

FORGIVENESS AND GRATITUDE 2

One shouldn't mistake forgiveness as an easy path. For many it will prove the ultimate challenge because so often we cling desperately to our hurts and pains and to the 'righteous' anger associated with them. So, the notion of forgiving when we have held so tightly to the belief that we are justified in feeling the way we do towards another is not an easy position to renounce. However, our reluctance or refusal in some cases to forgive actually does more harm to the one who holds onto the anger and the pain. In fact, the individual is literally being poisoned with the chemical secretions generated by those mood states. We need to understand that our emotions are either of a healing or toxic nature and so when we remain wedded to any emotion that makes us feel bad, regardless of the reasons, there is a negative trickle-down of chemical messengers (hormones) from the brain which pollute and poison the body. So, non-forgiveness not only poisons the mind and with that mood, behaviour and perception, it also contaminates the body. This is why forgiveness needs to be taken seriously as it really is the antidote for pain, anger and regret.

It is as we learn to forgive that gratitude and appreciation grows. So, how do we go about the business of really forgiving? Since we cannot give what we do not have, as explained in the previous handout, the first thing we need to do is begin our journey of self-forgiveness by compiling a list of all the things that we have done for which we would want to be forgiven. Once we have compiled that list, which may take several days of thoughtful reflection to complete, we then need to systematically work through the list using the wonderful tool of creative visualisation and with a sincere heart, practice the art of making amends. To achieve this, take one or two things on your list each day, sit in solitude, either in silence or with some gentle music in the background. You may choose to light a candle, although this is not necessary, but to have a focal point of some kind is very helpful. Then using the eye of the mind, see as clearly as you can, the person whom your actions affected or damaged in some way, then, speak from the heart. It is important to underline this must be a heartfelt activity, not an intellectual or mechanical process. Sincerity has to run through the very veins of this endeavour. Say all those things that need to be said, that have probably not been said or if they were, were not said in the right way. This is not a time for justification, or for making excuses for your position. It is a time for making amends. When you feel you have done that in a heartfelt way then bring that particular sitting to a close. It is important to remember you may need to revisit a particular event and person more than once before the feeling of forgiveness in your heart has been achieved. This is a very powerful activity and if you work through your list in this way, it will take several weeks if not longer to properly make amends for the things you feel you need forgiveness for. The more you do this activity from your heart, the more you will feel like a flower opening, able to spread the fragrance of gratitude in a way that hitherto had not seemed possible.

It might appear that this simple activity is not enough to truly cleanse the heart and mind, but the continual evidence of our experience demonstrates that it is. However, this is only the first phase in forgiveness because once you have done this you then need to repeat the exercise but this time your starting point is a list of those things that have been done to you. This is then followed by you giving your forgiveness to those who have trespassed against you in some way. When you truly have made amends within yourself, it is easy to offer the hand of forgiveness to another and when you do that you are able to connect with the very best in yourself. It's now time for you to take up the challenge.