

# Forgiveness

Break down your prison and letting the inmate free. This is one of the best things you can do to truly create happiness in our life. You may say, “I am not holding anyone in a prison,” but in reality, everyone creates a prison—and the inmate you are trying to set free is *yourself*. You create this prison by not forgiving.

In fact, many times inability to forgive is the biggest piece of baggage that anyone can carry. This baggage could be from a parent, friend, significant other, or coworker— anyone that was not there for you, abused you, took advantage of your trust, or harmed you emotionally.

Often we hold resentments, thinking we are somehow getting the other person back. How can this be true when they are not affected by our refusal to forgive, *only you are. You are the only one that knows you are not forgiving. Think about that.*

*“Resentment is like taking poison and expecting someone else to die” --  
Gautama Buddha*

## **So, what is forgiveness?**

Forgiveness is releasing the feeling that the other person owes you something.... And freeing ourselves from anger. You may believe that forgiveness is challenging, but when you understand who it is truly for, then it becomes easier. Forgiveness is all about YOU, not anyone else. When you practice forgiveness you will feel empowered. Forgiveness is freedom and freedom leads to happiness.

## **What forgiveness is NOT:**

Many people choose not forgive because they have a misperception about what forgiveness truly is. Therefore, let's go over some of the things forgiveness is not.

**Forgiveness is NOT:** Reconciliation with the person.

**Forgiveness is NOT:** Living in denial about a person's action(s).

**Forgiveness is NOT:** Allowing the person to do the same behavior over and over again.

**Forgiveness is NOT:** Having no consequence for a behavior.

**Forgiveness is NOT:** Having the pain magically go away.

## **Step 1: Forgive Yourself**

*“True justice is paying once for each mistake. True injustice is paying more than once. Animals pay once, humans pay thousands of times. Every time we remember we judge ourselves and feel guilt over and over again.”*

*- Edgar Cayce*

Many times, in our lives we make mistakes and we have to forgive ourselves for those mistakes. Most people have more resentment toward themselves than anyone else. There are two things that our minds unconsciously do when we feel guilty.

One of them is to try to repay or make right our mistake, often excessively. If we feel that there is nothing we can do to make something right, the second option we choose (unconsciously) is to punish ourselves.

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Take a moment to reflect on your actions (toward yourself or others) in the past that you may regret.

*Are there any mistakes you made that you continue to beat yourself up for? If so, what?*

*How are you punishing yourself for it?*

*Are you directly or indirectly punishing others for it?*

Your guilt is not going to undo what has happened. Even more importantly, holding onto this pain is causing further pain in your life. It is okay to let it go now. Release yourself from the burden of carrying it with you.

*I forgive myself for:*

**Apologize:** If any of your self-grievances are towards others, consider expressing an apology through a letter, email, phone call, or in person. (Remember not to be attached to the results since this is about you, not them. Do not expect to be forgiven.)

## **Step 2: Forgiving Others**

**Write it down:** Make a list of people you need to forgive and what you want to forgive them for. Include what you need to forgive *yourself* for. (See the other forgiveness worksheet for a complete activity for this step.)

**Reflect:** Acknowledge the pain that the lack of forgiveness (on your part) has caused you and how it currently impacts your life. Is it more painful than the actual experience?

**Learn the lessons:** What are some things that you can learn from the situations? Are there any positives that have or can come out of the experiences? What lessons could the other person(s) have learned?

**Let go:** Release any expectations from anyone else. This includes expectations of forgiveness or apologies from others or changes in others' behaviors. Forgiving doesn't mean accepting unacceptable behavior, but if the person does not change it is your responsibility to free yourself from the pain of resentment and do what's right for you, even if it means cutting ties with the person. What expectations do you release?

**Express Forgiveness:** ONLY if you feel it would be beneficial to you, consider expressing forgiveness to another through a letter, email, phone call, or in person. (Remember not to be attached to the results since this is about you, not them. Do not expect an apology.)

**Live and be free!** Forgiveness is about personal power. A life well lived is your best revenge; therefore take your power back and focus on your desires. Don't do it because, "You'll show them," do it because you want to live your life with freedom and happiness. Forgiveness is often an opportunity to learn, grow, and heal. You may even find that the negative experiences were blessings in disguise if you can create a place for forgiveness and acceptance in your heart. Remember, forgiveness is 100 percent your responsibility. Only you can unlock the door to your prison and shift your life from limitation to freedom and joy.