





can you really forgive?

MARY HAYES GRIECO, DIRECTOR OF THE MIDWEST INSTITUTE FOR FORGIVENESS TRAINING, WHO HAS TAUGHT WORKSHOPS ON THE SUBJECT FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS, SAYS **YES**. HERE, SHE SHARES HER SIMPLE EIGHT-STEP METHOD FOR LETTING GO OF EMOTIONAL WOUNDS AND FINDING LASTING PEACE.

LIFE IS DIFFICULT, and pain visits all of us on a regular basis. We see catastrophe and injustice on the news each evening. Even if we are blessed with thoughtful parents and fairly easy childhoods, it isn't long before we meet people who hurt us or find ourselves in situations that deeply disappoint: the unappreciative boss, the charismatic lover with an addiction problem, the friend who turned away and won't come back.

If you are blessed with a naturally forgiving personality, you are lucky! You keep moving forward happily and purposefully, despite the hurts of the past. But if you, like many people, are the type of person who holds grudges, you should take time to learn how to forgive.

The experience of forgiveness is profound and refreshing. When we do the gritty, methodical work that goes into healing and resolving an old hurt, we dissolve the stagnant weight of resentment inside us. It mends our tattered personal boundaries, improves our health and relationships, and empowers us to move forward with hope and creativity. Forgiveness is a private process that we do for our own sakes. As we release the past, we also release ourselves into the richness of the present and the possibilities of the future.

Literature and cultural storytelling around the world are filled with themes of healing. We believe in it more than we believe in despair. Even the worst stories—betrayal, murder, torture, war, and genocide—eventually yield to the gentle and powerful

trend toward healing. It might take a lifetime for an individual to heal, and it might take several generations for those who survive genocide. But healing eventually does come.

There is nothing that is unforgivable. There is no experience of hurt, loss, betrayal, or disappointment that is beyond our power to heal and resolve. When we forgive, we are saying that even though this experience has happened to us, we are going to completely release that pain and move forward without it.

Unconditional forgiveness is based on a model of health and well-being that is rooted in both modern psychology and universal spiritual laws. The Eight Steps to Freedom (next page) is a method that reliably works to bring swift and permanent resolution of any painful emotional issue. In the past 40 years, it's helped thousands of people release themselves from emotional pain and change their lives for the better.

The reason this recipe for forgiveness is reliable and transformative is that it is holistic and complete, assisting you in releasing the painful effects of a wound, no matter how large or small, and no matter how long you've held the pain inside you. This forgiveness method is not merely an intellectual or moral exercise, and you will not have to force yourself to remember your resolution to forgive someone, again and again. Once you've done it, it's done. You will have changed deeply, and the issue will be truly resolved.

EIGHT STEPS TO FREEDOM

STEP 1: STATE YOUR WILL TO MAKE A CHANGE.

It's hard to say why people hold on to a problem for a long, long time and then realize that they want to be done with it. More than once, I have had someone call me to do a forgiveness session—after carrying my card or flyer around in her purse for 10 years! One spring morning people wake up, I guess, and think, I'm tired of hating my ex. I'll get over it now. Where's that card? Later, after they've spent a short time working this thing out of their systems and feel light as a feather, they wonder, Why didn't I do this sooner?

To complete Step 1, place an empty chair in front of you and visualize the person you are forgiving sitting in it. Say out loud, "I will forgive you now, because ..." and name the reason you need to forgive the person, and why you are willing to do it. (Some examples: "You hurt me so badly," "I've carried this pain long enough," and "I need to move on.") State your will to forgive the person with firmness and conviction.

STEP 2: EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS.

Your emotions have their own truths that need to be spoken. For example, in dealing with an irresponsible ex-husband who is an active alcoholic, a woman's mind might try to stay detached and positive and think, Well, he is a very sick person, and I know he can't really help what he's doing. Her mind may believe these things, yet she still has a lot of hurt inside. Her feelings want to declare, That stupid son of a bitch! If he ever shows up drunk when he comes to see our son again, I will kill him! That is her emotional truth, which is on a different circuit than her mind. She will have a restless struggle with her mind until she gets those angry emotions out.

In this step, give yourself full permission to feel your pain and say your feelings out loud for about 20 minutes. Imagine the person sitting there. As you "look" at him or her, sink your awareness into your body and contact the tension that arises inside you. It may be a feeling of heaviness in your belly or an ache in your heart. Allow those sensations to become stronger.

See which words, pictures, or memories are lodged inside you that need to be expressed and in the language of emotion, such as "I am deeply sad that you ..." or "I was so humiliated when you ..." Take time to cry or vent your anger. Stay with this until you start to feel quiet inside.

STEP 3: RELEASE EXPECTATIONS FROM YOUR MIND.

There are a lot of things in life that you can't control: the weather, the economy, and the attitudes and behaviors of other people, to name a few. I think we hold onto expectations of others for a long time because they seem very

reasonable to us, just part of the "norm" that we assume is good and necessary. It takes a while to accept that these people really are the way they are, and we find it hard to believe that they're not going to change for the better.

In Step 3, distill the things you had been expecting from the person you're forgiving. State each one: "I would have preferred that you had been honest with me." Then acknowledge reality: "But you weren't." Now re-state your



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will: "And I will not hold onto this anymore." Cancel your expectation with a firm statement: "I release my expectation that you should have been honest with me."

Imagine your attachment to your unmet expectation dissolving. When you feel neutral, or there is more quiet and open space inside you, go on to the next expectation in the same way, until you have addressed them all.

STEP 4: RESTORE YOUR BOUNDARIES.

We can't take the mistakes or problems of others into our personal space as if they are our own or we will be quite uncomfortable. That is a loss of our boundaries, and it isn't healthy for us or others.

The act of restoring our boundaries with another person has two parts: On a moral level, we assign the person full responsibility for the consequences of his or her actions, and on a subtle energy level, we reinforce our individual personal space. To complete this step, give the person you're forgiving responsibility for his or her actions and attitudes. Use body language to symbolize giving back the person's "stuff." Firmly state, "I give you full responsibility for all your actions and attitudes."

Now reestablish and strengthen your personal space. Visualize a bubble of light around you—a smooth, egg-shaped container that protects you. Imagine it is filling with colored light, creating a healthy boundary. Clearly see the other person farther away from you, with your energies now separate.

STEP 5: GET YOUR NEEDS MET IN A DIFFERENT WAY.

Very often, if we are attached to an expectation of other people or situations, it's because we are subconsciously trying to get an important need met, and that need drives our judgments. In other words, we rigidly demand certain behaviors from others because those behaviors symbolize something important to us. What we don't realize is that



we can actually loosen up our specific demands and expectations of others and simply see what unfolds.

In Step 5, imagine being completely unattached to the person you are forgiving. With a trusting heart and a receptive mind, open your hands and extend them upward, asking the universe to help you get needs met in a different way. Be willing to have good new experiences in the near future.

STEP 6: RECEIVE HEALING ENERGY.

The gift of the Eight Steps is that we are able to use the first five as preparation to receive grace from a higher level. In this step, bring unconditional love and light down into your personality until you feel peaceful. In this step, sit upright with your eyes closed. Visualize a globe of light hovering above your head. The light is shining with love and healing

energy. Imagine that you can open up the top of your head like a skylight so that the light pours into your body, bringing calm, release, and a sense of being loved, valued, and comforted.

STEP 7: SEND UNCONDITIONAL LOVE TO THE PERSON.

We don't have to like everyone, but we can send goodwill and release them, which also releases us from them. This is a blessed relief. And mysteriously, as we make things right between us on the spiritual level, things start to right themselves on the personality level, too.

To complete Step 7, extend your hands in blessing to the person you have forgiven. Imagine a continuous stream of light flowing down to you and out of your hands to the other person. Say out loud, "I send you this higher love, and I release you to be yourself. And I release myself from you." Visualize the two of you, now in your separate, distinct spaces.

STEP 8: SEE THE GOOD IN THE PERSON YOU'RE FORGIVING.

The last step to forgiveness brings you back to a simple way of expressing unconditional love: See the good in the person and choose to focus on that instead of the things you don't like about him or her. It's the good old "glass half-full instead of half-empty" idea. It may sound Pollyannaish, but this new habit will give you peace and rest at last. Everyone has something good about her,

if you just look for it. If necessary, select some small, superficial thing to like about the person.

To complete this final step, think of a few good things about the person you have forgiven, and say them out loud. Maybe your villain has a nice smile or is always prompt. If you can't think of anything, try thinking of something good that the situation brought to you (for example, "I became stronger" or "I learned to be more compassionate"). Remind yourself that this good thing is what you intend to remember and focus on whenever you are reminded of this person or situation in the future.

Adapted from Unconditional Forgiveness by Mary Hayes Grieco, available December 20, 2011, © 2011 by Mary Hayes Grieco. Printed with permission of Atria Books/Beyond Words, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc.