



Coming to Terms with the Past

By Julie Fuimano, Executive Coach

What does it mean to forgive? This topic often comes up in conversations with clients who are holding on to too much pain from their past. When you hold something too tightly, much like having two clenched fists, you are not open to receive new gifts from the universe. It also requires a lot of energy to keep those fists tightly closed.

What does one need to do to let go of past hurts?

Every day you experience feelings. When difficult and challenging events happen, do you address your emotional state? Perhaps, like millions of other people, you have no idea how to handle your feelings. When you don't deal with your feelings completely, the pain remains in your cell's memory until you are willing to face it. Learning to acknowledge feelings and then speaking up for yourself helps you to deal with things in the moment so you don't drag things along with you.

But it is also crucial to look at the past. In order to lighten your burden in the present, you must deal with and then let go of the emotional energy (the baggage) you carry from yesterday and yesteryear.

Acknowledging Your Emotions

When you experience a feeling, it's like having someone tap you on the shoulder. It's a message suggesting you attend to something. When you acknowledge the feeling by recognizing its presence and experiencing it in your body, the energy around it dissipates; you can think clearly again.

You cannot think and feel at the same time. If you experience a feeling regarding a situation but do nothing about managing the feeling, you create a kind of cocoon that does not allow for reasoning.

Within your cocoon, you are closed to hearing anything other than your own thoughts on the matter. These thoughts are circulating in your mind trying to help make sense of the emotion you experienced rather than processing the event itself.

Feelings need to be managed differently than the situation itself. In the case of past events, the event itself has already occurred; it's over. While you cannot change what has transpired, you can change how you think about what happened. Your emotional state at that time needs to be revisited. Unless you deal with the emotions associated with that event, you will continue to carry them with you into the next day.

Go back in your history. What events, people, or things still evoke some emotion in you? If you are still angry about what your mom did to you when you were ten, then there is still work to do. In order to move beyond it, you have to acknowledge how your ten-year-old self was hurting and come to terms with it.

The Benefits of Holding On

What are the benefits of holding onto your pain?

I know what you're going to say, "There are no benefits!" The fact is, though, that there has to be something you gain by holding onto your hurt or else you would let go.

Perhaps what you gain is the thrill of the story. By having the story to tell, you can create some excitement



and get acknowledged by others. You create a stir. In doing so, you pacify your ego's need for attention and the emotional energy associated with the event is refreshed.

Perhaps the story allows you to wallow in self-pity, or put yourself down. Many people are accustomed to making themselves feel badly and do so at any opportunity.

Perhaps you've been telling the tale for so long it's become habit. You have made the story shape you into who you are. So long as you continue to tell the tale, you feel comfortable. Without the story, you might feel lost. A client recently remarked, "Unhappiness has become habit. It's all I have known for so long that it's comfortable for me. I need to learn what it feels like to be happy so that I can reach for that instead and let go of all this pain." How interesting that unhappiness should become a habit.

Whatever the potential gain, you must be willing to let go of old habits and tales for something better. Although you may be gaining something, it's costing you greatly. Whenever you hold onto something from your past, think of it as a chain wrapped around your ankle. Those chains keep you stuck; they keep you from achieving something greater. And until you cut that chain, you cannot move forward; you cannot fly.

Acceptance

"Forgiveness is the acceptance that there's no hope for a better past." - Judi Talesnik

In order to let go, you have to accept things as they are without judgment. Letting go of the emotional attachment to the event allows you to tell the story without any emotional energy lingering. In other words, it becomes just a story from one mile of the journey of your life-nothing more. Perhaps that event shaped you in some way. But the energy you experienced at the time of the event no longer has a grip on how you behave in the present.

Forgiveness is really about learning to love and loving is about accepting without conditions. You learn that people are fallible-especially our parents. You learn that people do the best they can at any given moment, even if you know they can do better. Most people operate with good intentions. You learn to love them in spite of their humanity and spend time with people who make you feel good. Most importantly, you learn to forgive your own humanity as you navigate this thing we call "life".

Finally, as you learn to accept and forgive your own humanity, you are more accepting and forgiving of others.



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