

The Freedom of Forgiveness

By Mary Nearpass

"Forgive him? Are you kidding? After what he's done to me?"

"Forgive me? How could God ever forgive me? You don't know what I've done."

"How could I have done such an awful thing? I can never forgive myself."

Of all the emotions in our human make-up, hate, anger and resentment are among the most powerful and self-destructive. These feelings are awakened in us by the actions of those we perceive to have hurt us, or those we love. Rationalizing that we are justified to hate, to harbor rage against, or somehow believing that we deserve to be hated carries an unbelievably high price.

Forgiveness is "the act of setting someone free from an obligation to you that is a result of a wrong done against you." For example, a debt is forgiven when you free your debtor of his obligation to pay back what he owes you. Forgiveness involves three elements: an injury, a debt resulting from the injury, and a cancellation of the debt. All these elements are necessary if forgiveness is going to take place.

Like fire raging through a dry forest, these intense emotions can become so pervasive that they can crowd out every other feeling from your heart. They can consume you with behavior that reacts with vicious aggression (wanting to hurt someone externally) or deep bitterness (wanting to hurt the self internally). We all have encountered someone in the grip of these negative emotions and see the outward expression of their inward turmoil. It takes little imagination that the person is being eaten away in their heart and soul by hatred, anger and resentment.

The Mind-Body Connection as a Result of LACK of Forgiveness:

The key word here is "eaten" in its most literal sense. When we harbor hatred, anger and resentment, our bodies' chemical bal-

ance is dramatically disrupted. Our innate "fight or flight" response, produced by our adrenal glands, is in high gear 24/7; therefore, being incompatible with any peace, joy and relaxation. Consequently, instead of being in a state of balance or "homeostasis," if we cling to these ugly emotions, then our bodies are constantly in a state of "heterostasis" or physiological imbalance. Staying in this powerfully aroused negative state leads to sleep disturbances, nightmares, poor concentration, fatigue, headaches, ulcers, stomach distress, back spasms, and even heart attacks.

In addition to the effects these emotions have on our bodies, they are the stuff of which emotional prisons are made. Choosing hate, anger or resentment toward another builds walls around you! Becoming trapped in a negative, emotional complex is tremendously draining when this negative energy dominates your entire life.

These negative emotions have a spill-over effect. They do not remain specific to just the relationship in which you were hurt. We bring our thoughts, feelings and beliefs into every relationship we have. To assume that we can turn our feelings on and off, as if a light switch, is presumptuous at best; naïve at worst. It just doesn't work that way! Holding onto such powerful emotions can literally change who you are, change what you do and contaminate what you have to give. Therefore, as we move throughout the day, people we encounter don't get you; they get a bitter shell of who you once were because we are completely disfigured by these ugly emotions.

You may THINK that you can conceal these emotions behind yet another mask, but don't kid yourself. If you're dragging the "chains that bind you" (Fleetwood Mac, 1977) into your other relationships, you are contaminating them. For the sake of your spouse, significant other, your children, other loved ones and YOURSELF, have the courage to "break these chains that bind you" and cleanse your heart, mind, body and soul of the toxicity of hatred, anger and resentment.

If you still have the need to justify your "right" with respect to being angry, consider this: You cannot give away what you do not have. If the love in your heart is metastasizing with the cancer of hatred, anger and resentment, then that is the only love that you have to give. Is that really what you want to give your children, your mate, your family, your friends, your fellow human being?

I'm leaving you with a challenge: Do you wish to go on living a tortured existence from harboring these all consuming, terrible emotions or do you wish to set yourself and the person who hurt you FREE by FORGIVING them? Think about it! The only thing worse than being hurt by someone you love is keeping that hurt alive. Some of us do so even after they have left this earth. Do you really want to be caretaker and nurturer of that hatred, anger and resentment for the rest of your life?

Let it all go TODAY! By forgiving that person(s), not only is it a gift to them, it is a gift to yourself! The art of forgiveness sets you free from the bonds of the self-induced emotional prison. You will instantly feel like you just dropped twenty pounds (now that's some kind of diet...lol...). You are worth so much, and everyone you love and loves you deserves it.



Mary M. Nearpass, MA, MS, holds two masters degrees in Health Education and Behavioral Psychology. She is also certified in Massage Therapy and Ashtanga Yoga. Presently, she teaches Psychology, Massage and Yoga, writes for numerous Health magazines and has completed her first book. Contact Mary at MNearpass@phillyfitmagazine.com.

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