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## **Access the Healing Power of Forgiveness**

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I will always remember the moment I first began to forgive my father. It was early one bright Sunday morning in June and I was driving to San Jose to teach an all day make-up class in Family Therapy to a group of graduate counseling students. The day before, I had hastily rented a book on tape about “letting go” to keep me company during my four-hour round-trip commute. To my surprise, the entire book was the author’s poignant story of how she had chosen to forgive her father, who sounded like a carbon copy of my own dad.

As I listened to the writer describe her courageous journey toward acceptance and healing, I became acutely aware of the bitterness and pain in my heart that I had kept locked away for decades. I felt my tears begin to wash away the anger, hurt, and resentment I had carried for so long. I suddenly saw my relationship with my father in a new way—through the eyes of my greater Self. Looking at the big picture of my life, I recognized how my dad had been my most important teacher in this lifetime: coping with his negative behavior towards me both strengthened my sense of self and deepened my level of compassion for those who are suffering. I also found my heart softening to the wounded little boy my alcoholic father hid so well from the world. Lifted by a profound sense of lightness and grace, I could feel the power of forgiveness working its magic in my very being. It wasn’t until I arrived at the university that I realized it was Father’s Day.

Forgiveness is our most potent medicine for self-healing. The light of forgiveness transforms everything it touches. When we forgive, we open the door to miracles in our lives. To forgive is to let go—to completely release any negative thoughts or feelings you have been holding toward your self or another. You say goodbye to hate, resentment, anger, hurt, guilt, and shame. You stop living in the land of “if only” and start accepting “what is” so you can move forward on your life’s path. Forgiveness is a powerful choice you make to be whole again.

It is not only in my own life that I have witnessed the power of forgiveness. In my psychotherapy practice, I have delighted in watching the blessings multiply after my clients make the courageous choice to let go.

Unfortunately, many people do not avail themselves of the healing power of forgiveness because of misconceptions they hold. Some common myths about forgiveness are:

*1. The other person has to do something before I can forgive him or her.*

If you are waiting for another to recognize he or she has wronged you, you have placed the power to heal yourself in someone else's hands. Take back the power to set yourself free of the past by choosing to forgive regardless of whether or not the other ever "sees the light."

*2. If I forgive, I am saying what the other person did was okay.*

Forgiveness does not send the message that the other's bad behavior was okay. Rather, it is saying that you are not going to continue to dwell on the past and carry the heavy feelings associated with it. When we lighten our emotional load, we refuse to allow the past to torment us in the present.

*3. I must hold positive feelings for the person I am forgiving.*

While forgiveness may help to transmute our pain and anger into compassion for the other, it is not necessary to replace the negative feelings you have had towards the other with positive ones. Of primary importance is your willingness to release the negative energy you have been holding towards a person or situation.

*4. Forgiveness is something I do for the other.*

Forgiveness is a gift you give to yourself. It takes a lot of your energy to continue to hold on to negative feelings toward another. Forgiveness releases this energy so you can apply it to more constructive and joyful pursuits.

*5. If I forgive, I may get hurt again.*

You can let go of the past while holding on to what an experience has taught you. To forgive is to retain the wisdom while releasing the pain associated with the life lesson.

*6. I only need to forgive someone once.*

Forgiveness is a process, so you may need to let go more than once. Should the negative feelings reappear, be gentle with yourself, and choose to release them one more time.

*7. I need to understand why before I can forgive.*

Needing to understand why is a trap that can snare you. Life is full of mysteries. You may never understand the whys which underlie another's behavior. Don't let that prevent you from releasing the past and moving on with your life.

Your inner guidance is forever urging you to choose the path of healing and joy. When you activate the power of forgiveness, you release any negative hold that the past has had on you. Give yourself the gift of forgiveness, and watch your life transform as it becomes a more perfect reflection of the light that you are.

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