

Forgiveness and Assertiveness:

Love in Action in the Real World

Spirit Rock Meditation Center
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Plan for the Day

- Meditation
- Buddhist Themes Related to Forgiveness
- Feeling Strong
- Overview of Forgiveness
- Self-Compassion
- Overview of Assertiveness
- Integrating Forgiveness and Assertiveness
 - Parts One and Two
- Closing

Basics of Meditation

- Relax
- Posture that is comfortable and alert
- Simple good will toward yourself
- Awareness of your body
- Focus on something to steady your attention
- Accepting whatever passes through awareness, not resisting it or chasing it
- Gently settling into peaceful well-being

Buddhist Themes for Forgiveness

- Seeing what is actually the case in oneself and the world; ignorance is the root of suffering
- The aim to end suffering in oneself and others
 - The importance of causes and intentions
- The Brahmaviharas: Compassion, lovingkindness, sympathetic joy, equanimity
- Wise Effort
 - Increase what helps and decrease what hurts
 - With thoughts, words, and deeds
- A focus on reducing craving, clinging: “thirst”

Dealing with Aversion

- Feeling tones of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral
- Much attention in the dharma on our craving for what's unpleasant to end: aversion
- Buddhist methods for reducing aversive reactions:
 - Insight: they make us suffer; conditions are impermanent, and they have many causes ("empty")
 - Non-harming: restraint ("sila"), ethics, precepts
 - Wise Speech: well-intended, true, beneficial, timely, not harsh, and (ideally) wanted
 - Equanimity: balanced and spacious
 - Compassion and kindness

Know the mind.

Shape the mind.

Free the mind.

Feeling Strong

- Relaxed, resting in awareness
- Feeling the strength in awareness itself, never sullied or rattled by what passes through it.
- Sense the vitality in your body
- Recall a time you felt really strong, and sense those feelings.
- Energy and strength in your breathing . . . in arms and legs . . . in your whole being . . .
- A spacious strength that lets others flow through
- In relationship and at peace
- Relaxed in a spacious world; no need for struggle

Three Components in Creating an Interpersonal Grievance

- Take something too personally.
- Blame the offender for how you feel.
- Create a grievance story that reflects helplessness.

What Is Forgiveness?

Forgiveness is the moment to moment experience of peace and understanding that occurs when an injured party's suffering is reduced as they transform their grievance against an offending party.

This transformation takes place through learning to take less personal offense, attribute less blame to the offender and, by greater understanding, see the personal and interpersonal harm that occurs as the natural consequence of unresolved anger and hurt.

Frederic Luskin

Forgiveness Is Not the Same As . . .

- Forgetting
- Pardon
- Reconciliation
- Condoning
- Justice

Core Components of Forgiveness

- View the offense less personally.
- Take responsibility for your own emotional experience.
- Change the story to reflect the heroic choice to grow and prosper.

Nine Steps to Forgiveness (1 - 3)

1. Know exactly how you feel about what happened and be able to articulate what about the situation is not OK. Then, tell a couple of trusted people about your experience.
2. Make a commitment to yourself to do what you have to do to feel better. Forgiveness is for you and not for anyone else. No one else even has to know about your decision.
3. Understand your goal. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean reconciliation with the person that upset you, or condoning of their action. What you are after is to find peace. Forgiveness can be defined as the “peace and understanding that come from blaming that which has hurt you less, taking the life experience less personally, and changing your grievance story.”

Nine Steps to Forgiveness (4 - 6)

4. Get the right perspective on what is happening. Recognize that your primary distress is coming from the hurt feelings, thoughts and physical upset you are suffering now, not what offended you or hurt you two minutes – or ten years –ago.
5. At the moment you feel upset practice the Positive Emotion Refocusing Technique (P.E.R.T.) to soothe your body's flight or fight response.
6. Give up expecting things from other people, or your life, that they do not choose to give you. Recognize the “unenforceable rules” you have for your health or how you or other people must behave. Remind yourself that you can hope for health, love, friendship and prosperity and work hard to get them. However, you will suffer when you demand these things occur when you do not have the power to make them happen.

Nine Steps to Forgiveness (7 - 9)

7. Put your energy into looking for another way to get your positive goals met than through the experience that has hurt you. I call this step finding your positive intention. Instead of mentally replaying your hurt seek out new ways to get what you want.
8. Remember that a life well lived is your best revenge. Instead of focusing on your wounded feelings, and thereby giving the person who caused you pain power over you, learn to look for the love, beauty and kindness around you.
9. Amend your grievance story to remind you of the heroic choice to forgive.

The Buddha's Words on Lovingkindness

Wishing: In gladness and in safety, may all beings be at ease.

Omitting none, whether they are weak or strong, the great or the mighty, medium, short, or small, the seen and the unseen, those living near and far away, those born and to-be-born: May all beings be at ease.

Let none through anger or ill-will wish harm upon another. Even as a mother protects with her life her child, her only child, so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings; radiating kindness over the entire world: spreading upwards to the skies, and downwards to the depths, outwards and unbounded, freed from hatred and ill-will.

One should sustain this recollection.

This is said to be the sublime abiding.

Lunchtime Reflections . . .

*Outstanding behavior,
blameless action,
open hands to all,
and selfless giving:*

This is a blessing supreme.

The Buddha

*The root of Buddhism is compassion,
and the root of compassion is compassion for oneself.*

Pema Chodren

Being for Yourself

- The dharma teaches us to be compassionate and kind toward all beings. And that whatever we do to the world affects us, and whatever we do to ourselves affects the world.
- You are one of the “all beings!” And kindness to yourself benefits the world, while hurting yourself harms the world.
- It’s a general moral principle that the more power you have over someone, the greater your duty is to use that power wisely. Well, who is the one person in the world you have the greatest power over? It’s your future self. You hold that life in your hands, and what it will be depends on how you care for it.
- Consider yourself as an innocent child, as deserving of care and happiness as any other.

Healthy Assertiveness

What it is: Speaking your truth and pursuing your aims in the context of relationships

What supports it:

- Being on your own side
- Self-compassion
- Naming the truth to yourself
- Refuges: Three Jewels, reason, love, nature, God
- Taking care of the big things so you don't grumble about the little ones
- Health and vitality

Healthy Assertiveness: How to Do It

- Know your aims; stay focused on the prize; lose battles to win wars
- Ground in empathy, compassion, and love
- Practice unilateral virtue
- Communicate for yourself, not to change others
 - Wise Speech; be especially mindful of tone
 - NVC: "When X happens, I feel Y because I need Z."
 - Dignity and gravity
 - Distinguish empathy building ("Y") from policy-making
- If appropriate, negotiate solutions
 - Establish facts as best you can ("X")
 - Find the deepest wants ("Z")
 - Focus mainly on "from now on"
 - Make clear plans, agreements
 - Scale relationships to their actual foundations

Forgiveness Summary

- Forgiveness is not: forgetting; pardon; reconciliation; condoning; justice
- Core components of forgiveness:
 - View the offense less personally.
 - Take responsibility for your own emotional experience.
 - Change the story to reflect the heroic choice to grow and prosper.

Forgiveness/Assertiveness Exercise

- Pick a situation; reflect and write about it: how could I be more skillfully assertive and forgiving?
- Tell partner about situation and what you're realizing
- Role play with your partner
- Debrief the role play with your partner
- Quietly reflect about the exercise
- Group discussion

Forgiveness/Assertiveness

- Core components of forgiveness:
 - View the offense less personally.
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- Keys to assertiveness:
 - Know your aims
 - Ground in empathy, compassion, and love
 - Practice unilateral virtue
 - Use NVC and Wise Speech
 - If appropriate, negotiate solutions
 - Focus mainly on “from now on”
 - Make clear plans, agreements

“Anthem”

*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in
That's how the light gets in*

Leonard Cohen

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