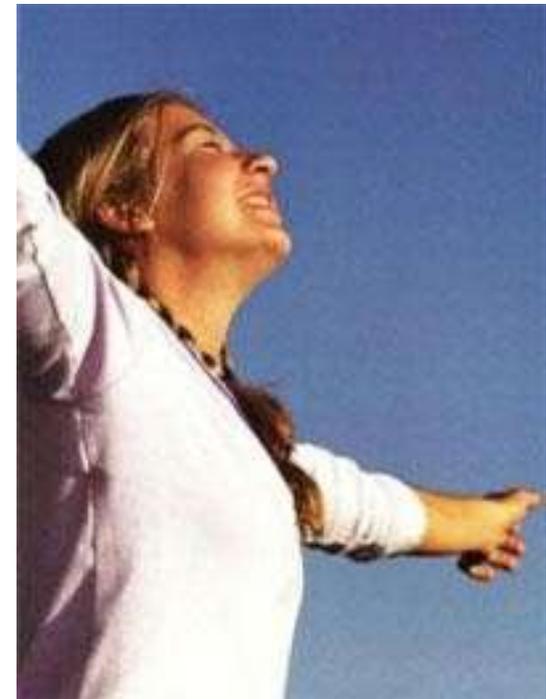
Throughout this forgiveness practice, you will be asked to identify thought and beliefs. A belief is a thought—fueled by a feeling—that you think over and over until it becomes habitual. Once a thought becomes habitual, you no longer even recognize that you are thinking it. For this reason, it is absolutely essential to identify and release the long-held, worn-out beliefs that often hold toxic thoughts in place.



Judge Not!

It's funny, but most of the people are addicted to TV shows in our modern technology driven world. These crime-and-punishment dramas support our beliefs that everyone and everything must be judged. For every crime there must be a punishment. On any given day, we are all judge and jury in the cases we build or hold on to in our minds. We judge ourselves and others when we believe someone is guilty until proven innocent. In the realm of consciousness, a judgment is a classification. It is a thought that classifies people and things as right or wrong, good or bad, fair or unfair when measured against what we believe. At the core of all judgments there is the belief that things are not as they should be, as we want them to be, or as we need them to be. Our judgments more often than not give rise to a toxic or negative feeling. **Forgiveness is the only cure for long-held judgments. Forgiveness of our judgments opens space and energy in our minds and hearts that has been held blocked off by anger, bitterness, and resentment. Forgiveness is the only cure for long-held judgments.**

What is often challenging for the human mind to accept is that regardless of how hard, challenging, frightening, or difficult an experience may seem, everything is just as it needs to be in order for us to heal, grow, and learn. That's just the way the universe works. Granted, most humans have a very difficult time accepting the way the universe works. This is what it means to be human. This is why we are faced with challenges and difficulties. This is how we ultimately learn to trust the process of life and our capacity to move through the hard times. This is how we grow in faith and learn to trust God. The moment we determine what is, should not be, we are denying the presence of love. God is love. Love is always present, surrounding us; guiding, growing, and teaching us. Even in the midst of total chaos, pain, and dysfunction, love is calling us to a higher experience and expression.



Forgiveness inevitably leads to acceptance. It is a demonstration of your willingness to move on. Acceptance does not mean you agree with, condone, appreciate, or even like what has happened. **Acceptance means that you know, regardless of what happened, that there is something bigger than you at work. It also means you know that you are okay and that you will continue to be okay. Even if you don't know it yet, it means you are willing to get to that space: forgiveness restores our faith, rebuilds our trust, and opens our hearts to the presence and power of love.**

Primary Judgment Issues More often than not, judgments can be traced back to one of three primary issues:

1. We do not or cannot tolerate the same behavior or characteristic in ourselves. When we harbor feelings of inadequacy, inappropriateness, weakness, or the “not-good-enough” syndrome, we resent seeing our behaviors and tendencies demonstrated by another person. Seeing it “out there” embarrasses us, so we condemn what is being demonstrated. A judgment of resentment or embarrassment often reveals that we are not fully expressing ourselves, and we experience resentment or anger when others do so.

2. We are unaware that we behave a certain way and of the impact that behavior has on others. So we disown it and project the behavior onto others and dislike it “out there.” Whenever we experience dislike, upset, or anger about how someone is being who they are, we must ask ourselves, **“How and under what circumstances am I prone to behave the same way?”** Only when we become willing to take an honest look within to determine if we share some of the characteristics we dislike in others can we become self-accepting and self-aware.



3. When we are envious and resentful, we must find something wrong with others who have what we want or do what we desire to do. We judge them in order to make them wrong about who we are and what we have not created for ourselves. When someone attains a certain level of success or recognition, it may remind us of a lack of confidence or success in our own life experience. When feelings of inadequacy surface in the face of success, chances are we will look for and find something wrong with the person to negate what is right or good about them and their accomplishments. This is also known as the “crabs-in-a-barrel” mentality: pulling someone down to the level we believe we are on.

Since judgments are a strategy used by the ego to avoid uncomfortable feelings, if we are unaware of the feelings hiding on our own internal landscape, we can and most likely will create all sorts of judgmental stories about the people to distract our attention away from what we are experiencing within. It is only when we forgive our judgments that we can have compassion for others, even when they behave in ways we would not.

Forgiveness allows us to explore and release our long-held beliefs and assumptions about ourselves instead of judging other people. The reward of forgiveness is that it eliminates the trap of unconscious ego gratification that we receive when we judge others and gives rise to a deeper experience of self-understanding. When we truly understand ourselves and cultivate compassion for the less-desirable aspects of who we are, it is highly unlikely that our first reaction will be to judge someone else. What we have more of within and for ourselves, we are free to give more of to others.



Judging people occurs when we watch their actions. The way anyone behaves is a function of their individual understanding of who they are, what is expected, and their historical perspective of life. Often we make judgments about others at a time when we cannot process our own feelings of discomfort. Critical comments about anyone else are always a mirror into our own life and attitudes. With time, practice, and forgiveness we grow a deeper understanding of what we say and do to others that can and will transform how we live within ourselves.

Regardless of how hard, challenging, frightening, or difficult an experience may seem, everything is just as it needs to be in order for us to heal, grow, and learn.

Forgiveness: The key to a Happier Future



“Forgiveness undoes our own hatred and frees us from a troubled past.”- Christopher Peterson

People often link forgiveness with reconciliation, according to the definition, forgiveness does not always include reconciliation or even interaction with the perpetrator. Forgiveness is defined as “a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness.” (“What is Forgiveness”, 2004)

Peterson describes it as a shift in thinking from “I’ll make them pay” or “I want to see them unhappy” to letting go of grudges. However, forgiveness appears to be more about you than then your perpetrator. As the ancient saying summarizes:

“Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent to throw it at some
The process of forgiveness is a skill you can learn. Just like learning how to ride a bike.

Just as you mastered the skill of riding a bicycle, so you can also master the skill of forgiving yourself.

And I can show you how to do it.

But here's the problem...

Many people feel they don't deserve to be forgiven - even by themselves.

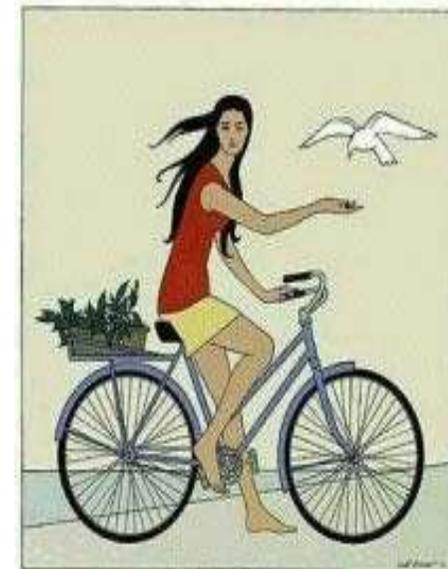
So often we just won't let ourselves off the hook. We'd rather carry the pain around with us because we think it's what we deserve.

Plus, we want to punish ourselves before someone else does.

If you don't forgive yourself - then most likely you'll go around 'beating yourself up' mentally. And you'll never get rid of the emotional pain you feel in your heart.

You'll have a harder time dealing with your current life, because all your attention has been captured by those past thoughts and feelings you can't let go of.

It's like dragging extra weight behind you.



Here's what happens
when I don't forgive.



You can't even see the burden you're dragging, but everyone else can.
one—you are the one getting burned.” -Buddha

Getting to Grips with Forgiveness

Forgiveness can be considered both a trait and a state. The difference between the two being the prevalence of forgiveness for an individual over time, whilst state forgiveness may be short term or apply to one situation, those who possess trait forgiveness will have a blanket approach towards stressful or painful situations where forgiveness is more easily achieved.

A study conducted in Taiwan by Wang (2008) researched the relationship between **The Big 5 Personality Traits** and the tendency to forgive. The research found that those people who were agreeable and emotionally stable found it easier to forgive.

This evidence shows that through emotional stability and higher agreeableness you are more likely to forgive those who have wronged you.

The Benefits of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a key part of many religions and civil codes because it helps societies to heal and function. Numerous studies have found that the positive effects of forgiveness are for those who forgive rather than those who are forgiven.

One such study found that those who forgave had less anger, less stress, less rumination and lowered reactivity in comparison to those who held onto their anger and pain (Harris et al., 2001).

As complicated humans living in complicated communities, it is good for us to forgive. Forgiveness can benefit us physically, mentally, relationally, and even spiritually, if you are so inclined, and is good for society.

What Forgiveness Can Do For You

It releases you from your own private prisons - the invisible ones you never see but are nonetheless there. It's even been proven to make you smarter. (From Baumeister, R. F. (2002) *"Humility, Egotism, Forgiveness, And the Victim Role"*)

Forgiveness fosters *all* growth and change.



Forgiveness Also

offers the best way to make a real and genuine change in any area of life...

brings you one step closer to living your heart's desire...

shows you how to drop the emotional baggage that makes you so tired...

stops you from mentally beating yourself up all the time...

ends the self-punishment...

Forgiveness ends the guilt and the emotional pain.

gives relief from the emotional and mental pain of the past...

energizes your life...

stops you from repeating useless patterns of the past...

provides the help you need to change bad habits...

helps you take charge of your emotions...

gets you out of your rut...

ends the overwhelm of life's situations...

releases the tensions, the obsessions, the stress...

shows you how to stop hating yourself every time you make a little mistake...

and lets you move forward in life.



Models of Forgiveness

Enright's (2005) 8 Keys to Forgiveness adds understanding what forgiveness is, forgiving ourselves and developing our "forgiveness muscles" into the recipe. He also acknowledges how using our strengths can help us forgive easier.

Enright (2005) acknowledges that the search for meaning in suffering helps with forgiving. He also stresses the need to acknowledge one's own pain, without getting stuck in the hurt.

His eight keys to forgiveness are:

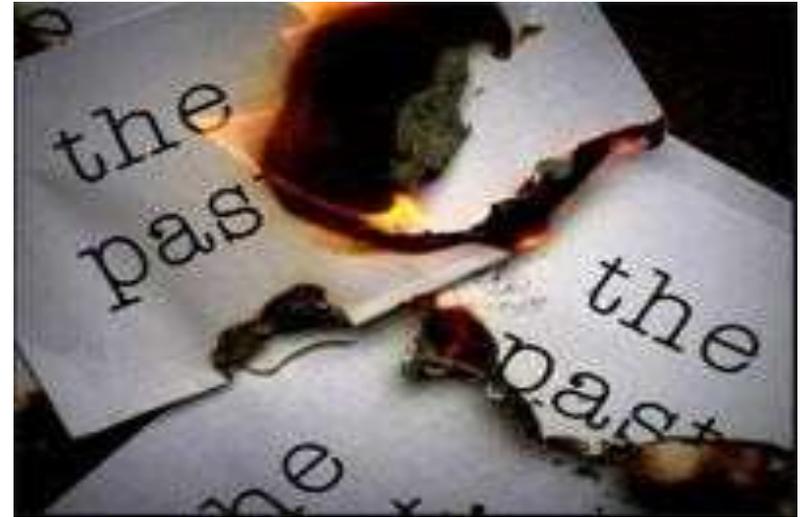
1. Know what forgiveness is and why it matters
2. Become "forgivingly fit"
3. Address your inner pain
4. Develop a forgiving mind through empathy
5. Find meaning in your suffering
6. When forgiveness is hard, call upon other strengths
7. Forgive yourself
8. Develop a forgiving heart

Forgiveness Exercises

Various forgiveness exercises have been tested in research. Peterson (2006) tells of getting his students to write a "forgiveness letter". In the discussion after completion of the exercise, it was felt by all but one student that sending the letter would backfire, unless sent in response to an apology from the recipient; and that it might even be seen as accusatory. Peterson reports that the one student who sent his forgiveness letter has not yet been forgiven for sending it.

More success has been found in workshops which teach the steps to forgiveness, with the objective to change one's own outlook (Harris, et al., 2001).

For more detail, try this forgiveness exercise based on Enright's eight keys.



As a Counseling Psychologist and Self-Esteem and Body and Social Confidence Coach, I see how so much pain could be avoided if people were more ready to forgive. For this reason I am motivated when I see that forgiveness can be taught and that its importance in healing is being recognized.

“Forgiveness says you are given another chance to make a new beginning.” – Desmond Tutu

Eight Essentials When Forgiving

Key principles to help you forgive and achieve peace of mind.

Why You Should Try It

We have all suffered hurts and betrayals. Choosing to forgive is a way to release the distress that arises again and again from the memory of these incidents—but forgiveness is often a long and difficult process.

This exercise outlines several steps that are essential to the process of forgiveness, breaking it down into manageable components. These steps were created by Robert Enright, Ph.D., one of the world’s leading forgiveness researchers. Although the exact process of forgiveness may look different for different people, most anyone can still draw upon Dr. Enright’s basic principles. In certain cases, it may help to consult a trained clinician, especially if you are working through a traumatic event.



Why It Works

Forgiveness is a long and often challenging process. These steps may help along the way by providing concrete guidelines. Specifically, they may help you narrow and understand whom to forgive—to name and describe your pain; to understand the difference between forgiving and excusing or reconciling; and by thinking about the person who has caused you pain in a novel way, you may begin to feel some compassion for him or her, facilitating forgiveness and reducing the ill will you hold toward this person. These steps also attune you to residual pain from your experience, and encourage you to find meaning and some positivity in it.

Evidence That It Works

Baskin, T.W., & Enright, R. D. (2004). [Intervention studies on forgiveness: A meta-analysis](#). *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 82, 79-90.

Researchers compared several studies that used Dr. Enright's "process model of forgiveness," similar to the steps outlined above. All the studies were done in a clinical setting including individual and group therapy. Therapies that used these methods were shown to be effective in increasing forgiveness, and in decreasing negative psychological states such as anxiety and anger, compared to control groups. These were often long-term therapies, ranging from 6 to 60 weekly sessions, aimed at helping individuals cope with serious offenses.

Sources

[Robert Enright, Ph.D.](#), University of Wisconsin, Madison

