

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

For many people forgiveness is one of the hardest steps of all in our progress toward freedom of spirit. Yet it is essential. For as long as we are unable to forgive, we keep ourselves chained to the burdens of bitterness. We give them rent-free space in our minds, emotional shackles on our hearts, and the right to torment us in the small hours of the night. When it is time to move on, but still too hard, try some or all of these steps.

Forgiveness is not an emotion – IT'S A CHOICE! It is a very powerful choice and can change your life and release you from an emotional prison. Following are 10 critical steps in the forgiveness process:

Step 1: The first step to forgiveness is acknowledging what happened and understand the meaning of forgiveness;

- Understand that forgiving does not mean giving permission for the behavior to be repeated. It does not mean saying that what was done was acceptable. Forgiveness is needed for behaviors that were not acceptable and that you should not allow to be repeated.
- Talk to someone you trust and open up about how hurt, sad or angry you may feel. Don't be ashamed to allow your emotions to come out and don't apologize for them.
- Don't withdraw or isolate yourself. Stay connected and feel the pain, even though it hurts. With someone there to listen, the pain is more bearable.

Step 2: Reliving and Reflecting

Vent and let it out, and then you are ready to rationalize about your life;

- Ask yourself: What do you want to do with this pain?
- Ask yourself, "what is what is holding you back and causing you to hold on to your anger and resentment?"
- Empathize with the person who hurt you. This is difficult, but critical. Once you can put yourself in the other person's shoes, you can use better reasoning and logic about your own life.
- Forgiveness is not the service of condoning. It's a service to yourself—free yourself from the poison of hatred, bitterness, and resentment

Step 3: Re-adjust your thoughts

Analyze your anger and put your life back into perspective.

- Slowly begin releasing the anger that is keeping you from forgiveness. Praying and mediating can help.
- Take inventory and give thanks for all the things you *do* have.
- You can imagine vengeance—just don't act on it.
- Think of your future. Know that you and your loved ones will be better off once you have rid yourself of any vengeful thinking.

Step 4: Relinquish Your Bitter Feelings

Your resentful feelings may never permanently go away.

- Acknowledge that your anger can come back.
- If your anger does come back, go through the process again to keep moving forward.
- Try to teach others the skill of forgiveness in an empathetic way.

Step 5: Accept responsibility – you are not a victim

- Acknowledge your part.
- Were you honest about your hurt or did you hide the fact that the behavior hurt you?
- Did you seek peace by reassuring the perpetrator that it was all right? Did you stay when you could or should have left?
- If so, then you, too, have some responsibility. (Here you start to move away from being a victim.)

Step 6: Make a list of what you gained from the relationship;

- Looking back, you may be focusing on the negatives, the hurt. Yet if they were repeated, you must have stayed to allow the repetition.
- You did not remove yourself. Why not? There must have been some positives if you chose to stay. Where were they?

Step 7: Write a letter to the person (no need to mail it);

- Acknowledge what you gained from the relationship, and express forgiveness for the hurts
- Allow yourself to express all your feelings fully.
- Do not focus only on the hurts.

Step 8: Create a ceremony in which you get rid of your letter, which helps you to symbolize the ending of the link between you;

- You may choose to visualize placing them on a raft and watching it drift gently away down a river. You may prefer to burn them and scatter the ashes. You may invent some other form of ritualized separation.

Step 9: Visualize the person you are forgiving being blessed by your forgiveness, and as a result, being freed from continuing the behavior that hurt you.

Step 10: Now that you have freed yourself from the painful links and released the pain, visualize and feel yourself growing lighter and more joyous. Now you are free to move on with your life without the burden of bitterness. Do not look back in anger! You now have joy and rejuvenation!

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