



THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

Why forgive? Why should we forgive those who have caused great suffering in our lives? Often people believe there are those who don't deserve forgiveness, and they are heard saying, "I will *never* forgive that person." Others hope for the same misfortunes to befall those who have caused suffering. The problem is that if we hold a deep grudge against others and wish them ill, we are, in effect, hurting ourselves. Our subconscious mind doesn't distinguish between a wish and an action, as both have the same effects on our body.

Wallowing in hate and self-pity, our lesser selves may enjoy a perverse form of pleasure from replaying vengeful thoughts over and over, unaware that we are causing adverse effects to the physical body. There's an insightful saying: *'To be unforgiving of someone is like taking poison and expecting the other person to die.'* By indulging in negative thoughts, we create toxins in our own bodies that eventually cause mental, emotional or physical illnesses that drain our energy and take all the joy out of our lives.

Animals are very different in their behavior patterns and it behooves us to learn from them. They live in the moment and do not relive the past. Many years ago, there was a brilliant film on television showing a stag eating grass. In the background a puma was preparing to attack. The stag saw it in time and confronted the puma, warding it off with its antlers until the puma eventually gave up and went away. The stag then went on eating grass as if nothing had happened. This instantaneous reaction to danger and then release is something we, as human beings, find very difficult. We don't say, 'Phew, thank goodness that's over' and put the ordeal behind us and move on. We may not have antlers to ward off a threat, but we do have a mind that can decide *not* to hang on to whatever occurred. I once heard about a girl who was raped and her attitude was, 'I gave fifteen minutes of my life to him and won't give any more.' Going over a situation in our minds again and again reinforces it, until it takes over and ruins our lives.

The good news is that love and forgiveness have releasing power. Gaining an understanding of what we've learned from the situation and forgiving the perpetrator for the misdeed sets us free to move forward to new, and hopefully less traumatic experiences. This may depend, however, on the ability to forgive. If we don't forgive, we leave ourselves open to having to experience a similar situation again until we *do* forgive. By forgiving the other, 'we wipe the slate clean' so that in the mind there is nothing to forgive and we are freed of toxins.

True forgiveness flows from the love of an understanding heart. Love does not judge or condemn; it is a magnetic Force that unites through understanding. The one who forgives realizes that whatever negative experience we encounter contains a lesson to be learned. Seeing life as a learning-ground, presenting us with experiences from which to learn and grow, saves us from a lot of unnecessary suffering.

Years ago, there was a cartoon strip that showed a little monk kneeling in prayer. In the first picture he said, 'O Lord, destroy my enemies.' In the second one he said, 'Oh Lord, destroy my *worst* enemy.' The third picture showed a bolt of lightning and a pile of ash with the caption, 'Let me rephrase that.' We are often our own worst enemies and sometimes what we wish for backfires and leaves us worse off.

Harbouring unforgiving thoughts causes our minds and bodies to become like a haunted house, with cold and barren rooms and a ghostly apparition moaning and rattling chains from which it sees no escape. As long as we remain unforgiving, clinging to the cause of suffering, there *is* no escape.

What is often not realised is that we are one; all of life is interconnected. We are all extensions of the life of our Creator, so what is done to one, or by one, affects the whole. Our bodies are separate, and we believe our thoughts are private, but at a deeper level there is no separation. It's like lumps in custard. The lumps may appear to be separate from other lumps, but in reality, all are part of the custard. Similarly, if you put a drop of dye into a glass of water, the colour doesn't remain in the drop but spreads into the glass. Bleach is then the only cleanser. Forgiveness is the bleach that clears the grief and suffering, the hate and resentment, not only for the one who forgives and the one being forgiven, but for the whole of humanity. Each act of forgiveness bleaches some of the darkness within the mind of the whole. Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the door to freedom and a life of peace, joy and harmony.

There is a Hawaiian healing technique called Ho'oponopone (pronounced ho-o-pono-pono). It is described as '*a Hawaiian practice of reconciliation and forgiveness.*' The name can be translated as "Correct a mistake" or "Make it right." Initially, this practice was made known by a therapist and teacher, Ihaleakala Hew Len, who healed a group of the criminally insane in a mental asylum in the space of three years. Initially, he had no contact with them. Each time he visited the asylum he read their reports, and as he read each one, he said, "*I'm sorry. Please forgive me, thank you, and, I love you.*" In the understanding that we are all one, by asking for forgiveness for himself, the other would be included. Prior to his intervention, the staff suffered severely from the stress of dealing with these dangerous individuals. But as Dr. Len practiced asking forgiveness for their behaviour, the patients gradually needed less medication, the staff took less sick leave and started enjoying their job. As time went on, Dr. Len ended up in the kitchen baking cakes with the inmates. The facility closed three years later as the patients were considered healed and were released.

This is the powerful effect of healing love and forgiveness. It is what we must do if we wish to heal our world. It has to start within each individual but the more of us who do this, the more we will affect the conditions of our world. When we think of those who wounded us with love and forgiveness, we provide them the opportunity to tap into the spark of our Creator that lives within

all of us. It is like providing the gentle breath that causes a spark to burst into flame consuming the timber around it. Criticism and recrimination don't work, as they reinforce the behaviour of the other. It takes courage to forgive, but the reward leads to a life of joy, peace and harmony. So, each time you feel angry about what is said or done to you, say instead, 'I'm sorry. Please forgive me, thank you and, I love you,' and note the results. They may surprise you.

~ NWOL.US